1 The British New Wave: a certain tendency?

> The terrible thing about the cinema is the way it uses up everything. It exhausts ideas, stories, brands of stories, and suddenly finds itself faced with a kind of gulf, a ditch across which it must leap to capture some new and absolutely unforeseen territory. We're not talking, obviously, about eternal masterpieces: clearly Shakespeare always had something to say, and he didn't have to jump any ditch. But it's a situation ordinary film production is likely to run into every five years or so. In France the New Wave has been lucky enough to jump the ditch. In England the same thing could happen. (Jean Renoir)[1]

> 'Queen' magazine recently ran a 'Space-age guide for Social Astronauts' which replaced the expressions like 'In' and 'Out' with 'Go,' 'Rogue' and 'Abort.' 'The cinema is generally "Go,"' twittered this glossy publication, 'but films in foreign languages are "Rogue" (released on the right course, but now in the wrong orbit); English films are usually "Abort."' (Mark Shivas)[2]

> There is, in any art, a tendency to turn one's preferences into a monomaniac theory; in film criticism, the more . . . single-minded and dedicated . . . the theorist is, the more likely he is to be regarded as serious and important and 'deep' – in contrast to relaxed men of good sense whose pluralistic approaches can be disregarded as not fundamental enough. (Pauline Kael)[3]

The British New Wave: definitions and directions

The British New Wave is the name conventionally given to a series of films released between 1959 and 1963. Here is the series in full: *Room at the Top* (Jack Clayton, 1959); *Look Back in Anger* (Tony Richardson, 1959); *The Entertainer* (Tony Richardson, 1960); *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz, 1960); *A Taste of Honey* (Tony Richardson, 1961); *A Kind of Loving* (John Schlesinger, 1962); *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (Tony Richardson, 1962); *This Sporting Life* (Lindsay Anderson, 1963); *Billy Liar* (John Schlesinger, 1963).

Conventional approaches to these films place their greatest emphasis upon viewing them as a series, stressing their similarities, and use these similarities to include the films in broader debates about class, gender and/or ideology. The time is now right to take an alternative approach and consider each of the films individually. This is not to deny that the

similarities between these films do exist. Nevertheless, for the sake of revivifying the study of British cinema, there is little methodological sense in merely reproducing existing critical discussions. Instead, I will define my own critical position in relation to the British New Wave and demonstrate that we can fruitfully consider the detail of these films individually without continually re-emphasising their similarities. The spirit of this approach has been shaped by Peter Hutchings's recent discussion of the British New Wave. The innovation of this approach is also complemented by the position its subjects occupy within the history of British cinema. As their collective title suggests, the arrival of these films was marked by a similar sense of innovation. This is because, as Peter Hutchings observes:

> Often shot on location in cities in the Midlands or the north of England and featuring relatively unknown actors and relatively untried directors, these films were generally seen by critics of the time as a step forward for British cinema, a move towards a mature, intelligent engagement with contemporary British social life and a welcome breath of fresh air after the conformist entertainment provided by studio-bound British film-makers in the first part of the 1950s.[4]

Hutchings continues by outlining three key points which will guide this book. He reminds us that these films, though constantly thought of and defined as a series, are, in certain respects, different from each other. Hutchings also argues that all of the New Wave films are 'fictions that seek, often in very seductive ways, to involve us in their narratives in a manner that still has the potential to neutralise any critical distance, in effect to make us sympathetic participants in their world'. Finally, and crucially, whilst not denying the central position that the concept of cinematic realism holds in the British cinema, Hutchings suggests that the concern 'to deconstruct realism and the aesthetic practices associated with it impacted especially severely' on the British New Wave.[5] Let's begin by considering Hutchings's final suggestion.

The innovation of a film like *Room at the Top* was its engagement with a contemporary British social life, and the emphasis in these new films was on the relationship between a character's leisure time and their working life. This was accompanied by an increased willingness to deal openly with the representation of sexual behaviour, especially of the extra-marital kind. The result of this was that the films displayed 'a deeper attention to the articulation of character and individuality', achieved by their narratives being 'resolutely organised around a single central protagonist, a single psychology and subjectivity'.[6] Furthermore, it was this willingness to depict sexual relationships more explicitly, combined with a use of vernacular language and the breaking of conventional shooting techniques that led to an idea of social realism being

attributed to the British New Wave. For Julia Hallam and Margaret Marshment:

> The roots of the social realist aesthetics of these 'kitchen sink' dramas are found in the British documentary movement of the 1930s (particularly the poetic realism of Humphrey Jennings), the Free Cinema movement of the 1950s and a new class consciousness in British theatre and literature centred on the experiences of aggressive and rebellious working-class males – the so-called 'angry young men' epitomised in successful plays such as John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and novels such as Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*.[7]

The idea of social realism, however, has always been a contentious issue, especially as the term itself – like the phrase 'kitchen sink' – has become something of a convenient, and uncritical, way to describe the contents of these films as 'gritty', 'raw' and offering a 'slice of life'. Worse still is the fact that the term itself is difficult to define owing to its being so politically and historically contingent. As Samantha Lay writes:

> Specific stylistic concerns are utilised at different times, in different ways by film-makers. Their use of certain styles in camera work, iconography, editing and soundtrack stand in a relationship of contrast not just between the mainstream products of the day but also to the stylistic preferences of the social realist film-makers who preceded them.[8]

A further problem stems from the suggestion that 'the new "realism" of these films was no more "realistic" than previous modes of representation had been. What was new was the drawing of a different boundary between the realms of "fiction" and "life."'[9] Finally, since the 1970s, realism in the cinema has been treated with suspicious and considered ideologically suspect.[10]

The relationship between social realism and the British New Wave is a troubled one and I am reluctant to engage with broader debates of realism and the cinema. My concern is that the question of realism in the cinema has always carried strong overtones in film aesthetics and has meant that successive critics have had to come to terms with some variation on the theme. The end result of this is usually the adding of another interpretation on to what Andrew Tudor has called 'the already creaking cart'.[11]

Lay usefully defines several pertinent features of the form of social realism associated with these films, and prominent among these is the way 'character and place are linked in order to explore some aspect of contemporary life'. The term can generally imply an independent production, the use of real locations and the employment of non-professional or little-known actors. Lay outlines three overlapping aspects: practice and politics, style and form, and content. Practice has already been defined above. If politics is defined as intentions then we can see that the New

Wave directors 'were interested in extending the range of cinematic representation to include the working class beyond London to the industrial towns and cities of the north of England'. The style and form of these films reflected this new range of cinematic representation but quickly became labelled as drab and gritty, with depressing portrayals of settings and characters. As Lay concludes:

> 'Style' refers to the aesthetic devices employed by film-makers and the artistic choices they make. These aspects of social realism refer to the specific formal and stylistic techniques employed by social realist film-makers to capture, comment on, and critique the workings of society. Form and style refer to elements within the text, though it is important to note that they may be informed by practice, politics and content.[12]

With the emphasis on the idea of difference, I will begin by outlining an approach to film criticism that places the greatest value on considering a film in its own right. An approach of this kind allows the individual details of one film to be brought to our attention in such a way as to negate the need always to compare one film with another. This will be followed by considering the idea of a 'critical distance'. The focus will be on the critical reception that these films received at the time and will consider some of the ways in which this reception has coloured subsequent examinations of the New Wave. I will conclude by continuing to investigate the relationship between British New Wave 'style' and social realism. Bearing in mind that the question of realism in the cinema is an enormous one, my discussion will be restricted to the impact that the desire to deconstruct these issues of realism has had upon the films. I will also propose a way in which the severity of this impact might be lessened.

Roman candles and rockets

Neil Sinyard hints at some of the reasons why the British New Wave films may have always suffered in terms of the critical response to them. The arrival of *Room at the Top* and the films that followed it coincided with a seismic shift in the British critical culture. For this period was the heyday of auteurism and 'by the side of the big names of Europe and Hollywood, it was felt that British film had little to offer'. Though the arrival of Clayton's film was greeted with considerable optimism, changes in the critical climate meant that some commentators were less sympathetic. This was particularly evident in the first edition of *Movie*, the British film journal which 'set the intellectual tone of the debate about British film for the rest of the decade'. Published in 1962, just as the British New Wave was in its prime, *Movie* contained a broad survey of the then contemporary state of British cinema, Victor Perkins's 'The British Cinema'.

British cinema has since undergone an extensive critical re-evaluation yet the shockwaves from Perkins's damning indictment still ensure that the discussion of New Wave 'style' is still what Sinyard calls a tentative affair.[13]

Discussions of these films began in 1959 with *Room at the Top* and have continued ever since. In fact, as Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards write in their recent re-evaluation of *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*:

> Just as the notion of fifties cinema as necessarily a 'doldrums era' is now undergoing a well merited albeit tardy revision so, too, that aspect of late 1950s and early 1960s British cinema which has hitherto attracted most attention when discussing the advances evidently made during the period – in debates, principally, surrounding the 'new wave' films – is once more, and for its own part, receiving renewed and closer scrutiny.[14]

Yet, the critical attention that these films have received, and are now receiving once again, is less to do with discussing the details of individual films and more concerned with still viewing them as a series. This is because, as Richards argues elsewhere, the study of film can be divided into two approaches: film studies and cinema history. Whereas the former concerns itself with 'minute visual and structural analysis of individual films' the latter places 'its highest priority on context, on the locating of films securely in the setting of their makers' attitudes, constraints and preoccupations, on audience reaction and contemporary understandings'. Both are valuable yet, as Richards continues, there still remains a 'hostility' between some adherents of the two approaches.[15] Nowhere is this hostility more apparent than in the case of the British New Wave. Admittedly, this division is a highly artificial one. Nevertheless, the implications of this division are directly relevant to the debates that surround the British New Wave. This is because films such as *Room at the Top* or *Billy Liar* lend themselves almost too easily to broader accounts of their context and construction. This is evident in famous discussions such as John Hill's 1986 book *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956–1963*, or Andrew Higson's investigation into the realist tendencies inherent in their use of locations,[16] to name but two of the most famous accounts. The problem is that the balance between the two approaches has become weighted too far in favour of cinema history. This imbalance is due to an extremely persuasive historical reason why the 'minute visual and structural analysis of individual films' has not been applied to the New Wave.

In 1958 Penelope Houston, the then editor of *Sight and Sound*, invited a selection of eminent British film critics and film makers to contribute to a round-table discussion about the state of British film criticism.[17] Paul Rotha and Lindsay Anderson felt *Sight and Sound*, in a sentiment later

echoed by the writers of *Movie*, to be 'an organ of the enemy'. Anderson, summing up his view of *Sight and Sound*'s position, expressed a certain disappointment:

> But what it [*Sight and Sound*] lacks, I feel, is a certain vitality – *creative* feeling for the cinema. There's too much of the charmed circle about it. What we need is something at once more edgy and more personal . . . The criticism we desperately need should be enthusiastic, violent and responsible, all at the same time.

Basil Wright was also keen for film criticism to become much more radical. As he declared: 'What we seem to need at this stage is an anarchic paper, run by a group of probably rather scruffy young men between 17 and 22, who will let off squibs and roman candles and rockets in all directions and generally stir up the whole thing.'[18]

Whilst Wright's desire for scruffy anarchists was never realised, the critical pyrotechnics he called for soon arrived, first in the form of *Oxford Opinion* then, in June 1962, with the first edition of *Movie*.[19] It was here that Anderson's desire for enthusiasm, violence and responsibility found its expression in the writings of Ian Cameron, Mark Shivas and Victor Perkins, amongst others.

Exactly a year after its first issue, *Movie* published a round-table discussion designed to demonstrate the critical differences between its regular contributors, and Victor Perkins outlined his ambitions for both *Movie* and the future of British film criticism. He began by suggesting that any criticism is valuable, as long as it is related to the film itself and, more importantly, opens up 'avenues for discussion rather than closing them down'. 'I think we all attempt', he continued, 'to write criticism which is useful, whether or not it meets with agreement, criticism which suggests more questions than it answers.' All of which led him to conclude that he would rather be an orator than an oracle. Or, 'To put it another way, this magazine won't really be a success until it's regarded as a witness stand rather than a judgement seat.'[20]

Movie's primary aim was to advocate a more specific style-based approach to British film criticism. David Bordwell traces the development of this form of criticism from the postwar writings on film found in *Cahiers du Cinéma* and developed by the journal's American champion, Andrew Sarris. *Movie*, following the American tradition, was primarily concerned with merging 'the analysis of technique with the delineation of themes'. This was because the 1960s boom in explicatory interpretation was undergirded by the presumption that a film was actually 'a composite of implicit meanings given material embodiment in formal patterns and technical devices'. This trend incorporated two distinct approaches. On the one hand, the critic 'might choose to emphasize the meanings, as did Sarris and most *Cahiers* writers in their attempt to

distinguish each director's underlying vision or metaphysic'. Or, 'the critic could take the themes as given and go on to study how form and style make them concrete and vivid'. This second method was an important feature of most *Movie* critics' approach to narrative and technique.[21]

The implications of the kind of exploration of visual style offered by *Movie*, their valuing the detail of a film's style, might be 'most markedly shown in relation to Hollywood films'. However, 'the debate about Hollywood demonstrates what is at stake in mise-en-scène particularly clearly, these ideas are just as relevant to other forms of cinema.' As John Gibbs continues:

> Ultimately, the concept of mise-en-scène may be more important than the arguments about authorship which it supported. It enabled critics to understand film as a visual and sensory experience rather than just a literary one, to engage with film as a medium in its own right, and to consider the determining influence of style upon meaning. *And, in the case of Movie particularly, it formed the basis of a detailed criticism, which strove to understand the relationship between a film's meanings and the evidence on the screen. Mise-en-scène criticism made possible a more profound sense of how films work.* [italics mine][22]

Valuing the influence of style upon meaning will be central to my examination of the British New Wave. There are significant differences among these films, and it is through an examination of the style and meaning of each film that these differences will be most clearly demonstrated. In this way, the balance between film studies and cinema history will be restored. However, despite their talk of being a witness stand rather than a judgement seat, the form of mise-en-scène criticism advocated by *Movie* was never applied to films such as *Room at the Top* or *The Entertainer*. This suggests that mise-en-scène criticism only made possible a more profound sense of how *certain* films work. The pressing question here is: why was *Movie* not prepared to apply its critical methods to these films? In order to answer this question we need to consider the process of film criticism in more detail.

An artistic conscience?

The practical activity of film criticism is beset by two specific problems. With the critic having to construct a sufficiently compelling argument for the chosen film to be considered worthy of critical interpretation, the first problem is one of *appropriateness*. The films of British New Wave were not deemed to be an appropriate subject for sustained critical interpretation and received little in the way of positive critical attention from *Movie*. This means that the avenues for positive critical discussion remained limited and, were it not for the fact that the next problem

facing the film critic is one of *novelty*, there is little point in trying to apply a style-based critical model to the British New Wave. Bordwell defines novelty in the following way:

> the interpreter is expected either to (a) initiate a new critical theory or method; (b) revise or refine an existing theory or method; (c) 'apply' an existing theory or method to a fresh instance; or (d) if the film is familiar, point out significant aspects which previous commentators have ignored or minimized.[23]

Applying an approach to film criticism that originated in the 1950s hardly qualifies as the initiation of a new critical method. Nevertheless, these observations are crucial because the reasons for examining the New Wave films in this way still fulfil the remaining criteria. An existing method of criticism will be refined and will also be applied to a fresh instance. With films as familiar as *Room at the Top* or *A Taste of Honey*, part of the task will also involve pointing out significant aspects that have been both minimised and ignored. The question at this point is, of course: why didn't the writers of *Movie* apply the form of film criticism they helped to pioneer to their national cinema in the first place? The answer to this will become clearer when the idea of a critical distance is considered. Before this, however, more needs to be said about this kind of critical approach.

Having decided to examine a film, there are two ways for the critic to proceed. One way is to note the 'compatibilities that the film affords with respect to concepts currently in circulation in criticism'. The other is based on the idea of 'anomalies'. As Bordwell continues:

> Within the film, perhaps a scene or a bit of behaviour does not initially seem to fit with the others; or perhaps previous critical interpretations have ignored or overlooked something I can pick out; or perhaps the film as a whole does not square with some current conception of genre or style or mode. I can then hypothesize that the film will somehow justify its difference by virtue of certain other properties that are institutionally acceptable (for example, internal plot logic, thematic coherence or ideological aspects).[24]

Bordwell's observations depend upon the idea of our examination of a particular film being sufficiently different from previous examinations. But, if we are to successfully justify the appropriateness of the British New Wave films as the basis for the kind of critical discussion that *Movie* reserved for other films, then these ideas of novelty and difference must be extended further. Deborah Thomas is helpful here when she discusses what she feels it might mean to 'read' a film. For her, the aim of the process:

> is to engage with [the film] in all of its detail as a starting point for talking about things that matter and, in the process, to discover the common ground between the film and us, in some cases in spite of a considerable passage of time between the film's initial appearance and our subsequent reading.[25]

It is not necessary for these readings to match up with the intentions of the film makers who produced the films in the first place. Rather furthering Bordwell's ideas of compatibilities and anomalies, Thomas offers the following advice:

> [The readings] can most usefully be understood as sustained meditations grounded in the detailed specifics of their texts. At their best, such accounts invite those to whom they are offered to revisit the films and see for themselves, enriching their own experiences with new depth and bringing significant details to their attention in fresh and productive ways, while ultimately encouraging such viewers to make up their own minds as to how true to their own experiences of the film the readings may be, and how illuminating and important the issues that they raise.[26]

Thomas's offer to revisit a particular film and produce a sustained meditation sits comfortably with Bordwell's desire for novelty. Both suggest a way in which overlooked or (critically) 'unworthy' films might benefit from re-evaluation. Also, both commentators emphasise the attention that must be paid to the specific detail of an individual film.

Stanley Cavell continues this idea of the details specific to a single film when he famously asks 'What Becomes of Things on Film?' The process of reading a film, of interpretation, must 'account for the frames of the film being what they are, in the order they are in, e.g., to say what motivates the camera to look and to move as and where it looks and moves'. As Cavell concludes:

> the question of what becomes of objects when they are filmed and screened – like the question what becomes of particular people, and specific locales, and subjects and motifs when they are filmed by individual makers of film – has only one source of data for its answer, namely the appearance and significance of those objects and people that are in fact to be found in the succession of films, or passages of films, that matter to us. To express their appearances, and define those significances, and articulate the nature of this mattering, are acts that help to constitute what we might call film criticism.[27]

Cavell, then, continues this idea of film interpretation being a sustained meditation upon the film in question. With words such as expression, definition and articulation, the interpretative process is a highly personal one. For example, as Cavell considers elsewhere:

> How could we show that it [the film] is equally, or anyway, sufficiently, *worth* studying? Now we are at the heart of the aesthetic matter. Nothing can show this value to you unless it is discovered in your own experience, in the persistent exercise of your own taste, and hence the willingness to challenge your taste as it stands, to form your own artistic conscience, hence nowhere but in the details of your encounter with specific works.[28]

Cavell proposes an approach to film criticism that not only emphasises, once again, the importance of considering the specific details of a specific film but also suggests that the problem of appropriateness noted by Bordwell might be best overcome by adopting a purely personal response to the film in question. However, questions of experience, taste and a personal response to an individual film need careful handling. This was why *Movie* rejected films such as *Room at the Top* in the first place. Therefore, applying this idea of developing a critical conscience whilst discussing *A Kind of Loving*, say, is a process that needs further definition, and a better understanding can be developed by considering Robin Wood's response when challenged to formulate his critical position.

The disciplines of film criticism and theory share a contradictory relationship. Though they may partly overlap and though they might be capable of supporting one another, they ultimately lack compatibility. A theorist erects systems whilst a critic explores works. To the theorist a 'personal response to a given work will be an irrelevance, even an obstruction'. For the critic 'while he will be aware that it must be continually probed, questioned, tested – personal response is central to his activity'. There is the possibility that such an 'ideal' will never be fully attainable. Nevertheless, 'the function of an ideal is to provide a means of measuring degrees of success and failure'. One reason for the unattainability of this ideal takes us to the heart of what Wood calls the critical dilemma: 'the intense personal involvement in the work which is inseparable from any genuine response will inevitably make our "reading" to some degree biased and partial'. Despite this, Wood concludes with a call for critical integrity:

> I see no way of eliminating this problem from criticism, though the chief function for the critic of the tools provided by the theorists is to discipline and counterbalance this personal/subjective element: any theory of art, any scholarship, any historical or cultural research, any analytical procedure, that can help us see the work as it is and ensure that we are responding to something that is there and not something we have invented, is obviously to be welcomed.[29]

Following Bordwell, Thomas, Cavell and Wood, I will develop my own artistic conscience by examining the specific details of films such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* or *A Taste of Honey*. The examination of each film will take the form of a sustained personal reading, bringing the significant details of each film to the forefront in a fresh and productive way. The reader will be offered the opportunity to revisit the films of the British New Wave for themselves and allow my discussions to enrich their own experiences of these films. Finally, as well as being continually probed, questioned and tested, my personal response to each of these films will also be underpinned by the three conclusions Wood

reaches in his discussion. Firstly, 'Valid criticism must never lose touch with the critic's whole response, in which instinctual and emotional elements play at least as important a role as intellectual.' Secondly, the suppression of a personal element in critical discourse is neither 'possible nor desirable'. Its 'apparent absence should always be regarded with distrust'. Thirdly, 'the true end of criticism is evaluation, the evaluation of the total experience of the work is felt by the critic to offer; experience derived, that is, from what the work *is* rather than from what it *says*, structure, style, method all playing their roles'.[30]

We now need to turn to the question of why it is that this form of critical approach has never been applied to these films. Considering the fact that all of these films have been re-released and are now available on DVD, there is every reason to suspect that critical interest will once again turn to *This Sporting Life* or *A Kind of Loving*. Yet, the writers of *Movie* made it clear from the outset that they didn't feel the mise-en-scène of these films to be worthy of such sustained attention. Quite simply, *Movie*'s stance in relation to these films is responsible for the existence of a specific critical distance.

Movie and the British film

Penelope Houston believed that the weakness of 'the *Cahiers du cinéma* school' – as she called *Movie* (and its precursor, *Oxford Opinion*) – lay in the fact that they paid scant attention to 'experience which does not take place in the cinema'. Self-limiting in its enthusiasm, criticism of this sort was, for Houston, 'shop talk for the initiated'. As she continues:

> it turns inward upon itself, so that a film's validity is assessed not in relation to the society from which it draws its material but in relation to other cinematic experiences. It is all a bit hermetic, as though its practitioners had chosen to live in the dark, emerging to blink, mole-like, at the cruel light, to sniff the chilly air, before ducking back into the darkness of another cinema.[31]

Ian Cameron countered by pointing out that the journal was motivated more through a perceived absence of ideas in Britain than from an abundance of ideas from the continent. Cameron was happy to acknowledge that the obvious influence of *Cahiers* could be found in the confidence with which *Movie* developed its own cinematic tastes. Nevertheless, this confidence was tempered with a practicality. As Cameron explained:

> In comparison with the flamboyant intellectualism of *Cahiers*, *Oxford Opinion* [*Movie*'s predecessor] was almost doggedly practical, keeping very close to its subjects, usually keeping within them rather than referring out . . . The closeness to the films and the desire to investigate the way they *worked* continued into *Movie*; the best antidote to the prevalent wooliness about the cinema seemed to us to lie in detailed, descriptive criticism.[32]

Movie was not trying to be fashionable but was attempting 'to establish a solid critical tradition in an art form that has been so badly served by its critics'. Cameron felt that *Movie*'s contribution was to initiate discussion of the 'extraordinary richness of expression that the medium has inspired'.[33]

The journal saw itself as a response to the failure of British film criticism, a failure it saw characterised by *Sight and Sound*'s reverence for declining European art cinema as well as 'a set of liberal and aesthetic platitudes which stood in for a deeper and more analytical response' which 'meant that the critical approach to all films was equally impoverished'.[34]

Movie was motivated by a conscious effort to stand apart from the existing British critical community and move closer to the style-based criticism more commonly practised in France and America. Taking their lead from abroad, the journal's first edition contained its own ranking of directors in order of their perceived critical worthiness. Charles Barr has described this as an elaborate chart set out on two halves of the same page. The editors' judgement of the talents of all practising Hollywood and British directors led to them being graded in a series of six categories and 'almost all the British were huddled in the two lowest ones'.[35] Such a practice contained 'inevitable extravagances'[36] with only Hawks and Hitchcock designated as 'Great' directors and more than the vast majority of British directors being ranked as 'Competent or ambitious' at best or, alternatively, just dismissed as 'The Rest'. The result of this chart was 'a spectacular, eloquent and polemically very effective asymmetry'. From *Movie*'s point of view, this 'asymmetry' was a clear indication of where its collective sympathies lay.[37] The moment that this chart was published, the style and construction of the British New Wave films was critically doomed. For it was alongside this chart that Victor Perkins, writing on behalf of the journal's editorial board, outlined his famous assault on 'The British Cinema'.

The Woodfall answer?

'The British Cinema' opens with a wry acknowledgement of the changing face of the industry. As Perkins begins:

> Five years ago the ineptitude of British films was generally acknowledged. The stiff upper lip movie was a standard target for critical scorn. But now the British cinema has come to grips with Reality. We have had a breakthrough, a renaissance, a New Wave. More than that, we are now on the crest of a Second Wave: 'In the new spirit of freedom the British cinema moves on to explore worlds outside the conventional middle-class drama.'[38]

This breakthrough was nothing more than a change of outlook and still did nothing to hide the fact the British cinema was as lifeless as before. If British films had improved then this was only in terms of their intentions for Perkins was 'still unable to find evidence of artistic sensibilities in working order' and this lead him to famously conclude that there 'is as much genuine personality in "Room at the Top", method in "A Kind of Loving" and style in "A Taste of Honey" as there is wit in "An Alligator named Daisy", intelligence in "Above us the Waves" and ambition in "Ramsbottom Rides Again".' Though Perkins is quick to point out that his opening remarks might sound 'peevish', this does not stop him from continuing his claims for the lack of 'artistic sensibilities' evident in the British cinema by comparing British films with the best movies from Europe, Japan and the United States. *Movie*'s stance on British cinema is first revealed by Perkins asking 'where are the British films that we can compare with, say, *Lola*, *The Keeper*, *Rebel Without a Cause*, or *Man of the West*?' As he continues:

> The cinema of Fritz Lang, Raoul Walsh or Jacques Tourneur is different from, not superior to, the cinema of Godard, Nicholas Ray, Franju, Losey, Bergman, or George Cukor. The request is not for a 'correct' approach to the necessary subjects. It is for a cinema which has style, imagination, personality and, because of these, meaning.[39]

But why might Perkins have felt this way? To begin with, he places the blame on the industry itself for a lack of artistic sensibility. Producers and backers lacked ambition and adventure and were paralysed by the fear of commercial failure. This led to an over-reliance upon the formulae set by previous commercial successes.[40] These problems are not dissimilar from the problems faced by the film industries of other countries. Nevertheless, the problems peculiar to Britain are compounded by the concept of what Perkins terms 'The Good Film'. As he complains:

> The traditional British 'quality' picture follows a recipe for which the ingredients are: an important and if possible controversial subject . . . ; a popular story; a fair representation of all points of view; a resolution which makes the audience 'think'; a 'cinematic' treatment; lastly, but importantly, a few 'personal' idiosyncrasies (in the hope that mouthpieces will thus resemble people).[41]

This list of ingredients created a cinema of such 'awfulness' that a new and more responsible approach was needed, one that was prepared to deal seriously with human relationships and social problems. This was precisely what the 'new wave' of films, either produced or influenced by the Woodfall company, had to offer. Despite their 'difference' from the 'quality' picture, however, Perkins was still not convinced. Whereas the failure of the 'quality' picture could be attributed to its use of stereotypes,

its spurious excitement and its attempts at intellectualising its subjects, the newer forms of British cinema failed stylistically. Despite gaining praise for their attempts to break away from formulaic constraints of the 'quality' picture, Perkins felt that these films were unable to connect their characters effectively with their environments. As he famously notes:

> Richardson, Reisz, Schlesinger and Clayton are weakest exactly where their ambitions most demand strength: in the integration of character with background. Because of this weakness they are constantly obliged to 'establish' place with inserted shots which serve only to strengthen our conviction that the setting, though 'real', has no organic connection with the characters.

As a result, for Perkins and, by extension, *Movie*, the 'new wave' was as clumsy as it was ambitious.[42]

These objections were founded upon the belief that the first task facing a film critic was to look for 'a harmony between action and presentation', a task further guided by the need for a correspondence between the event and its presentation. As he concludes elsewhere: 'There's a huge range of filming any piece of action but I would insist that the chosen method maintain the integrity of the event.'[43] This was where the British New Wave directors were alleged to have failed. Perkins's objections were founded on the belief that directors such as Schlesinger, Clayton and Reisz sacrificed 'the integral relationship between décor and action' in order to 'make a directorial point'.[44]

One way that we might understand these objections to the British New Wave is to see them in terms of an aesthetic standard. Perkins's objections become the criteria by which these new British films were deemed to have fallen below this standard. When compared to the finest films that Hollywood and Europe had to offer, the British New Wave, was, for *Movie*, devoid of personality and reduced to making clumsy points. These films also lacked style, imagination and, ultimately, as a result of all of these deficits, meaning. Further compounding their failure was the lack of a suitable correspondence between the form of a particular film and its content. This created a gap between the event and its presentation. For Perkins, and by association, for *Movie*, the new British films were not worthy of positive critical comment.[45] As Charles Barr concludes elsewhere:

> Such British films as did get occasionally get praised were presented as being marginal and atypical, exceptions which, in the true sense of the term, proved the rule – they tested and bore out, by their demonstrable difference, and by the fact that they seemed to lead nowhere, caught in a cinematic cul-de-sac, the 'rule' that certain notions and practices of cinema were somehow embedded in Britain which were inimical to the kind of high achievement of skill and moral seriousness valued by *Movie*.[46]

Why did the style and construction of these new British films cause Perkins so much consternation?

Between form and content

The problem with the British New Wave was a simple one. Allegedly, these new British films were unable successfully to contain their use of locations within their narratives. We need to understand that the position that Perkins adopted in relation to these films finds its origins in discussions of the cinema's essentially bastard nature. Believing the medium to be an intrinsically hybrid form of expression, Perkins felt that there was too much variety and conflict between its facilities and components for the cinema to be considered otherwise. Yet, crucially, he also suggested that the exclusive opportunities offered by the medium were the essential factors in the questions of choice and style. Allied to this was the belief that these specific opportunities were better served when considered in terms of their inter-relatedness. On a broader scale this is because:

> The fictional film exploits, where purer forms attempt to negate, the conflict between reality and illusion. Instead of trying exclusively either to create or record, the story film attempts a synthesis: it both records what has been created and creates by the manner of its recording.[47]

Admittedly, these last ideas are taken from Perkins's *Film as Film*, a book written some ten years after the publication of 'The British Cinema' and it is highly likely that critical positions and perspectives will change over time. This is all part of what Cavell calls 'the persistent exercise of your own taste'.[48] With its concern for coherence and synthetic relationships, *Film as Film* is a broader development of some of the concerns expressed in 'The British Cinema' and, as such, bears a direct relevance to this discussion. Nevertheless, despite the time that has elapsed between the publication of 'The British Cinema' and the present day, there has been no evidence of Perkins reconsidering or recanting the views on the British New Wave he expressed in 1962. At this point it is also worth pointing out that I do not intend to extend this discussion into a broader debate about the medium's essence. Instead, I will concentrate on the relationship between this idea of synthesis and the objections Perkins raised about the British New Wave. Indeed, it is Perkins himself who usefully suggests the limits of this debate when he argues that the essence of the medium itself is not a sufficiently compelling subject when it comes to the business of film criticism. This is because, as he continues:

> We do not deduce the standards relevant to Rembrandt from the essence of paint; nor does the nature of words impose a method of judging ballads and

> novels. Standards of judgement cannot be appropriate to a medium as such but only to particular ways of exploiting its opportunities.[49]

This is crucial because Perkins's original objections were wholly based upon the ways in which the New Wave directors exploited the opportunities offered by the medium. We have come to understand the scorn with which Perkins viewed these films, and it was his standards of judgement that led him to condemn these films as failures. Putting aside the more personal claim that these films lacked style and meaning, we have also seen that the bulk of Perkins's objections were based upon the failed integration of a character with its background, the constant 'obligation' to 'establish place with inserted shots', and the setting lacking an organic connection with the characters – with each objection being an example of the ways in which these films failed to make the most of their opportunities. This was where the films failed. As John Hill later explains:

> The ideas and attitudes expressed by . . . the films of the British 'new wave' do not derive simply from the focus on the subject-matter but also from their deployment of certain types of conventions (in accordance with what a audience 'accustomed to the cinema' expects) which, then, inevitably structure and constrain the way in which that subject matter can be presented in the first place.[50]

Perkins's idea of opportunities presented by the medium becomes redefined as the deployment of conventions, and this is crucial because, as Hill continues, it is the 'conventionality' of realism which makes its usage so vulnerable to change. As the conventions change (either in reaction to previously established conventions or in accordance with new perceptions of what constitutes reality) so too does our sense of what then constitutes reality.[51] Perkins acknowledged that there was a need for British films to avoid what he called the cinema of awfulness, with its stereotypes and spurious excitement, and adopt a more responsible approach to dealing with human relationships and social problems. However, these new Woodfall-influenced films were also damned by their efforts to be more responsible. For Hill, it is through these efforts that the vulnerability of the British New Wave was most clearly demonstrated. This is because the narrative elements of a particular film are not only the actions and events themselves but also the way in which these actions and events are presented. These specific conventions will be motivated in terms of the presentation of actions and events. However as Hill continues, the inclusion of certain scenes can be considered to be redundant, unwarranted and, ultimately, 'surplus'. Despite similarities with other films, this inclusion gives the British New Wave a degree of 'noticeability'.[52]

Andrew Higson continues this idea of noticeability when he describes this inclusion of scenes or actions in terms of the tension that they create within the narrative. Seen in this way, these stylistic procedures

> at one level construct a *narrative space* in which the protagonists of the drama can perform the various actions of the plot. Narratives require space in which they can unfold. But because British New Wave films are promoted as realist, landscape and townscape shots must always be much more than neutral narrative spaces. Each of these location shots demands also to be read as a real historical place which can authenticate the fiction.

At the same time, however, the demands of the New Wave narratives require these spaces to be active rather than passive. This is because they must also authenticate the fiction by being easily read as real historical places and here the two demands create a tension, 'with the narrative compulsion of the film working continually to transform place once more back into space'. There are two ways in which this tension might be resolved. One is when the characteristic shots of these films become incorporated into the movement of the narrative. 'In these cases', Higson notes, 'place becomes a signifier for character, a metaphor for the state of mind of the protagonists.' The second way is to understand them to be cutting against the narrative flow, allowing these shots to be read a spectacle, 'as a visually pleasurable lure to the spectator's eye'.[53]

For Perkins, these shots achieved neither of these things. It is true that he felt these shots to be cutting against the narrative flow but the tension they created within the workings of the film served only to enhance his idea of landscape-mongering. It is this degree of noticeability that leaves these films at their most vulnerable to adverse criticism. This is because any innovation in cinematic realism is best understood in terms of a rejection of those conventions that preceded it. In this way, 'location shooting and the employment of unknown regional actors' were a means by which 'new wave' realism might place a distance between itself and 'the "phoney" conventions of character and place characteristic of British studio procedure'. This was exactly what Perkins called for in his article. However, it was the replacement of these 'phoney' conventions with location shooting that then led Perkins to complain that these films constantly had to re-establish their setting. It was the deployment of ostensibly non-functional actions and locations which became a characteristic of the British New Wave. In contrast to a high degree of ordering allegedly apparent in 'conventional narrative films', this deployment only loosely fitted into the logic of narrative development. As Hill suggests: 'Place as place is less important than its function in the narrative as a site for action.' One explanation for this approach to space and place can be found in the films' concern for realism. With its 'apparent "mismatch" between place and action', a distance is (arguably)

placed between these films and the 'more ordered and less 'wasteful' fictions of Hollywood where, also, 'place' is not 'accredited an autonomy and "integrity" outside the demands of the narrative'. This is the conclusion that Perkins reached. As Hill concludes:

> It was because of such stylistic 'manipulation' that a number of critics (including those attached to *Movie* such as V.F. Perkins) had objected to the British 'new wave' films. For them the virtue of mise-en-scène in traditional American cinema was precisely its relative unobtrusiveness: style and technique amplified the themes of a film without distracting from the film's forward movement. By contrast, the style and iconography employed by the British 'new wave' is obtrusive.[54]

Perkins also demanded a correspondence between the form of a film and its actual content, so that the distance between a cinematic event and its presentation might be reduced and/or removed. Higson is useful here when he defines the obtrusiveness of this these films as an example of 'surface realism' – 'an iconography which authentically reproduces the visual and aural surfaces of the 'British way of life'. The problem with this definition is that such a surface realism prevents the total incorporation of these iconographical details into their respective narratives. Rather than a complete sense of mise-en-scène we are presented with 'the spectacle of the real, as distinct from its narrativization'.[55]

The views of Hill and Higson are vital for two reasons. They make clear the relationship between Perkins's objections and the artistic choices made by the New Wave directors. Equally importantly, both Hill and Higson demonstrate a willingness to place as much emphasis upon the collective failings of these films as Perkins originally did. Their observations are indicative of the same tendency towards overemphasising the similarities between these films that Perkins's article initiated. We can see that one aspect of the historical legacy left by 'The British Cinema' has been the tendency to view these films collectively. For a final example of this tendency we need to move forward ten years from 'The British Cinema'.

Corruption and repetition

Thomas Elsaesser outlined two things that particularly troubled him about the British New Wave. He felt that directors such as Schlesinger, Anderson and Richardson demonstrated 'an excessive modesty'. Echoing the comparative theme evident in Perkins's earlier discussions, Elsaesser felt that these directors just didn't measure up to the new wave of French directors such as Rohmer, Rivette and Godard. Specifically, this meant that the British directors lacked 'a cinematic eye' and by this Elsaesser meant

> an approach to the material he [the director] is dealing with, which is shaped by the requirements and possibilities of the cinema, and that there is consequently no director who has an awareness of style and form sufficiently sensitive that each movement of the camera counts, each angle and composition of the frame is there to advance the thematic movement, embody a point of view or clarify the action.[56]

This 'modesty' allowed Elsaesser to bemoan the fact that this lack of a cinematic eye resulted in 'loose-jointed narratives, careless handling of camera movements' and, echoing Perkins's earlier indictment, a 'misplaced visual emphasis'. The alleged problems of style and construction in the films of Schlesinger *et al.* were further compounded by questions about the representation of location and atmosphere. As Elsaesser continues:

> The fact is that by seeking 'realism' primarily on the level of location and atmosphere, the British cinema, especially during its 'renaissance' has remained almost as naïve as ten years earlier: it confined itself to a sometimes astute but more often mechanical combination of an industrial (northern) working-class setting with readily identifiable characters and class stereotypes.[57]

It was this mechanical combination which caused the initially fresh images of the New Wave, the shots of urban industrial skylines and rolling moors, for example, to eventually become formulaic and demonstrate their 'vulnerability'. This resulted in two additional problems. Firstly, there was an obvious effect on the way the films were constructed. Elsaesser also felt that the films' dramatic conflicts were either 'pushed into melodrama or they dissipated themselves in squalid little compromises'. These two problems came to demonstrate what he saw as one of the fundamental problems with realism in the cinema; namely, its corruption through repetition. As if this wasn't enough, these films also lacked a sufficiently well-established psychological or moral conflict and a theme or argument that allowed the setting of the film to be absorbed into 'the metaphoric language of emotions and actions'. This meant that the British New Wave was unable to avoid the exploitation of its social milieu.[58]

Like Perkins previously, Elsaesser's objections focus on the films' systematic use of landscape and location. Perkins's disdain for the apparent lack of effective connection between character and landscape has become, for Elsaesser, a problem with 'misplaced visual emphasis'. In both cases, it is the link between the style of the British New Wave and their use of realistic locations that leads to these films being seen as having failed. By making this link, Elsaesser was able to suggest famously that realism in these films meant nothing more than living in a terraced house and riding a bicycle to work. A further result of this repetition was the spawning of cliché after cliché, 'until the scene of a couple overlooking

belching gas-works and a row of sooty houses from the surrounding hills became as meaningful as a shot of the Eiffel tower in a picture about Paris'.[59]

Appropriate criteria?

If standards of judgement can only be appropriate to ways in which a particular film takes advantage of the opportunities offered by the medium then this also must mean that the criteria applied by the critic must be based upon what he or she can sustain and not on the demands that he or she might make. This is crucial because, as Perkins concludes:

> The clarification of standards should help to develop the disciplines of criticism without seeking to lay obligations on the film-maker. Criticism and its theory are concerned with the interplay of available resources and desirable functions. They attempt to establish what the medium is good for. They cannot determine what is good for the medium, because the question is useless. The search for appropriate criteria leads us to observe limitations; it does not allow us to prescribe them. Anything possible is also permissible, but we still have to establish its value. We cannot assess worth without indicating function.[60]

It is the interplay of resources and functions that is crucial here. The resources available to these films would be the locations where they were filmed and their functions, desirable or otherwise, would be to establish the spaces and places where the New Wave narratives unfold. However, Perkins felt that there was a problem with the interplay between them. This meant an alleged discrepancy between action and its presentation. This discrepancy allowed him to decide upon the relatively low critical value of these films. Having decided that the function of the locations prevented them from being fully integrated into the narrative Perkins felt able not only to list the criteria appropriate to their failure but also to dismiss these films arbitrarily.

The concern here is that, despite claims to the contrary, Perkins's claims for the failings of the British New Wave appear to do more than merely observe their limitations. In the case of these British films, this 'lack' of correspondence meant, for Perkins, that they appeared imbalanced. As he writes:

> This balance, the delicate relationship between what is shown and the way of showing, justifies and exalts the movie's mongrel confusion of reportage with narrative and visual art. A single image is made to act both as a recording, to show us what happens, and as an expressive device to heighten the effect and significance of what we see.[61]

However, this balance can be appreciated only if we respond to movies as a synthetic form and understand that the parts of a film are of interest only in relationship not in isolation. With its characteristic use of apparently isolated establishing shots, the British New Wave apparently lacked the capacity to be considered in this way. 'The British Cinema', then, marked the point at which British style-based criticism and the New Wave films diverged. Also, as is evident in the responses of Elsaesser, Higson and Hill, Perkins's original objections were wholly responsible for the creation of a certain tendency to treat these films collectively. Yet, the case for refusing to examine the style and meaning of these films individually is not as watertight as impressions might suggest. Perkins's accusations of 'landscape-mongering' sit at odds with his call for an interest in relationships and not isolation and, as we are about to see, the relationship between *Movie* and the British New Wave becomes an increasingly complicated one.

One true church?

The practical critical approach advocated by *Movie* was the specific way in which the journal would set itself apart from the existing critical community in Britain. In particular, they were keen to stand in opposition to the British Film Institute journal *Sight and Sound*. As Perkins explained in 1961:

> Our reaction was provoked by *Sight and Sound*'s influence over 'serious' film criticism in Britain. During the past five years, the magazine has retreated further and further from the difficult business of coming to grips with the most complex of art forms, and has hidden behind a screen of well-meaning 'liberal' clichés. Its reviews became increasingly dull and unhelpful.[62]

Elsewhere, Ian Cameron was even more brutal: 'The ultimate reason for bad criticism in Britain is intellectual laziness which shows itself as a reluctance to make the effort to understand more than the superficial meaning of a film.'[63] However, *Movie*'s antagonism towards *Sight and Sound* was also responsible for a contradiction that lies at the very heart of their objections to the British cinema.

As Thomas Elsaesser argues, Perkins's repudiation of British cinema, especially its 'new wave', was simply an attempt to dispel the belief that directors such as Richardson, Schlesinger, Clayton and Anderson had 'somehow given the British cinema an artistic form and a sense of style'.[64] Critically, for Perkins and the others at *Movie*, there was just no comparison between a Nicholas Ray film, say, and one from Tony Richardson. As Geoffrey Nowell-Smith continues, the belief in a new British cinematic 'style' was sacrilegious. As he writes:

> if they [*Movie*] are interested at all to elucidate what Preminger has to say about Israel, or what Rossellini has to say about freedom in *Vanina Vanini*, it is because Preminger (or, as the case may be, Rossellini) is saying it, and Preminger and Rossellini are members of the True Church, like Donen, Minnelli, Hawks.

'There is,' as Nowell-Smith concludes, 'be it noted, only One True Church, even if it has many prophets, and there is one cult – the almost mystical and certainly hermetic movie experience.'[65]

For *Movie*, the suggestion that the style and construction of a film such as *Room at the Top* was worthy of positive critical discussion was tantamount to heresy. This heretical belief in the development of a British 'style' could be blamed on the infidels writing for *Sight and Sound*.

Sight and Sound hoped that this mode of British film making might bring about what they saw as a specifically British 'sense of style'. Though Houston felt that there was nothing great about the film she did declare it to have the 'impact of a genuine innovation'. Also, with a new subject, a new setting and new talent, Houston concluded that 'half a loaf, in this context, looks very much better than the usual bread substitute'. Additionally, there was also a real cause for optimism that the newer independent companies such as Remus (which produced *Room at the Top*), Woodfall and Associated British would be able to demonstrate innovation. However, as she warned: 'What happens next will depend on the talent and persuasiveness of half a dozen writers and directors, on the imponderables of public response, and on whatever weight the critics are prepared to throw into the scale.' This meant that it was now up to the critics 'to play their own part in trying to keep the road signposted and the traffic moving'.[66] David Robinson felt *Look Back in Anger* to be a 'breakthrough'.[67] Penelope Houston echoed Robinson's optimism in her cinematic summary of 1959. As she declared:

> However and wherever we are going to do our film-making, one encouraging certainty remains. 1959 has been a year of intense vitality, an amazingly confident contrast to the uneasy 'fifties. The cinema has been killed off in the headlines several times during the past few years. The corpse has never looked healthier.[68]

With its 'attempt to interpret the spirit behind a large part of British life today', *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* was, for Peter John Dyer, the next step forward for this new wave of British films. Mindful of the tendency always to compare a British film with a more 'acceptable' film from elsewhere – a tendency that epitomised *Movie*'s position – Dyer's review is an attempt to make a claim for the critical acceptance of the British New Wave.

Whilst prepared to acknowledge that the film might lack the 'sublimity and universality' of *Pather Panchali* and *Tokyo Story*, Dyer doubts whether

such a comparison is really necessary. This kind of comparative argument – as revealed by the stance taken by Perkins in 'The British Cinema' – demonstrated 'something notoriously inbred and exclusive about the British which tugs against the broader, deeper expressions of feeling – against, if you like, universality'. As he argues:

> Why, in any case, should not the Nottingham wilderness of trade-marked houses and digital smokestacks be as likely a setting for important truths as Tokyo or Taormina? It would be a great pity if our sensibilities, our standards of what is major and minor art, should continue to be directed, despite the example of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, by sophisticates and romantics, sceptics and theorists, of every shade and hue.

Dyer concludes with a critical challenge which demonstrates a more reasonable approach to the New Wave: 'Grant us more such "minor" films and directors. Then, and – in the context of contemporary British cinema – only then, can we start asking for something "major."'[69]

For *Sight and Sound*, *A Kind of Loving* appeared to keep the momentum going. Eric Rhode begins by connecting the film's 'documentary' style with the inner conflicts of the characters. In this way, the style of Schlesinger's film 'establishes the bewilderment of his lovers through the ambiguity of their motives'. Of course, as Rhode continues:

> this documentary style is as awkward as gunpowder: the mildest implausibility is liable to blow the film sky-high. Yet June Ritchie and Alan Bates, who play the lovers, carry this dangerous burden with an almost breathtaking nonchalance, and perform with a range of gesture, genuine and unexpected, which is not usually found outside the documentary.

The result of this, for Rhode, is a 'curious objectivity'. The camera 'holds us back from the characters so that people are almost seen as things – leaden, weighted with texture. Rather than let us identify ourselves with these characters . . . it restrains us, makes us think again.' As Rhode concludes: 'Somehow, we are forced to fuse these two points of view: and this, in effect, is the achievement of *A Kind of Loving*. It presents us with a complex situation and then compels us to face it squarely.'[70]

Like Dyer's previously, the tone of Rhode's review demonstrates a more even-handed approach. Rather than just praising the film for its own sake or dismissing it out of hand, Rhode makes a significant claim for the achievements of Schlesinger's film. However, if Rhode gave the impression that the style of these new films was capable, after all, of bearing a serious critical weight then this optimism was short-lived, as Peter Harcourt's discussion of *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* demonstrates. Once again, this review will be considered in greater detail later. Harcourt's review has a decidedly disappointed tone to it, and the implication is that *Sight and Sound*, despite its initial optimism, soon came to share the same disillusionment with these films as *Movie*.

Hollow promises?

In each of these examples a sense of the relationship between style and theme was clearly evident for *Sight and Sound*. However, the initial optimism soon faded and for the journal, as for *Movie*, the supposed breakthrough in British cinema appeared to be only a hollow promise. As Penelope Houston writes:

> Three years or so ago, films like *Room at the Top* and *Look Back in Anger* had critics talking about a breakthrough in British cinema. A breakthrough to what? Other than a responsible look at a new kind of subject, it was never all that clear; but we could feel that the British cinema was poised on the edge of something. In 1962, it is still hovering on the edge.[71]

However, just like Perkins, a disappointed Houston was unable to resist the urge to look elsewhere for inspiration. As she laments:

> But perhaps we know now, as we didn't then, what a breakthrough might mean: we've had films as varied as *La Notte* and *Il Posto*, *Lola* and *A Bout de Souffle* to teach us. There is not a glimmer of a chance, on the existing evidence, that any of these films could have come out of Britain, either from our studios or from the young film-makers working independently.

Finally, echoing Perkins's thoughts on the stylistic failures of the new British films, Houston concludes by suggesting that 'a film like *Lola* or *Il Posto* seems entirely at home in the place where it's made; a British film, when it gets outside the studio, becomes location-conscious'.[72]

Houston's despair at the lack of progress made by these films meant that the distance between her and Perkins was smaller than either would care to admit. In fact, as her review of Seth Holt's *Nowhere to Go* (1958), demonstrates, Houston was expressing a real concern about those aspects of a film's construction that later troubled Perkins. As she writes, describing the film's ending:

> It is the film's final shot which comes closest to giving the game away. This is a really striking atmospheric landscape, a view of the Welsh countryside with the chimneys of an industrial town smoking in the distance. We don't often see this sort of view in a British film, and the shot is held for emphasis, designed clearly to make a point. But what point? . . . a shot which would make a fine conclusion to a bigger film merely imposes a pretentious final comment on a film not large enough to contain it.

As Houston concludes, 'Here, fully exposed, is one of the traps that catch the contemporary serious film-maker: the temptation to impose "significance", as it were, from outside.'[73]

Ultimately, Houston, like Perkins, bemoaned the lack of a breakthrough. *Sight and Sound*, like *Movie*, felt that the overall failings of the British New Wave were symptomatic of an industry that was itself a

failure. Another conclusion that both journals arrived at was that Britain's home-grown product just could not compare with its European and Hollywood counterparts. As Houston writes: 'Accepting that Britain cannot, except in co-productions, expect to challenge the American cinema in terms of spectacle . . . then there is the challenge of French and Italian "quality" product to be met.'[74] However, as she eventually admits elsewhere: 'Comparisons between the young cinemas of Britain and France are becoming monotonous. We have made them ourselves in *Sight and Sound*.' Whereas 'across the channel the *Cahiers du cinéma* writers . . . have made it woundingly apparent that as far as they are concerned Britain's cinema is not yet ready to join Europe'. The result of this, for Houston, was that compared to a cinema 'headed by Truffaut, Godard, Resnais, Demy, Rivette etc., we are fielding a second eleven and', as she concedes, 'that is all there is to it'.[75] Despite the many protestations made by *Movie* to emphasise the difference of their critical position, Perkins reaches the same conclusion at the end of 'The British Cinema'. As he complains: 'We know that we can't have a *L'Avventura* or an *À Bout de Souffle* under the present system. We are much more disturbed by the fact that we are not getting equivalents for *Psycho*, *Elmer Gantry* and *Written on the Wind*.'[76]

The relationship between the form of expressive criticism advocated by *Movie* and the films of the British New Wave is a complicated one. Despite the claims that Perkins made for the study of cinema to be based upon ideas of difference not superiority, it is clear that British cinema in general, and the New Wave in particular, was not considered worthy of the kind of individual attention that *Movie* devoted to other films. Despite its initial euphoria, *Sight and Sound* succumbed to the same disappointments and reached the same conclusions. The historical reason why making a positive style-based case for the British New Wave has always been a problematic one is more complicated than originally imagined. If *Movie*'s objections to these films were solely dependent upon a considered examination of their style and construction then this would be enough to suggest that a new style-based interpretative approach to these films might well be a waste of time. Certainly, according to the aesthetic standards set by Perkins in his article, this would appear to be the case. Also, it is clear that, for Perkins the differences between the films of the British New Wave and those films from Hollywood and France could be found primarily at the level of their respective mise-en-scène. However, *Movie*'s objections to the stylistic flaws of these films were fatally influenced by its dislike of *Sight and Sound*'s desire to champion them. With a contradiction underpinning *Movie*'s stance it is sensible to suggest that the relationship between style-based criticism and the New Wave needs to be reconsidered. The existence of this contradiction offers sufficient opportunity for an examination of the style

and meaning of *A Kind of Loving*, say, to begin in earnest and not just be dismissed as unnecessary. Indeed, as Perkins claims elsewhere, adding a further complication:

> So long as we see the definition of criteria as a means of validating enthusiasm rather than contempt, our standards of judgement will be useful for what they include but will have limited reference. The limits are not destructive but necessary. A positive claim, provided that it is rationally sustained, should be given greater weight than a denial of value. If we fail to perceive functions and qualities it may well be because we are looking for them in inappropriate ways.[77]

Here, though, Perkins's call for a positive claim sits at odds with his views on the films themselves. Consider, also, another statement that he makes on the same subject:

> The corollary is that values which *are* claimed should be argued in the clearest and most positive terms. A failure to discern quality is not a demonstration of its absence, but equally its presence cannot be indicated by the kinds of negative statements which movie reviewers have frequently invoked in the past decade to solicit approval for films which 'escape the confines of narrative' and so forth.[78]

A continued emphasis upon the issues and conventions of social realism that inevitably accompany these films will always result in the kind of negative statements that have always prevented any discernment of quality. Though Perkins avoids the term 'social realism' it is obvious that his concerns over the mismatch between locations and characters amount to a dissatisfaction with the same thing. Thus, a continued emphasis upon the collective failings of the films appears to be incompatible with the desire to make an evaluative assessment of the style and meaning of each individual film. This is especially true when we relate this desire to Perkins's involvement in the promulgation of style-based evaluative film criticism in Britain. The real problem here is that to understand the use of location only in terms of the deployment of a specific convention places a dubious double weight upon the question of the use of location. Over time the idea of a convention becomes tainted by accusations of repetition and corruption. This has meant that these accusations then become the reason why expressive discussions of New Wave style and meaning have never been started. This double weight has always placed an unnecessary limit upon the discussion of these films.

Despite the apparent contradictions and asymmetrical tendencies that we have uncovered, a style-based approach of the kind advocated by Perkins is still the best way in which our subsequent discussions of these films can avoid the overworked emphasis upon the realist issues that inevitably accompany them. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, an evaluative approach to film criticism has little choice but to rely upon

a personal response to the film(s) in question. That there is little choice here is because, as Perkins suggests, the alternative to a personal response is to restrict criticism to a descriptive role and this would be highly unsatisfactory. Also, as he continues: 'A descriptive analysis will need at the least to make claims about the distribution of the film's emphasis; and emphasis is as subjectively perceived, relies as much on a personal response, as judgement.'[79]

Perkins's words here unwittingly become the moment at which British style-based criticism and the New Wave can begin to converge once again. If claims about the distribution of a film's emphasis are reliant upon a personal response then this explains Perkins's original stance concerning these films. However, I certainly have no intention of reducing my examination of the New Wave to mere description. My interest is in making claims for the differences that distinguish one film from another – relying on description alone would serve only to highlight similarities.

My personal response will inevitably involve my own claims about the distribution of emphasis in each film. The traditional tendency has been to place the greatest emphasis on the use and abuse of social realist conventions, but the weight of this emphasis has always restricted discussions of the films. In order for the redistribution of this emphasis to begin we need to return to the questions of conventions.

Plausibility and common sense

For Andrew Tudor, it is the idea of 'plausibility' that is more interesting than 'what can be claimed as realistic representation'. We all have conventional ideas of what is appropriate to the context of the film we are watching. If a film is set in a northern industrial town and the protagonist works on a lathe in a factory then it surely stands to reason that he is more likely to live in a terraced house and go to work on a bicycle than wake up in a penthouse apartment before setting off in a Cadillac. As Tudor concludes:

> All the discussions of realism in film aesthetics, all the claims of film-makers to be making realist films, all these have contributed to forming our notions of the 'real' in films. Sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly. But we shall never understand the working of the conventional image of 'realism' as long as we go on looking for some absolute aesthetic standard.[80]

It is also interesting to consider what Robin Wood has to say on the same subject. He begins by suggesting that discussions of realism demonstrate formidable theoretical elaboration but lack common sense. This is followed by a list of what he believes to be the fundamental features of realism: the tendency to become interested in characters as if they were real people; the tendency to care about the characters and what happens

to them; the tendency to become emotionally involved, 'to participate, to identify'.[81] As Wood explains:

> The reason why representational or narrative art has been dominant in all ages is simple: it makes possible a human richness – an appeal from human beings, to human beings, about human beings – that abstract art or art that denies us emotional involvement and satisfaction cannot (for all their potential interest) possibly encompass.[82]

As Wood is led to conclude: 'The narrative film – owing as much to the development of the novel as to the invention of the camera – provides, then, a remarkable synthesis of the manifold strivings towards Realism in the arts.' However, the problem here is that, owing to 'its complicated mechanics' film, 'the most realistic of art forms', becomes the easiest 'to deconstruct'. As each of its technical innovations moves the camera closer to perfecting 'the illusion of reality' it also 'offers further possibilities for deliberately artificial (hence anti-Realist) effects'.[83] Yet 'Realism is a concept generally taken for granted' and is in fact 'very difficult to define satisfactorily. For Wood, as for Tudor, the commonest notion of it would probably be 'the plausible reproduction of reality as we know it.' However, as he finally warns:

> The criterion by which Realism is assessed is our own experience of life, beside which we place the work in a straight 'one to one' relationship; its value is determined by how recognizable we find its characters or by how we would like those characters if we had to live with them.[84]

The problem here is twofold. Firstly, 'our experience of life may be limited'. Secondly, a film defines its own reality through its 'method, presentation, style, structure'. Therefore, '"Realism" is relative, not absolute, and can only be judged by reference to the work's internal relationships'. This means that a better notion of Realism might be 'a particular artistic method or strategy'. Crucially, the relativity of realism becomes clears through the question of the emphasis placed upon it. By questioning this emphasis and refusing to accept an absolute standard of judgement, one that can then be applied to define a series of films collectively, the precise nature of our involvement will 'differ appreciably' from film to film, with 'each writer or director determining our relationship to his characters through method and style'.[85]

The chapters that follow will become the demonstration of a personal response to the films of the British New Wave. This demonstration will take the form of a series of sustained meditations upon the films in question. Also, following Wood, the precise nature of my involvement with each film will differ appreciably. In each case, I will show that a redistribution of critical emphasis not only allows discussions of the British New Wave to be based around questions of their style and meaning but

will also allow the problematic relationship between these films and the questions of realism to be reconsidered. There is an important distinction to make here. I am not suggesting that social realist conventions were not utilised by the films but it should also be clear by now that a repeated emphasis upon the use of these conventions leading to a flawed series of films has become little more than an effective means of closing down discussion. Surely there is something else that we might start to say about these films? To this end, my discussion of the British New Wave will be based upon the idea of difference. Though there might be inevitable or unavoidable similarities between *Room at the Top* and *A Kind of Loving*, the main focus of my examination of these films will be upon the differences that can be found at the level of their respective style and meaning. Some of the chapters will be concerned primarily with producing sustained readings of individual films. Whilst continuing the interpretative trend that underpins this book, other chapters will also address other notable discussions that have accompanied these films. Finally, other chapters will also aim to demonstrate the ways in which detailed film analysis will allow the critic to move beyond generalised discussions of history and context and really gets to grips with the mise-en-scène of an individual film. It will also become immediately apparent that, with the exception of the Richardson films, the chapters are not arranged chronologically in relation to the films' release. This is a deliberate attempt to demonstrate that the films might be better understood in their own right and not as part of a series.

Chapter 2 will begin by considering Tony Richardson's contribution to the British New Wave. Beginning with 1959's *Look Back in Anger* and ending with 1962's *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, this chapter will comprise a series of shorter interrelated test-cases designed to demonstrate how an analysis of style and meaning might be undertaken. By including his two other films, 1959's *The Entertainer* and 1961's *A Taste of Honey*, in this demonstration I will also consider in greater detail the concerns over realist conventions raised by commentators such as Hill and Higson. This chapter will also evaluate the development of Richardson's approach to film making and reveal that the critical trajectory that his films initiated can be seen as symptomatic of the broader critical trajectory that accompanied the series as a whole. Ultimately, as this chapter will demonstrate, Richardson's four films from this period need to be seen as indicative of a talent being developed rather than the achievements of a director at the height of his creative ability.

Chapter 3 will examine Jack Clayton's 1959 *Room at the Top* and will concentrate on the film's opening sequences in order to achieve two related objectives. I will explore in detail the ideas of arrivals and new beginnings that these sequences bring to our attention. I will also demonstrate how these two ideas will also allow us to overcome the way

in which existing considerations of this film have tended to place unnecessary limits upon the interest and importance of *Room at the Top*'s mise-en-scène. In this way, my reading of Clayton's film will offer the opportunity for further discussion. Chapter 4 is a detailed reading of John Schlesinger's 1963 film *Billy Liar*. I will demonstrate how the film's style and meaning might be fruitfully examined, and my reading will be particularly concerned to illustrate some aspects of the approach to mise-en-scène criticism outlined in John Gibbs's book *Mise-en-Scène: Film Style and Interpretation*. As this chapter will demonstrate, a British film like *Billy Liar* can sustain the kind of detailed aesthetic discussion that is usually reserved for films from other modes of cinema. My reading, then, will demonstrate that the style and meaning of a British film is worthy of sustained examination and discussion. John Schlesinger's 1962 film *A Kind of Loving* will be the subject of Chapter 5. Once again, this chapter will be centred upon a sustained reading. I will also aim to address some the specific criticisms that that have been directed towards this film. I will consider the concerns over narrative interruption that Andrew Higson has raised in relation to this film. I will also address the consternation that a particular camera movement found within the film caused Perkins in 'The British Cinema'. This is because Schlesinger, for Perkins, 'landscape-mongers in the most blatant and inept fashion'. Not only that, he also has 'no appreciation of the power of his décor'.[86] In keeping with the ethos underlying each of the chapters, my analysis of Schlesinger's film can be characterised by a positive evaluation which runs contrary to existing accounts from Perkins and Gibbs.

Chapter 6 will be concerned with Karel Reisz's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960). My examination will centre on questions of causality. I will address the limitations of applying of David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's ideas about cause and effect to an individual film. Accompanying this will be a further discussion of the ways in which the historical contextualisation of a British film, the kind of project espoused by practitioners of cinema history, limits the production of a more rounded examination of the film. As the chapter will demonstrate, and despite the best intentions of existing writers such as Aldgate and Richards, current accounts of Reisz's film refuse to get to grips with the detail of the film. Lindsay Anderson's *This Sporting Life* (1963) will be the subject of Chapter 7. As before, I will produce a sustained discussion of the relationship between the film's style and meaning. I will not only consider the fact that this film is the last in the series but will also allow the details of Anderson's film to formulate a further discussion about the processes and development of film criticism. In this way, the case I am making for a positive re-evaluation of these films will be complete.

I want to conclude here by considering Raymond Durgnat's views on the practice of critical preference. A practice of this kind, one that

operates on the basis that 'Howard Hawks is better than . . .', for example, and one that can then substitute Hawks for Welles, or Ophuls, creates the unfavourable impression that 'vivid and insightful remarks or situations are a monopoly of a few prestigious individuals'. This and the tendency to summarise a period of film making by selecting 'the most distinguished films of the most distinguished directors' combine to create 'one of the principle distortions of film criticism'. This is not to say, however that the process of casting new light on critically unfashionable films is simply an exercise in archaeology because this, like the practice of critical preference, can be seen as just another convenience. It is simply the case that every generation 'has its own perspectives into the past, and needs its own criticism'. By way of an ending I am keen to appropriate Durgnat's words to mark the beginning of my examination. As he concludes:

> The chapters that follow differ from most British movie criticism also in concentrating less on evaluating the texture of films than on critical exegeses of certain themes, undercurrents and overtones. It is often assumed, though it has never been shown, that artworks not of the highest textural quality don't deserve thematic exegesis – that if they don't ring true to the highly sophisticated critic they can't ring true to anybody, and that what doesn't ring true can't have any meaning or subtlety.[87]

Notes

1 Louis Marcorelles, 'Conversation with Jean Renoir', *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Spring 1962), pp. 78–83, p. 79.
2 Mark Shivas, 'Letter from London', *Film Culture*, No. 27 (Winter 1962/63), p. 21.
3 Pauline Kael, 'Is there a Cure for Film Criticism?', *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Spring 1962), pp. 56–66, p. 57.
4 Peter Hutchings, 'Beyond the New Wave: Realism in British Cinema, 1959–63', in Robert Murphy, ed., *The British Cinema Book*, 2nd edition, London, BFI Publishing, 2002, pp. 146–152, pp. 146–147.
5 Hutchings, 'Beyond the New Wave', pp. 146–147.
6 Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995, pp. 269–270.
7 Julia Hallam with Margaret Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2000, pp. 45–51.
8 Samantha Lay, *British Social Realism: From Documentary to Brit Grit*, London and New York, Wallflower, 2002, p. 23.
9 R. Barton Palmer, 'What Was New in the British New Wave? – Re-viewing *Room at the Top*', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Fall 1986), pp. 125–135, p. 128.
10 As Hutchings explains: 'Seen from this perspective, the predominately urban and industrial landscapes of British film realism, and the stories of

the mainly working-class characters who populate them are revealed as vehicles for the expression of middle-class and patriarchal values' (Hutchings, 'Beyond the New Wave', p. 146).

Of course, as Hutchings continues, the basis for this suspicion was the earlier grouping of British realist films produced by John Grierson during the 1930s. This series of documentaries espoused a middle-class perspective that was apparently so pronounced that the changes in the British critical landscape noted by Hutchings caused them to be viewed as suspect for an excellent summary of the rise and reception of the British documentary movement (see Lay, *British Social Realism*, pp. 39–53).

11 Andrew Tudor, 'The Many Mythologies of Realism', *Screen*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Spring 1972), pp. 6–36, p. 27.

12 As Lay explains: 'These film-makers were interested in extending the range of cinematic representation to include the working class beyond London to the industrial towns and cities of the north of England. They used unknown regional stage actors such as Tom Courteney, Albert Finney, Rachel Roberts and James Bolam, in ensemble casts. By situating their regionally authentic casts in regionally authentic locations, the British New Wave directors made new claims to realism, and made explicit through social realist fictions what was only implicit in documentary realist texts – that character and place were interconnected, and that environmental factors were largely deterministic of characters' fates and fortunes' (Lay, *British Social Realism*, pp. 5–19).

13 Neil Sinyard, *Jack Clayton*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2000, pp. 11–17.

14 Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Best of British: Cinema and Society from 1930 to the Present*, London and New York, I.B. Tauris, 1999, p. 186.

15 Jeffrey Richards, 'Rethinking British Cinema', in Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson, ed., *British Cinema: Past and Present*, London and New York, Routledge, 2000, pp. 21–34, p. 21.

16 See John Hill's *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956–1963*, London, BFI Publishing, 1986, and Andrew Higson, 'Space, Place, Spectacle: Landscape and Townscape in the "Kitchen Sink" Film', in Andrew Higson, ed., *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema*, London, Cassell, 1986, pp. 133–156.

17 As Alan Lovell notes, *Sight and Sound* was and is the subsidised magazine of the British Film Institute. It was set up 'to encourage the art of the film' and, as such, was in an ideal position to be a journal of film analysis, scholarship and theory. However, as he laments, 'Instead it became a magazine of film journalism about the contemporary cinema and involved in the apparatus of exhibition' (Alan Lovell, 'Notes on British Film Culture', *Screen*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Summer 1972), pp. 5–15.

18 'The Critical Issue', *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 27, No. 6 (Autumn 1958), pp. 270–279, pp. 272–276.

19 Writing in *Film*, Peter John Dyer greeted the arrival of *Oxford Opinion* on the critical scene with hostility: 'Now the enthusiasm of such critics may seem invaluable to the cause of cinema; celluloid may be coming out their ears. But I wouldn't trust them with an inch of space in any magazine of mine. I wouldn't employ them because of their judgement, or rather

their lack of it; and because it follows that they will enjoy neither influence nor staying power' (Peter John Dyer, 'Counter Attack', *Film*, No. 26 (November–December 1960), pp. 8–9, p. 8).

20 '*Movie* Differences: A Discussion', *Movie*, No. 8 (April 1963), pp. 28–33.

21 David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*, London, Harvard University Press, 1989, pp. 52–64. At this point it is also worth noting, as Pam Cook suggests, that *Movie*'s concept of mise-en-scène differed somewhat from that of its French counterparts, referring as it did to the overall formal organisation of films, their 'style'. As she continues: '*Movie*'s brand of mise-en-scène analysis is based on a deductive method whereby detailed description of films is seen to be the basis for criticism, a method which sees film criticism as a practical activity rather than as a theoretical project' (Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink, ed., *The Cinema Book* 2nd edition, London, BFI, 1999, p. 269).

22 John Gibbs, *Mise-en-scène: Film Style and Interpretation*, London and New York, Wallflower Press, 2002, pp. 62–66.

23 Bordwell, *Making Meaning*, pp. 29–31.

24 *Ibid.*, pp. 29–31.

25 Deborah Thomas, *Reading Hollywood: Spaces and Meaning in American Film*, London and New York, Wallflower Press, 2001, pp. 1–2.

26 *Ibid.*

27 As Cavell concludes: 'Then to explain how these appearances, significances, and matterings – these specific events of photogenesis – are made possible by the general photogenesis of film altogether, by the fact . . . that objects on film are always displaced, . . . (i.e., that we as viewers are always already displaced before them), would be an undertaking of what we might call film theory' (Stanley Cavell, 'What Becomes of Things on Film?', in *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp. 180–183).

To further understand the relationship between style-based criticism and significance we might consider what Graeme Turner has to say. For him 'the notion of mise-en-scène is useful in that it allows us to talk about the way in which elements within a frame of a film or a shot composed of many consecutive frames, are placed, moved and lit. Since significance can be communicated without moving the camera or editing – for instance through a character moving closer to the camera, or throwing a shadow over another's face – the concept of mise-en-scène becomes an important means of locating the process through which such significance is communicated' (Graeme Turner, *Film as Social Practice*, London and New York, Routledge, 1988, p. 42).

28 Cavell, 'The Thought of Movies', in *Themes Out of School*, pp. 10–11.

29 Robin Wood, *Personal Views: Explorations in Film*, London, Gordon Fraser, 1976, pp. 10–12.

30 *Ibid.*

31 Penelope Houston, 'The Critical Question', *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Autumn 1960), pp. 160–165, p. 164.

32 Ian Cameron, 'Introduction', in Ian Cameron, ed., *Movie Reader*, London, November Books, 1972, p. 6.

33 *Ibid.*
34 Jeffrey Richards quoting Ian Cameron, 'Rethinking British Cinema', pp. 21–34. Also, as John Caughie writes: 'Criticism tended to be neither very committed nor particularly rigorous. Within that context, in the 1960s, *Movie*'s attention to "style", to the way the film was constructed, to the movement of the mise-en-scène, its focus on "how" a film should be made, rather than "why" constituted and produced a radical shift in British film criticism' (John Caughie, ed., *Theories of Authorship* London and New York, Routledge, 1981, p. 49).
35 Charles Barr, 'Introduction: Amnesia and Schizophrenia', in Charles Barr, ed., *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema*, London, BFI Publishing, 1986, pp. 1–30, p. 3.
36 Andrew Tudor, *Theories of Film*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1974, p. 123.
37 In fact, as Barr is led to conclude, it was the tradition of British film criticism that became more celebrated than the British cinema itself, creating the ironic situation where the international prestige of the former was sufficiently raised to lower the international prestige of the latter (Barr, 'Introduction: Amnesia and Schizophrenia', pp. 3–7).
38 V.F. Perkins, 'The British Cinema', *Movie*, No. 1 (June 1962), pp. 2–7, p. 2.
39 *Ibid.*, pp. 2–4.
40 Derek Hill discusses exactly this problem. As he writes, quoting John Osborne: 'The success of low budget films in France seems to have made little impression on distributors in this country. "I shouldn't think they've [production companies] even heard of the new wave," said Osborne gloomily. "It's easier far easier to find £500,000 for a film than £50,000, simply because half a million buys all the things the distributors consider a good investment, starting with top stars"' (Derek Hill, 'A Writer's Wave', *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Spring 1960), pp. 56–60, p. 58.
41 Perkins, 'The British Cinema', p. 2.
42 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
43 '*Movie* Differences: A Discussion', pp. 30–31.
44 John Gibbs, *It was Never All in the Script: Mise-en-Scène and the Interpretation of Visual Style in British Film Journals, 1946–1978* (University of Reading, 1999, PhD Thesis), p. 135. The example of 'point-making' that Perkins uses in 'The British Cinema' is what he calls 'the first' love scene' in John Schlesinger's *A Kind of Loving* (1962). This is something I will examine in much more detail in my chapter on this film.
45 Perkins does offer *some* hope for the future of the British film. Karel Reisz's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* is seen as being 'preferable to the other new movies partly because its director does not attempt to palm himself off as one of the lads, and partly because he is less addicted than his colleagues to attempts at extraneous "style". Also he [Reisz] knows a little about how to use actors.' However, this faint praise is immediately followed by a damning examination of the film's fairground sequence and the conclusion that 'Reisz failed the test miserably'.

Two other names are put forward as representing the 'hope' for a brighter future for the industry, Joseph Losey and Seth Holt. By this time Losey had made three films – *Time Without Pity* (1956), *Blind Date* (1959) and *The Criminal* (1960) – but as Perkins ruefully notes: 'Losey is an American. He has, at least temporarily, left Britain. How much indigenous talent have we which could legitimately inspire hope?' Perkins answers this question by citing Seth Holt's *Taste of Fear*, made in 1961. Though Perkins is ready to admit that this film was not very good he is happy to predict that it might represent the future of British cinema. As he writes: 'To put it simply *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* is a good film, and we can't imagine, on its evidence, that Karel Reisz will make a much better one. *Taste of Fear* is rather a bad film, and we can imagine Seth Holt making a masterpiece' (Perkins, 'The British Cinema', pp. 6–7).

46 Barr, 'Introduction: Amnesia and Schizophrenia', p. 4.
47 V.F. Perkins, *Film as Film*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972, p. 62.
48 Cavell, 'The Thought of Movies', pp. 10–11.
49 Perkins, *Film as Film*, p. 59.
50 Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism*, p. 54.
51 *Ibid.*, p. 57.
52 *Ibid.*, p. 64.
53 Andrew Higson, 'Space, Place, Spectacle', p. 134.
54 Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism*, pp. 127–132.
55 Higson, 'Space, Place, Spectacle', p. 136.
56 Thomas Elsaesser, 'Between Style and Ideology', *Monogram*, No. 3, 1972, pp. 2–10, p. 7.
57 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
58 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
59 *Ibid.*, p. 5. For a further example of how this historical legacy has survived we might also consider what Geoff Brown has to say when he admits that 'for some the suspicion was growing that in abandoning the drawing-room for the kitchen sink British cinema had substituted one easy formula for another'. As Brown continues: 'Think British realism, and you think inevitably of kitchen sinks, factory chimneys, cobblestones, railway arches, bleak stretches of moor or beach, graffiti-lined council estates, people and landscapes placed in spare and striking juxtaposition. You also tend to think black-and-white: the perfect colour scheme for grey skies, smokestacks and poetic melancholy' (Geoff Brown, 'Paradise Found and Lost: The Course of British Realism', in Robert Murphy, ed., *The British Cinema Book*, London, BFI, 1997, pp. 187–197, pp. 188–189.
60 Perkins, *Film as Film*, pp. 58–62.
61 *Ibid.*, p. 78.
62 *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Spring 1961), p. 100.
63 Ian Cameron, 'Attack', *Film*, No. 25 (September–October 1960), pp. 12–14, p. 13.
64 Elsaesser, 'Between Style and Ideology', p. 4.
65 Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'Movie and Myth', *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Spring 1963), pp. 60–64, p. 64.
66 Penelope Houston, '*Room at the Top*', *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Spring 1959), pp. 56–59, pp. 58–59.
67 David Robinson, '*Look Back in Anger*', *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 28, Nos 3 and 4 (Summer/Autumn 1959), pp. 122–125, p. 124.

68 Penelope Houston, 'Into the Sixties', *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Winter 1959/60), pp. 4–7.
69 Peter John Dyer, '*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*', *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Winter 1960/61), p. 33.
70 Eric Rhode, '*A Kind of Loving*', *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Summer 1962), pp. 143–144, p. 144.
71 'The Front Page', *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Spring 1962), p. 5.
72 'The Front Page', p. 5.
73 '*Nowhere to Go*', *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Winter 1958/59), p. 38.
74 'The Front Page', p. 55.
75 *Ibid.*
76 Perkins, 'The British Cinema', p. 7. Pam Cook reaches a similar conclusion in her discussion of the British critical climate of the period in question. *The Cinema Book*, p. 271.
77 Perkins, *Film as Film*, pp. 190–191.
78 *Ibid.* Though Perkins is writing some ten years from his 1962 article, the relevance of these later quotes can be found in the fact that there has been no real attempt on his behalf to modify his views on the British New Wave. Therefore, the time that has elapsed should have very little bearing on the use of these quotations.
79 Perkins, *Film as Film*, p. 191.
80 Tudor, *Theories of Film*, p. 34.
81 Wood, *Personal Views*, p. 78.
82 *Ibid.*, p. 79.
83 *Ibid.*, p. 79.
84 *Ibid.*, pp. 80–81.
85 *Ibid.*, p. 81.
86 Perkins, 'The British Cinema', p. 5.
87 Raymond Durgnat, *A Mirror for England: British Movies from Austerity to Affluence*, London, Faber and Faber, 1970, pp. 3–4.

2 From microscope to telescope: the films of Tony Richardson

I think it is no help at all for a film director to have had previous experience in the theatre – rather the opposite. Very few people have made the change successfully. The theatre is a literary tradition, and I have always had to fight to overcome a literary approach to film-making because of my work in it. The two roles are entirely different. In the theatre the director is in a solely interpretative position – interpreting what the playwright has written. However brilliantly he may do this, he creates nothing himself. In the cinema the director is the creative artist – ultimately responsible for what goes on the screen. A script which is of little worth in itself can be created into a great film by the director. There is no doubt, as far as I am concerned, that the cinema is the more satisfying medium. Making a film is, for the director, an entirely original act, from the moment of kicking a subject around, through the processes of shooting, editing, sound mixing – to the final master print. (Tony Richardson)[1]

The trouble was that what was 'unique' tended so quickly to turn into what was 'representative' – so that instead of reacting to what was extraordinary about the characters in the films, one found oneself anticipating what it was they had in common with those other films. (Alexander Walker)[2]

Sir – The praise that has been bestowed on such films as *Saturday Night*, *A Taste of Honey*, *A Kind of Loving*, shows how poor British films are. Like all serious films, these three are deficient in the only qualities that elevate films into the realm of art – imagination and depth. (George Camden)[3]

Critical position

Nowadays, for Peter Hutchings, writing on British cinema tends to lack what he calls 'evaluative judgements'. Films no longer tend to be viewed as good or bad but are often only seen as interesting. Potentially, this lack can be explained by a greater awareness of the contingency of value judgements and their relationship with broader ideological questions. At the same time, however, this is as much an issue of critical positions. As Hutchings continues, evaluative judgements do have the potential to undermine approaches concerned with establishing what a film's significance might be. Yet, this is useful because 'the undermining of interpretative authority opens up the interpretation itself to critical scrutiny.'[4]