BRITISH FILM MAKERS

Karel Reisz

Colin Gardner

Karel Reisz

BRITISH FILM MAKERS

MANCHESTER 1824
Manchester University Press

already published

Anthony Asquith TOM RYALL

Roy Ward Baker GEOFF MAYER

Sydney Box ANDREW SPICER

Jack Clayton NEIL SINYARD

Lance Comfort BRIAN MCFARLANE

Terence Davies WENDY EVERETT

Terence Fisher PETER HUTCHINGS

Launder and Gilliat BRUCE BABINGTON

Derek Jarman ROWLAND WYMER

Joseph Losey COLIN GARDNER

Carol Reed PETER WILLIAM EVANS

Michael Reeves BENJAMIN HALLIGAN

J. Lee Thompson STEVE CHIBNALL

BRITISH FILM MAKERS

Karel Reisz

Colin Gardner

Manchester University Press
MANCHESTER

Published by Manchester University Press

Altrincham Street, Manchester M1 7JA, UK

www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data applied for

ISBN 0 7190 7548 3 hardback
EAN 978 0 7190 7548 3

First published 2006

15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Typeset in Scala with Meta display
by Koinonia, Manchester

Contents

List of plates

Every attempt has been made to obtain permission to reproduce the figures illustrated in this book. If any proper acknowledgement has not been made, copyright holders are invited to inform the publishers.

Series editors' foreword

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

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

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

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

Acknowledgements

For someone who usually finds the writing process to be excruciatingly painful, this book turned out to be (relatively speaking) a pleasure to write. Now, either I have finally mastered the art of critical self-expression (highly unlikely) or I was surrounded by a wealth of research and editorial talent that at least minimized the book's shortcomings and allowed me to take full responsibility for my own creative urges (a much more likely scenario). First of all I would like to thank my editor at Manchester University Press, Matthew Frost, who was such an enormous support on my previous book on Joseph Losey and gave the green light for this project. Series editors Brian McFarlane and Neil Sinyard read the proposal in its earliest stages and provided invaluable input on chapter organization and the overall balance of the book, while Brian was also very generous in sharing his insights on Reisz's early film criticism in *Sequence* magazine. Georg Gaston's 1980 book on Reisz proved to be extremely useful, not only because of the author's rigorous close readings of the films themselves but also because until now it has been the only book-length study of the director (up to and including *Dog Soldiers*), thus helping to give my own work some overall historical shape and perspective.

I also owe a great deal of gratitude to Sarah Athanas, my fabulous research assistant at the University of California, Santa Barbara and a talented film-maker in her own right, who diligently fed me with a steady supply of primary and secondary sources over a period of eighteen months, and to my esteemed colleague Helen Taschian, who generously read each of the early drafts of the book and provided important insights into readability and narrative continuity. Her constant e-mails urging me to send her the next chapter also inspired me to stay on schedule for fear of incurring her considerable wrath (just kidding!).

My research made extensive use of several libraries and archives and I would like to acknowledge the extremely helpful librarians and staff at the following institutions: Ann Stephenson in the Stills, Posters and Designs department at the British Film Institute; BFI's Research Viewing Service and Stills Archive; the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Film and Television Archive; the UCLA University Research and Arts Libraries;

the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; the Davidson and Arts Libraries at the University of California, Santa Barbara; the Main Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and Claire at 'Eddie Brandt's Saturday Matinee' in North Hollywood where most of the book's film stills were acquired. These stills are reproduced by kind permission of the British Film Institute; Graphic Films Ltd. (London); MGM/Sony; Turner Entertainment Co.; Warner Bros. Entertainment Company; StudioCanal (Paris); Universal Studios and Paramount Pictures. Every attempt has been made to contact the copyright holders. In the event of any misattribution please contact the publishers.

The writing of the manuscript was significantly aided and abetted by a sabbatical leave from the University of California, Santa Barbara, which accounted for two thirds of the final project. Many thanks to Kip Fulbeck, Art Department Chair, and David Marshall, Dean of the Humanities, for approving the leave of absence. I would also like to acknowledge the professional and moral support of my usual gang of academic and artistic cohorts: Peter Bloom, Trudy Bolter, Jane Callister, Alain Cohen, Dick Hebdige, Steve Mamber, Lary May, Warren Neidich, Tony Shaw, Janet Walker, Samuel Weber and John Welchman. Finally, love and appreciation to my wife, Louise, and my Golden Retriever, Nicky, whose endless cookie mooching and burp-filled interruptions were an endearing annoyance throughout.

Introduction: Karel Reisz, 'The last great man in England'

1

> The way my films all work ... they try first of all to document and make real the spiritual and emotional life of a central character. That's not to say that the central character isn't subjected to some criticism; he's not idealized. It's in the clash between the character's inner desires and what the society demands of him – in that clash is the content of my films ... I have very definite political views, but in that way the films don't raise the political questions – they provide, if you like, certain emotional information from which political discussion can usefully start. (Karel Reisz)[1]

Mid-way through Karel Reisz's international hit, *Morgan: A Suitable Case for Treatment* (1966), fervent Trotskyite and erstwhile painter Morgan Delt (David Warner) and his equally ardent Stalinist mother (Irene Handl) visit Karl Marx's grave in Highgate Ceremony to mark the occasion of the great Communist philosopher's birthday. As Morgan reverentially places his bunch of flowers beneath Marx's stony countenance, his sentimental Cockney mother recalls her late husband and the good old days of the revolutionary Old Left. 'Your dad used to love comin' 'ere', she recalls. 'You know, 'e wanted to shoot the royal family, abolish marriage, and put everybody who'd been to public school in a chain gang?' She leans back, sighs wistfully, and adds the kicker: 'Yes, he was an idealist your dad was'. Then, as a solo trumpet plaintively picks out the refrain of 'The Red Flag', she asks Morgan to read the inscription on the grave, Marx's famous dictum: 'Philosophers have tried to understand the world. Our problem, however, is to change it'. As Morgan reads, mother and son, Stalinist and Trotskyite, find a common bond in the call to praxis, their emotional truce transcending their generational and sectarian divide. However, as Morgan makes eye contact with Marx's bust, he undergoes an extremely strange metamorphosis. Almost imperceptibly, Morgan's look of profound respect transforms into a simian smirk. Suddenly, he emits a basso grunt, like a highly agitated gorilla. Then, horror of horrors, he starts pounding his chest, provoking

the reified Marx like a jungle rival jealously protecting his territory. Not surprisingly, Mrs Delt is horrified by this atavistic spectacle: 'Morgan! That's disrespectful!' Then, in a massive understatement of the obvious, she adds: 'You 'ave grown into a peculiar sort of a feller, Morgan'.

Very peculiar, for Morgan, it turns out, is certifiably insane, 'a suitable case for treatment' indeed. Significantly, the cemetery scene ends on a slapstick *and* allegorical note as Morgan offers to give his footsore mother a piggyback ride home. As they weave their merry way through the gravestones to his mum's delighted squeals, Morgan triumphantly shouts, 'Up the Revolution!' as Marx stares expressionless from his pedestal, eschewing editorial comment. However, although the Father of Communism remains significantly mute, Reisz makes it clear that Morgan's cry is nothing but windy rhetoric, for the young man is obviously as much in need of a psychological revolution as a political one (it's easy to recall John Lennon's telling line from The Beatles' *Revolution* (1968) – 'You tell me it's the institution! Well, you know, you better free your mind instead'). Moreover, we can also read the scene symbolically, as a still-born New Left (Morgan) carries the crippling Golem of the Old Left on its shoulders, creating a dialectical impasse that can only be resolved internally, through withdrawal into the schizophrenic line of flight that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call 'becoming-animal'.

During a 1966 interview with *Morgan*'s screenwriter, the playwright David Mercer, an anonymous London *Times* correspondent summarized the film's position succinctly:

> To Mercer, Morgan is the defeated revolutionary – a Marxist turned inside out. Incapable of further allegiance to the belief in revolutionary social change, and haunted by the tragic deterioration of revolutionary ideals in countries where revolutions have taken place, he asserts an 'internal revolution.' The debris of political faith gives rise to a new, subjective mythology – a world where the innocence of animals is a counterpoint to the corruption of men, where the gorilla, which rarely uses its great strength in aggression, becomes a tragic-comic image of Morgan's alter-ego.[2]

Although based on an earlier 1962 teleplay, Mercer's shooting script was heavily influenced by the existential psychoanalysis of radical psychiatrist R. D. Laing, particularly the idea that schizophrenia may be a function of the breakdown of personal relationships in families. This is compounded in Morgan's case because his parents also represent the idealism but subsequent corruption of the Old Left – his mother stubbornly refuses to de-Stalinize – which has consequently destroyed his faith in the political efficacy of the counter-culture (a theme to which Reisz will return twelve years later in *Dog Soldiers* (1978), a searing

examination of the inner self turned psychotic in the wake of Nixon, the drug wars and Vietnam).

Reisz claimed at the time that *Morgan* was an attempt to heal the rift between the generations. Although the Morgan character isn't Reisz's direct mouthpiece any more than, say, Isadora Duncan or Patsy Cline represent his aesthetic and subjective position in subsequent films, he did see in the character 'a divine spark which provoked the question of who is mad and who is sane, analogous to the way our older generation treats today's hippies as freaks, as "cases." The film seemed to me a way to bridge the generations'.[3] However, one could also argue that the then-unknown David Warner's quirky innocence in contrast to Irene Handl's much beloved filmic persona actually served to exacerbate the film's political and generational differences which, as Philip French perceptively noted at the time, 'makes nonsense of the socio-political situation of which he [i.e. Morgan] is supposed to be the victim ... Somewhere between people in their sixties (Morgan's mother, the die-hard Stalinist) and those in their early twenties (Morgan himself) there is a missing generation. It is this generation that is behind the cameras'.[4]

This is an important observation because it underlines a common thread that runs through all of Reisz's films, namely his use of characters and contexts to represent ideological and subjective positions that are not necessarily his own. In this case Reisz himself is caught *between* generations (he was forty at the time of Morgan's release), too young to identify with (or make excuses for) the repressive pogroms of the Old Left, too old to belong to the burgeoning student movement of the 1960s. It is to Reisz's credit that he never tried to force an artificial synthesis from this antinomy, but rather sustained the mounting tensions between the Old and New Left, preferring to explore the generational and ideological impasse as itself a worthwhile subject of study. It also suggests that as a political refugee and Jewish émigré from Nazi persecution – the Czech-born Reisz spoke no English on his arrival in Britain at the age of twelve – the apprentice director clearly learned at first hand both the psychological and material ramifications of personal displacement. All of his major characters are in some ways expressions of this dislocation, whether as class antagonists against establishment norms (Arthur Seaton in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, the psychopath Danny in *Night Must Fall*, Morgan Delt in *Morgan*); artistic and idealistic free spirits (Isadora Duncan, Patsy Cline, Sarah Woodruff in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*); or Nietzschean existentialists (Axel Freed in *The Gambler*, Ray Hicks in *Dog Soldiers*) exercising their will-to-power in the face of unpredictable fates. As the playwright John Guare perceptively noted following Reisz's death in 2002, 'I always think his

view of things was essentially about freedom: the Albert Finney character at the end of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, or the gambler being paralysed by his obsession. How do you find your freedom in the middle of paralysis? The day Karel's life changed, from one universe to the other, when he was 12 years old, was all about that: how do you survive when all the rules change suddenly?'[5]

Reisz expresses this alienation through a deliberate split between the understated social realism of his *mise-en-scène* and the performative expressionism of his actors. Unlike another émigré director, Joseph Losey, who resorted to an overwrought baroque stylization to draw attention to the very fabric of the cinematic device as a form of individual and historical self-justification, Reisz is visually self-abnegating to the point of seeming invisibility. Indeed, one of the main critical complaints against Reisz's oeuvre (and the resultant anathema of auteur critics such as Andrew Sarris, who accused the director of 'an ingrained reluctance to pursue passion to its lyrical extensions in time and space'[6]) is that it lacks a distinctive authorial visual signature. 'A good case can be made for Lindsay Anderson as a bilious but authentic "auteur"', notes Peter Wollen, 'but nobody has made a serious claim for the auteurist credentials of Reisz, Richardson, Schlesinger, and others'.[7] Wollen's point is well taken, but a more generous view is that Reisz creates a neutral but carefully detailed and concrete *mise-en-scène*, all the better to root his films in a specific cultural milieu and class context that both defines *and* alienates his protagonists, giving them both their identity and a reason to rebel. In one of the most incisive reviews of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, for example, Alan Lovell observed in the *New Left Review* that,

> Karel Reisz gets his main effect from the style he uses. It's almost an anti-style. The camera does only enough work to tell the story as simply and directly as possible. Because of this the audience is encouraged to make judgements for itself. Just how important this is has gone unnoticed. Very few contemporary films, whatever their quality, leave their audience alone. Nearly every director, either serious or hack, tries to bludgeon his audience by his technical skill or his dramatic talents. Because of their uncertainty about their relationship with the audience, directors seem constantly to be saying 'Look I'm here and I'm good.' Very few film makers have enough confidence in the audience just to assume their co-operation. Karel Reisz does this.[8]

On one level then, Reisz can be defined as cinema's Emile Zola, a cultural determinist whose characters are inescapably (and thus passively) defined by their background. This 'trap' is all the more profound because the films' milieux are transparently 'real' and stylisti-

cally 'neutral' to the point of seeming inevitability. Against this backdrop Reisz also creates a more active, performative space defined by his characters/actors, who struggle to escape the confines and limitations of their milieu through various acts of hedonistic self-assertion (or, some might argue, self-indulgence) or outright rebellion. This is the subjective register of Reisz's cinema, where the audience identifies with the character's point of view and shares vicariously in his or her struggle.

However, Reisz adds a third layer – expressed largely through editing, sound and temporal ellipse – which allows him objectively to critique his characters, to open up an ambivalent critical and hybrid 'third' space that leaves the spectator scrambling to discern a concrete identity and psychological closure. It is at this more formal level that we discover the deeper meaning in Reisz's art. Far from engaging in a rebellious agency, Reisz's characters are themselves vicariously harnessed to a series of cultural constructions, so that their apparent will-to-identity is already interpellated (in Louis Althusser's sense) by larger social forces.[9] Thus Arthur Seaton has no real *creative* agency in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, but instead channels his desire through already constructed formulas – heavy drinking, womanizing, armchair Marxism, infantile pranks – that make him ripe for his eventual assimilation into a soulless suburban marriage and the responsibilities of fatherhood. Similarly, Morgan, Isadora and Sarah Woodruff are slaves to their own clichéd fantasies, their dreams of life and love lived through a romanticized imaginary of life-as-art, which turns out to be the benign flipside of its more dangerous corollary: madness and death. Axel Freed and Ray Hicks's existentialism – their touching faith in the luck of the dice throw or their Zen-like affirmation of fate – is equally myopic insofar as they are naively unaware of the darker social forces, in this case a corrupt, unforgiving underworld economy of drugs and gambling, that have come to permeate western society as a whole, including the very counter-culture that was spawned to combat it. While country singer Patsy Cline is perhaps Reisz's most driven, life-affirming artistic force, not only is her career cut tragically short by the 1963 air crash that claimed her life, but her husband, Charlie Dick (Ed Harris), is yet another of Reisz's empty ciphers, living vicariously through the deeds of another. The result is a cinema of alienation that forces the viewer both to think *and* feel the psychological damage of an era that began with hopes of revolutionary social change and ends with the savage backlash of Reagan, Thatcherism and a new conformity fuelled by a combination of cynicism, pragmatism and indifference (the subject of Reisz's final feature, *Everybody Wins*). In this context, Reisz's return to the work of Samuel Beckett at the end of the millennium is both appropriate and telling, a sign that,

stylistically at least, the theatre of the absurd is perhaps *the* last viable form of social realism.

In a pair of interviews during the 1970s, Reisz himself acknowledged this clear line of continuity in his work – he always thought of himself as a cinematic auteur – but stressed that it was a continuity of neither British nor Czech sensibilities: 'It's easier for me to say that because I'm not British anyway, and it was largely accident that I ended up in Britain and therefore began making British films. But essentially I always make the same film, wherever and however I'm working. All my films – *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, *Night Must Fall*, *Morgan*, *Isadora* – are about a central character who is in some way on the edge of sanity, seen partly from his or her own point of view, partly, none too sympathetically, from the outside. It's obsessive, so that it turns out that way even when, as in *Night Must Fall*, the subject was not initially my own choice'.[10] Then, as a necessary corollary, he also admitted: 'I don't think there is much of my Czech sensibility in my films ... I do feel myself to be an outsider in both these countries. So I suppose there is a kind of cool touch to the movies – a kind of outsider's view. It's also something perhaps which has made me identify with outsiders – with people who are outside society. All my films have been portraits of people who are in one way or another not acceptable to society, either as heroes or villains or whatever. But I've never made films about spokesmen or typical people. It's always been edgy people who've been ill at ease with their world'.[11]

Like many exiles and outsiders, Reisz was able to balance an emotional investment in his adoptive country with the ability to remain critically distanced enough to recognize and then de-familiarize the cultural tropes that make it tick. It's hardly surprising then that, speaking specifically of Morgan's political insecurities, Reisz admitted that 'The character seemed very relevant to me, since I had had a left-wing youth myself in Czechoslovakia, an allegiance swiftly broken by the Soviet-inspired purges there in 1947–50. Morgan's type has a nursery full of idealistic and ideological toys: it could have been crucifixes, it just happened to be Lenin and Trotsky. In adult life he finds them totally useless. It seems to be extremely germane to the way young people are now'.[12] Because ideology is manifested through representations, and because representations are reproduced through processes of production and circulation, a de-familiarization of these mechanisms through self-reflexive aesthetics helps to disclose the constructed nature of ideology itself. Thus, according to Althusser, 'What art makes us see, and therefore gives to us in the form of "*seeing*," "*perceiving*" and "feeling" (which is not the form of *knowing*), is the ideology from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it *alludes*'.[13]

Because they are concerned with baring representations as ideological devices, one could argue that all of Reisz's films are Althusserian by their very nature.

Although Reisz's directorial career spanned forty-five years, he produced a mere nine features, two filmed television plays and two groundbreaking documentaries. 'There's no real reason for it', Reisz admitted to Brian McFarlane in a 1992 interview. 'I'm lazy. I don't find the process very enjoyable. I think it is very hard to make a film. And I have sometimes had to abandon projects because I felt I couldn't cast them. My films tend to be portrait films that revolve around a central character. There is a sense of tension and ambiguity between the *persona* of the specific actor cast in the central role and the part he plays. This is often the subject of my films. So when I haven't been able to cast a central role ideally, I've sometimes abandoned the project'.[14] Despite his relatively meagre output it would still be fair to place Reisz among the seminal figures in postwar British cinema, both as a film-maker and, as we shall examine in the next chapter, as a film writer (his early 1950s theory and criticism was at least on a par with, if less polemical than, the work of his fellow auteur theorists, Gavin Lambert and Lindsay Anderson).

Along with Anderson, Tony Richardson, Robert Vas and Lorenza Mazzetti, Reisz was a founding member of the independent Free Cinema 'movement' which attacked the prevailing parochial values of post-war British cinema (specifically Ealing comedies and Gainsborough costume dramas) with a vigorous commitment to everyday working-class subject matter and a uniquely personal film style. Deeply indebted to the poetic realism of Humphrey Jennings and the urban immediacy of Italian neo-realism (as opposed to the sociological, 1930s documentary tradition of John Grierson), Reisz's Free Cinema films, *Momma Don't Allow* (1956, co-directed with Tony Richardson) and *We Are the Lambeth Boys* (1959) laid the basis for a unique hybrid form of 'poetic social realism', a director-driven documentary-like style that culminated in the international success of Reisz's first fiction feature, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960) starring Albert Finney. *Momma Don't Allow* (the title was derived from the lyrics of a popular skiffl e song of the period) was an attempt to rehabilitate youth culture in the wake of the negatively framed Teddy-boy phenomenon through a sympathetic look at the Wood Green Jazz Club (actually a hired room in a North London pub featuring the music of the Chris Barber Jazz Band) and its predominantly teenage patrons. As Reisz's programme note pointed out, 'We felt free not to disapprove of Teddy-boys, not to patronise shop girls, not to make sensational or hysterical a subject which is neither (but is almost always shown so)'.

We Are the Lambeth Boys is a revealing look at the Alford House Youth Club in South London's predominantly working-class area of Kennington. The film features teenagers 'puttin' on the agony, puttin' on the style' in their Saturday night dances, discussing pressing issues of the day such as the death penalty (no need to worry there – almost all the lads are 'hang 'em and flog 'em Tories'), while struggling to face (or avoid) a future of mind-numbing routine in monotonous jobs. At this time (1958–59), Reisz was also involved with the burgeoning New Left and its journal, *Universities and Left Review*, which subsequently merged with the *New Reasoner* to form the *New Left Review* and was initially edited by the Jamaican-born Stuart Hall, soon to be a key voice in the nascent field of cultural studies and postcolonial theory. This led in turn to Reisz becoming active in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Along with Lindsay Anderson, Christopher Brunel, Charles Cooper, Allan Forbes and others, Reisz was one of the so-called 'production assistants' (read: cameramen/film-makers) on *March to Aldermaston* (1959), the documentary record of the 1958 CND Peace March to the now-infamous nuclear facility west of London.

Despite earning a well-deserved reputation in the field of documentary, the Free Cinema group had intended to make dramatic fiction films from the start, not documentaries. As Lindsay Anderson later recalled,

> In fact I would say our interest in films was always very much more to do with the fictional and dramatic approach ... But we weren't able to make them because at the time when we started making films it was impossible for new directors to work in British cinema, which was profoundly conservative. So in our small ways we started making films which were documentaries, which are always easier to make. I think the characteristics of the kind of films we tried to make were that they were much less theoretically political; they were much more concerned with human beings as individuals and as characters, and perhaps more concerned to be what I would call poetic than to be instruments of propaganda.[15]

Certainly Reisz's first two features followed this dictum to the letter and, along with Tony Richardson's *Tom Jones* (1963), proved to be career-making vehicles for the young Albert Finney. Adapted by Alan Sillitoe from his eponymous novel, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* is the quintessential 'kitchen sink' drama. It features the boozy, womanizing factory worker Arthur Seaton (Finney) as a rebel without a cause living the high life in industrial Nottingham while trying to stave off the entrapments of adult responsibility. His married mistress (Rachel Roberts) is pregnant with his child, while his upwardly mobile girlfriend, Doreen (Shirley Anne Field) promises a dismal future of semi-detached suburban life with deadly mortgage payments and yet more babies.

Despite run-ins with local censors (the film was actually banned by the Warwickshire County Council), *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* was a critical and box-office success and the film's returns helped to finance Lindsay Anderson's own feature debut, *This Sporting Life* (1963), which Reisz produced.

The latter's second feature with Finney was supposed to be a film about the nineteenth-century Australian bandit, Ned Kelly (eventually realized by Richardson, with the Rolling Stones' Mick Jagger in the title role), but when location shooting proved to be prohibitively expensive, the pair quickly accepted an offer from MGM to remake the 1937 thriller, *Night Must Fall*. Adapted from Emlyn Williams's successful London stage play, Finney stars in the original Robert Montgomery role as the psychopathic Danny, a charming bus boy who has already committed one murder (he keeps the decapitated woman's head in a hatbox as a portable trophy) and proceeds to insinuate himself into a country house and 'seduce' the inhabitants. Reisz attempted to expand the 'penny dreadful' psychoanalysis and *grand guignol* dramatics of the original by rooting Danny's psychosis in concrete social conditions, but as Finney noted at the time, 'We meant to stick to sociology, but that damn head in the hatbox proved too powerful'.[16]

Reisz's response to the disappointing critical and box-office reception of *Night Must Fall* was a complete change of pace, for with its free-wheeling slapstick style, fast motion sequences and swinging London milieu, *Morgan* was more akin to Mack Sennett's Keystone Kops or Richard Lester's Beatles films than the gritty urban realism of Free Cinema and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. As we have seen, David Warner plays Morgan Delt, a mentally deranged, alienated communist with a passion for gorillas who struggles to de-Stalinize his working-class mother. Morgan also fights the class war on a second front as he attempts to win back his aimless upper middle-class ex-wife, Leonie (Vanessa Redgrave) from the pretentious bourgeois clutches of her art dealer fiancé, Charles Napier (Robert Stephens). To add insult to injury, Napier also happens to be Morgan's dealer. As Morgan's subversive actions border on the anarchic, culminating in the disruption of Leonie's wedding reception while wearing a gorilla suit, he finds it increasingly difficult to discern the difference between fantasy and reality. The film ends with Leonie pregnant with his child as she visits Morgan in a mental institution, his revolutionary spirit heavily medicated but ultimately undimmed.

Reisz's next project was *Isadora* (1968), a film biography of the revolutionary dancer and Modernist free spirit Isadora Duncan (Vanessa Redgrave in a *tour de force* performance). The film uses a fractured flash-

back structure to create a dialectic between Isadora's youthful commitment to free love and the liberating effects of beauty and art, and the self-deprecating, more embittered fatalism of the present-day (1927), as she dictates her memoirs while in pursuit of a handsome Bugatti driver who will ultimately lead to her death by accidental strangulation. Using the chaotic mosaic of Isadora's memories as their narrative guide, Reisz and his screenwriters, Melvyn Bragg and Clive Exton, create a subjective weave of Eros and Thanatos, idealism and cynicism, as they trace the dancer's career from American vaudeville to the avant- garde stage of revolutionary Russia, taking in a wide variety of lovers along the way. Although Reisz's original three-hour edit was cut by fifty minutes with the director's 'unwilling help', the film's video release features a restored director's cut of 153 minutes, allowing us to appreciate his original vision.

Following the enforced cutting of *Isadora* by Universal Pictures (it was released in truncated form in the United States as *The Loves of Isadora*), a disillusioned Reisz suffered through two abortive projects – adaptations of John Le Carré's *The Naïve and Sentimental Lover* and André Malraux's *Man's Fate* – before directing Chekhov's one-act play, *On the High Road* (1973), for BBC television. It would be six years after the release of *Isadora* before Reisz successfully teamed with screenwriter James Toback to produce his next feature, *The Gambler* (1974), a flawed but incisive portrait of an obsessive gambler. James Caan's Axel Freed teaches English in a New York City College by day, lecturing on Dostoyevsky and Nietzschean will-to-power as a theoretical justification of his own gambling addiction. By night he is in debt to the mob to the tune of $44,000. Freed borrows from his mother to pay the debt, but immediately flies to Las Vegas with his girlfriend (Lauren Hutton) in an attempt to double his money. Driven by a mixture of *amor fati* and sheer ego, Axel wins big at the craps tables but at the same time loses an equal amount betting on college and NBA basketball games. Pressured by the mob, Axel recruits one of his students, a basketball star, to shave points while playing against the college's cross-town rivals in order to square his debt. Fuelled by a mixture of self-hatred and high adrenalin, Axel then risks his own life by stage-managing a fight with a Harlem pimp and a prostitute, which culminates in his face being slashed with a knife. As he examines the brutal wound, a faint smile crosses his face: he has beaten the odds yet again. Freeze-frame.

Although the film was a commercial failure, Reisz's incisive direction on *The Gambler* sufficiently impressed United Artists to entrust him with the film version of Robert Stone's National Book Award-winning novel, *Dog Soldiers* (released in the United States as *Who'll*

Stop the Rain, 1978), a dark meditation on the decline and corruption of the drug-based counter-culture in the wake of the Vietnam War. The director was immediately attracted to Stone's novel because, as he put it, 'it's a damn good *story*. It changes in unexpected ways and takes you into worlds you didn't know existed – what we used to call a rattling good yarn. Some of my best experiences in the movie theatre as a viewer have been with "The American Storytelling Cinema" – genre films like *They Live by Night*, *Force of Evil*, *Act of Violence*, *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, and a lot of the [John] Ford films. They are defined by narrative confidence, which is a very American – and not European – tradition. My other films are single-character studies, so I was very tempted to have a go at one of these'.[17] One might expect the result to be Reisz's most traditionally American film – a case of plot driving character, rather than the reverse – but *Dog Soldiers* turns out to be a deconstruction of the action-hero genre, where traditional values of personal justice and strict loyalty are destroyed by a corrupt new world fuelled by a drug economy ruthlessly hostile to spiritual ideas. Nick Nolte's hippy Zen warrior is ultimately overmatched by the perverse currents of the Nixon era (the film is uncannily prescient of the corruption of Reagan and Iran-Contra), leaving the moral playing field open to Michael Moriarty's more passive pragmatism.

Reisz's 1981 film of John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, a self-reflexive novel about a doomed nineteenth-century love affair, is a model of creative adaptation. In true Brechtian fashion, Fowles's existential book comments on itself as it unfolds, culminating in three different endings designed to satisfy the demands of three different genre expectations. Reisz and his scriptwriter, Nobel Prize Winner Harold Pinter, overcame the cinematic limitations of this uniquely literary device by telling the story in a parallel double register, cross-cutting the melodramatic Victorian love story between the scarlet woman, Sarah Woodruff (Meryl Streep), and bourgeois archaeologist, Charles Smithson (Jeremy Irons), with modern-day actors – and adulterous lovers – Anna and Mike (also Streep and Irons) who are playing the period roles for a new movie. The modern love story thus plays out in counterpoint with the 'filmic' fiction, so that life comes to imitate art, and vice versa, albeit with radically opposed results. In their own different ways, both sets of characters become slaves to genre expectations, harnessing their individual will-to-power to a controlling fictional deceit (this *Madame Bovary*-like trope is a common theme in Reisz, as we have seen), fuelled by an almost gothic romanticism.

The director's second foray into filmed biography, *Sweet Dreams* (1985), features another artistic free spirit – ill-fates country singer Patsy

Cline (Jessica Lange) – only in this case the film is structured chronologically as a series of counterpoints between the singer and her ne'er-do-well second husband, Charlie Dick (Ed Harris). Comparisons to Michael Apted's *Coal Miner's Daughter* (1980), the filmed life of Loretta Lynn and her relationship with an equally unfaithful husband, are perhaps inevitable, but in the latter film Tommy Lee Jones's Doolittle is an active force in promoting his wife's career. Charlie in contrast lacks agency, living vicariously (and not a little jealously) through Patsy's short-lived success. The resultant fissure between compelling art and creative vacuum is never resolved, leaving Charlie at the film's end mourning Patsy's tragic death without any clear idea of what his own future holds.

Reisz's final feature, *Everybody Wins* (1990), was adapted by Arthur Miller from his own play, *Some Kind of Love Story*, his first screenplay since 1962's *The Misfits*. Nick Nolte is Tom O'Toole, a Connecticut private eye hired by the beautiful and charming Angela Crispini (Debra Winger), who claims to have crucial information that could free a man unjustly convicted of murder. Not only do the authorities have the wrong man, but the case also hints at corruption and cover-up at the highest levels of state government. Unfortunately for Tom, as he falls under Angela's seductive spell he gradually discovers that she has a personality problem – three of them in fact, each seemingly unknown to the others. As Tom delves deeper into the corrupt underbelly of the community – the main suspect is an ex-drug runner biker turned religious fanatic; the DA turns out to be Angela's ex-; even the presiding judge has designs on her – the logic of the case explodes into a series of Machiavellian alignments in which ultimately 'everybody wins' except the truth and Tom, who is left shaking his head at the corrupt absurdity of it all.

For the want of interesting and commercially viable film projects, the 1990s saw Reisz return to the theatre (he had previously directed James Woods, JoBeth Williams and Sam Waterston in John Guare's *Gardenia* in 1982 at the Manhattan Theater Club in New York), where he directed an award-winning production of Terence Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea* (1993), several plays by Pinter (*Moonlight*, 1995, *A Kind of Alaska*, 1998, *Ashes to Ashes*, 1998–89, *Landscape*, 2001), as well as Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days* (1996) with Rosaleen Linehan at the Lincoln Center's Beckett Festival. This extremely fruitful stage period culminated in a filmed adaptation of Beckett's *Act Without Words I* (2000) for Channel 4's 'Beckett on Film' series. Starring Sean Foley as an unnamed everyman stuck without water in a studio-bound desert, the 1956 drama takes the form of a balletic mime as the character is 'locked' into the space by an invisible wall. Life-saving water and other useful props are tantalizingly dangled by wires from the rafters but just

far enough out of reach that Foley expends more energy trying to grab them than if he had passively accepted his fate. The play ends with no resolution other than an expression of humans' life-affirming spirit in the face of the overwhelming absurdity of existence, an apt metaphor perhaps for Reisz's oeuvre as a whole. Once affectionately described by director Stephen Frears as 'The last great man in England', Karel Reisz died in November 2002 at the age of seventy-six from a blood disorder following a six-month illness.

Notes

1 Karel Reisz, interviewed by Eva Orbanz, Helmut Wietz and Klaus Wildenhahn, in Eva Orbanz, *Journey to a Legend and Back: The British Realistic Film* (Berlin, Edition Volker Spiess, 1977), p. 58.
2 Anonymous, 'David Mercer on Why He Writes the Plays He Does', *The Times*, 27 July 1966, p. 6.
3 Karel Reisz, interviewed 11 December 1969, in Alexander Walker, *Hollywood, England: The British Film Industry in the Sixties* (London, Harrap, 1974 and 1986), p. 311.
4 Philip French, 'Alphaville of Admass', *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Summer 1966, p. 110.
5 John Guare, quoted in Andrew O'Hagan, ed., 'Karel Reisz Remembered', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 24, No. 24, 12 December 2002. Accessed 27 January 2005. www.lrb.co.uk/v24/n24/mult03_.html.
6 Andrew Sarris, 'Metaphor in Search of a Movie', *Village Voice*, 9–15 September 1981, p. 49.
7 Peter Wollen, 'The Last New Wave: Modernism in the British Films of the Thatcher Era', in Lester Friedman, ed., *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 37.
8 Alan Lovell, 'Film Chronicle', *New Left Review*, No. 7, January–February 1961, p. 52.
9 Interpellation for Althusser was a form of 'hailing'. Language positions the individual into a situation of passive response to the cry, 'Hey you!', so that our reply, 'Who me?', inevitably constructs us as an ideological subject into a pre-existing system of relations that we are powerless to control.
10 Karel Reisz, quoted in John Russell Taylor, 'Tomorrow the World: Some Reflections on the Un-Englishness of English Films', *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 43, No. 2, Spring 1974, p. 82.
11 Karel Reisz, quoted in Gordon Gow, 'Outsiders: Karel Reisz in an Interview with Gordon Gow', *Films and Filming*, Vol. 25, No. 4, January 1979, p. 13.
12 Reisz, quoted in Walker, *Hollywood, England*, p. 311.
13 Louis Althusser, 'A Letter on Art', *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London, New Left Books and New York, Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 222.
14 Karel Reisz, interviewed October 1992, in Brian McFarlane, *An Autobiography of British Cinema* (London, Methuen, 1997), p. 479.
15 Lindsay Anderson, interviewed by Eva Orbanz, Gisela Tuchtenhagen and Klaus Wildenhahn, in Orbanz, *Journey to a Legend and Back*, p. 41.
16 Albert Finney, interviewed 16 September 1971, in Walker, *Hollywood, England*, p. 148.
17 Karel Reisz, quoted in Leigh Charlton, 'Who'll Stop the Director', *Village Voice*, 23, 4 September 1978, p. 63.

Reisz the critic

2

> When one comes to consider films which attempt a more rigidly authentic approach to reality, it becomes obvious that here the director must be mainly in charge. The great films of the sound period – *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Le Jour Se Lève*, *Bicycle Thieves* – are all essentially 'directors' films. (Karel Reisz)[1]

> It's no exaggeration to say that the *Sequence* group changed the whole way of feeling and thinking about film in England – at any rate for a few inspiring years. (Tony Richardson)[2]

> Ideology is not acquired by thought, but by breathing the haunted air. (Lionel Trilling)[3]

Given his lifelong affinity for outsiders and exiles, it is clear that Reisz's personal background is crucial to any understanding of his cinema, not only because of his own exile from Nazism and subsequent displacement into a foreign culture, but also, like the directors of the French New Wave, because of his graduation into film-making from the academic world of film criticism, a realm largely alien to many of the veterans of the British film industry. It would thus behove us to examine facets of both Reisz's early life and career in more detail.

Karel was born on 21 July 1926 in the mill town of Ostrava in north-central Czechoslovakia, a few hours' walk from the southern Polish border. At the age of twelve he was sent to England as part of the Quakers' Kindertransport Programme (Children's Transport) because his father Josef, a Jewish lawyer, was fearful of the threatened Nazi invasion of the Sudetenland. Unbeknown to Reisz at that time, his escape was abetted by a young British stockbroker, Nicholas Winton (b. 1909), often referred to as the 'British Schindler', a man so modest that he kept his activities secret for another fifty years.[4] In late 1938, Winton visited Prague at the invitation of a friend at the British Embassy and was asked to help in the newly constructed refugee camps. Appalled by the over-

crowded conditions and troubled by the impending Nazi invasion, he set up an office in his room at the Wenceslas Square Hotel and tried to extricate as many children to the safety of Britain as possible. Although overwhelmed by requests from concerned parents, Winton established the organizational blueprint of the Kindertransport in Prague in early 1939 before leaving for London to deal with the necessary bureaucracy at the British end. This necessitated persuading the London Home Office to issue a visa, find a foster family and provide a £50 guarantee for each child (no small change in those days), as well as raising cash for the train journey from central Europe. By the time war was declared on 3 September 1939 Winton had arranged for 669 children to escape on eight sealed trains, passing clandestinely through Germany to the Hook of Holland, and then on by boat to England. A smaller group of fifteen children were flown out to Sweden. Unfortunately, a last train, crammed with 250 children, was due to leave the day Britain entered the war and it never left Prague station. The children were never seen again. Among the children rescued was Karel Reisz, who met Winton for the first time forty-five years later at a teary-eyed reunion of the survivors. 'I had never heard of him', Reisz admitted. 'I thought the Red Cross had organised it. I took my children and grandchildren – I think it brought it alive to them to learn where their grandfather came from. It was very emotional'.[5]

Young Karel was sponsored by the Quaker-run Leighton Park School in Reading, where his brother Paul had been boarding since 1936. According to Reisz's second wife, the American actress Betsy Blair, the school had been chosen by their Uncle Franz over Harrow and Mill Hill schools 'because they don't beat the boys'.[6] The headmaster, Edgar Castle, encouraged Reisz to retain the name Karel instead of his mother's proposed assimilationist 'Charles' and also bought him a bicycle. Of course, under the emergency circumstances of the Kindertransport, Reisz was forced to leave his parents behind in Ostrava and it wasn't until the age of eighteen that he learned of their ultimate fate in Auschwitz concentration camp. In 1944 he joined the Czechoslovakian wing of the RAF as a fighter pilot but the war ended before he could see action. The following year he was repatriated to Czechoslovakia with his military unit but managed to gain a leave of absence to attend Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where he studied natural sciences, specializing in chemistry.

Politically, Reisz had been sympathetic to the left in his teens, but the Stalinist coup in Czechoslovakia in 1947 quickly left him disenchanted with the western European Communist parties and their stubborn affiliation to the Moscow party line (this, remember, was a full nine years

before the British New Left's own political awakening following the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian Revolution in November 1956). After graduation Reisz remained in England, teaching at the Grammar School of Marylebone in London between 1947 and 1949. It was the latter experience, rather than organized politics in the form of strict party membership, which proved to be his formative political experience:

> Coming straight from university, the whole impact of that outside world was very, very strong. It was probably the first kind of wider community life I'd come across at all; for though I'd been happy at boarding school and university, I'd felt totally encapsulated there. Teaching was my first taste of social reality: and you can't deal daily with working-class youngsters and their parents in their own habitat and retain an archaic view of the lower classes as comic relief or criminals, the roles they traditionally filled in British films. Nor could you regard them as documentary statistics: no one has a greater contempt for these, and all the denial of diversity they imply, than the man or woman whose back is to the blackboard.[7]

Questioning Reisz on his Marylebone experience in *Punch* in 1961, Philip Oakes noted with amusement that the teacher 'maintained discipline by shouting, but he still has a recurrent nightmare in which he shepherds sixty small boys through north London to their football pitch. "It was, and still remains," he says, "my idea of hell."'[8] Despite his obvious ambivalence, it is clear that his experience as a teacher formed an indelible mark on Reisz, particularly the need to treat the working class with respect and to give them an opportunity to voice their own opinions and fears without excessive editorializing (a goal only partly realized in his subsequent Free Cinema outings, *Momma Don't Allow* and *We Are the Lambeth Boys*, as we shall see in the next chapter). 'He talks constantly of wanting to make films which are "civilized,"' notes Oakes, 'and ... his purpose as a film-maker is akin to Lindsay Anderson's, "... to make ordinary people feel their dignity and importance so that they can act from their principles."'[9]

By 1950 Reisz had abandoned formal teaching, venturing on a career in film criticism. Although his most notable work was his hugely influential 1953 book, *The Technique of Film Editing* (which, with an update by Gavin Millar, is still in print to this day), from 1950 to 1952 Reisz also wrote numerous articles and reviews for the Oxford University Film Society magazine, *Sequence* – he co-edited the final issue with Lindsay Anderson – and the British Film Institute's (BFI) *Sight and Sound* (1950–58), which at that time had been revitalized under the aegis of *Sequence* co-founder, Gavin Lambert, and his eventual successor as editor, *Sequence* alumna Penelope Houston. During 1951–52, while working at

the British Film Academy, Reisz also wrote a pair of scholarly articles on the creative role of the Hollywood producer ('The Showman Producer') and the filmic adaptation of novels ('Substance into Shadow') for the annual Pelican paperback series, *The Cinema* (formerly *The Penguin Film Review*), edited by Roger Manvell and R. K. Neilson Baxter. (See the Bibliography for a complete list of Reisz's critical publications.)

How deep is the connection between Reisz's film theory and criticism and his own ideological self-evaluation as a class-conscious educator and his subsequent work as a film and theatre director? Firstly, it's important to dispel any misconception that Reisz and his peers saw a clear-cut division between cinema as an intellectual and artistic 'discipline' as opposed to a commercial and industrial 'craft' or 'business'. As Reisz explained to the London *Times* in 1960,

> This distinction between the 'intellectual' critic who starts making films and the director who graduates in the traditional way from the cutting room or from being an assistant director or cameraman is often rather misleading. It would be difficult to find any more 'intellectual' directors than people like Robert Hamer and Alexander Mackendrick, who have grown up in the industry, while on the other hand many of the outside people, the ex-critics, would have much preferred to be working practically in the industry if they had had the chance. For instance, when I came down from Cambridge I would have liked nothing better than to go and work for a few years in a cutting room, but I just couldn't; there was unemployment in the industry and no opening for new workers, so I became a critic instead. But if I had been able to do as I wanted, you would be thinking of me now as on the other side of the fence, a trained technician from inside the industry rather than an 'intellectual' from outside ... Basically what matters, I think, is a passion just for doing things with film, for using a camera, and having film in one's hands, manipulating it – which is a very different thing from just being vaguely interested in making a film.[10]

Secondly, because of their shared polemical interests, it's often very difficult to separate Reisz's evolving critical voice from those of Anderson and Lambert, not only because he was a latecomer to *Sequence*'s roster of writers – the magazine's political and aesthetic stance was already well established by its Oxford undergraduate founders – but also because Reisz's more measured, scholarly 'voice' tended to be overshadowed (if not overwhelmed) by the more wilful and strident rhetoric of his colleagues.[11] In fact, *Sequence* (like the subsequent Free Cinema 'movement') was deliberately doctrinaire and undemocratic from its inception. As Brian McFarlane points out in his invaluable survey of the magazine's development, although *Sequence* was handsomely produced, nobody got paid (including contributors) and it remained a largely

inbred, amateur enterprise: 'amateur in its history, its distribution, and its sense of owing allegiance to nothing except its editors' sense of what they believed in and valued about cinema'.[12] Lambert concurs, noting that, 'In an early editorial, Lindsay announced that *Sequence* welcomed (unpaid) contributions "from anyone, on any aspect of the cinema, written from any point of view." In fact we never published anything that we disagreed with, which was why we wrote most of the articles and reviews ourselves'.[13] In short, the editors chose what should be in the journal and then decided who should write it. We can thus safely say that Reisz must have concurred with this editorial consensus otherwise he wouldn't have been invited to write for *Sequence* in the first place.

This collective accord was expressed through both negative and positive polemics. A recurring complaint in the magazine's pages was the domination of the British entertainment industry by the Americans, and its obvious corollary: the failure of British cinema to produce films of an authentic (read: working-class) national character. The ideological implications of the latter were made clear in numerous articles attacking British producers who turned out 'mid-Atlantic' product to compete with Hollywood and confused commercial success with true art (Gainsborough and Rank being the usual targets) as well as the inflated patriotism of postwar British films, especially in the work of Michael Powell and David Lean. There was begrudging praise for Carol Reed (*The Fallen Idol*, 1948, received widespread approbation), while Reisz's acknowledged 'intellectuals', Mackendrick and Hamer, invariably escaped the magazine's usual invective against home-grown talent. As Reisz later pointed out, 'You have to remember that British films were heavily dominated by country-house comedies, patriotic war epics and period melodramas. They were not concerned with contemporary British life – the changing realities were largely ignored. You have to remember, too, that this was the time of Italian neo-realism, which engaged passionately with contemporary life ... There was nothing remotely equivalent in British cinema. The British cinema seemed to us out of touch with what was going on, and stiflingly class-bound: it was due for a radical shake-up ... the general level of filmmaking was very provincial and airless'.[14] Similarly, traditional British documentary of the Grierson School – which may have been expected to provide a more self-consciously ideological perspective – was attacked for its dull didacticism and stodgy sociology, as well as, more importantly, its collective (as opposed to personal/auteurist) mode of production.

Largely ignoring the economics of film as a business (there were no articles, for example, on studio mergers and their impact on film production; no statistical analyses of exhibition and distribution), *Sequence*

instead concentrated on cinema as an *art* form, as opposed to Grierson's idea of film as public education. As Anderson declared in *Sequence* No. 3, 'What is required is a cinema in which people can make films with as much freedom as if they were writing poems, painting pictures or composing string quartets'.[15] In effect, *Sequence* advocated a Leavis-ite criticism, with film replacing the study of English as '*the* supremely civilizing pursuit, the spiritual essence of the social formation'.[16] Like F. R. and Queenie Leavis and their fellow contributors to *Scrutiny* in the 1930s, the magazine stressed personal vision and style over a specific message and underlined the importance of a vibrant arts (and criticism) to the health of the broader culture. 'There is no reason to demand that every film should be a work of art', argued Lambert. 'The output of bad novels and bad plays is equally high, and the important factor is that the kind of mass relaxation accepted by any society is a pointer to the condition of that society, that mass pleasures are formed by habit, and that a debased standard of popular entertainment is dangerous both to social ease and artistic vitality'.[17]

For the editors, film had a social duty to uphold the quality of life, and the bulk of this responsibility fell on the shoulders of the film's director. He/she was seen as the medium's creative driving force, taking on the hybrid role of author-as-poet. Consequently, as Reisz notes, most of the issues of *Sequence*, 'were built around a long central article about an individual director – Ford, Carné, early Hitchcock, Disney, and so on. Much of the emphasis was on American cinema. This was a time when most literate writing on the cinema was pretty patronising about Hollywood. Russian and German silent films and French cinema were the canon of "serious" film criticism. *Sequence* concentrated on the movies we enjoyed at the Odeon – musicals, Disney, Ford, Preston Sturges, and so on'.[18] The main strength of the journal lay not in its *theoretical* base – as McFarlane rightly notes, *Sequence* was far removed from the theory-laden, semiotic approach of *Cahiers du Cinéma* or *Screen* in the 1970s, or even André Bazin's ontological theories of film published between 1945 and 1951[19] – but in its enthusiasm for good films, Hollywood or otherwise: 'All we basically knew was that we cared about personal films', recalled Lambert, 'not official ideas of "art," and *Sequence* was partly a series of love letters to directors we admired, partly a succession of hate-mail against work we despised'.[20] The focus was thus on 'emotional truth' and the compatibility of cinema style with content rather than the promotion of an aesthetic theory for its own sake – for example, *Screen*'s 1970s Althusserian-cum-Lacanian approach.[21]

In addition to the lionization of specific contemporary films – George Rouquier's *Farrebique* (France, 1946), Arne Sucksdorff's *People in the*

City (Sweden, 1947), Georges Franju's *Blood of the Beasts* (France, 1949) – most critical attention was paid to specific auteurs, with the surrealists Luis Buñuel (*L'Age d'Or*, 1930) and Jean Vigo (*L'Atalante*, 1934), poetic realist Humphrey Jennings (*Fires Were Started*, 1943; *A Diary for Timothy*, 1943–45) and Anderson's personal favourite, John Ford (especially *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, 1949) leading the pack because of their deep personal vision. Moreover, a focus on auteurs also necessitated a detailed discussion of *style*, for as Anderson was quick to point out, 'with a poetic artist like Ford, style is the essence'.[22] Reisz and the editors' position can best be summed up in Anderson's effusive paean to *My Darling Clementine* (1946), which featured prominently on the cover of *Sequence* No. 2:

> There was a particular warmth, a particular familiarity about the handling of the traditional atmosphere and the traditional themes. The images were masterly, the music perfectly evocative. But none of these easily identifiable excellences, singly or together, seemed really to explain the magic of the film. This emanated rather from a quality altogether more elusive and more profound, some kind of moral poetry. I knew of course that poetry could not be defined. But something impelled me to try. So I began to have some glimmerings of what is, after all, the essence of cinema: the language of style.[23]

As if to underline the point that moral poetry *is* style, Anderson attacked the highbrow press for its critical myopia, reminding his readers that, 'If you have forgotten that poetry, visual as well as verbal, is its own justification, you will call *L'Atalante* sordid and obscure and join the critic of "The Times" in condemning *My Darling Clementine* to "the graveyard of mediocrity."'[24] Not that all films by a common auteur received equal praise. *Fort Apache* (1948), Ford's first entry in the so-called 'cavalry trilogy', was vilified for its poor script, cinematography and acting, reinforcing the editors' position that the discerning critic should focus as much on distinguishing between first- and third-rate films by esteemed directors as on ferreting out artistic gems from unexpected (read: lowbrow, avant-garde or B-movie) nooks and crannies.[25]

Reisz's first major article for *Sequence* was a thoughtful analysis of *La Terra Trema* (1948), Luchino Visconti's lyrical neo-realist fable about Sicilian fishermen exploited by commercial wholesalers and boat owners. Radically different from Visconti's subsequent operatic mannerisms in *Senso* (1953) and *Rocco and His Brothers* (1960), the film's understated poetry seems tailor-made for promoting the magazine's editorial stance that cinematic style and content should fuse to form something original and strikingly individual, literally a whole greater than the sum of its parts (a critical precursor to the subsequent Free Cinema dictum that,

'A style means an attitude. An attitude means a style'). Reisz begins his analysis by acknowledging the difficulty of expressing the theme of extreme poverty, as it entails stepping outside one's own social milieu, 'to make, as it were, a film from the outside. There is the danger that the director may remain too distant from his material, may never subjectively grasp the effects of hunger and poverty'.[26] Sergei Eisenstein's *The General Line* (1929) falls into this trap with its patronizing, 'flippant atmosphere', while Robert Flaherty's *Man of Aran* (1934) 'over-prettifies' *La Terra*'s similar theme of man's eternal struggle against the sea: 'The imposition of an irrelevant pictorial style ... brings out a sort of "picturesque peasant" attitude to poverty which is little short of an impertinent sophistication', complains Reisz.[27] Visconti, an aristocrat by birth and seemingly the last person who would identify emotionally with his film's subject matter, 'avoids all these pitfalls by bringing a style to his subject, which, in spite of a continual emphasis on pictorial values, is never less than relentlessly realistic'.[28] There is no forcing of pace, few imposed dramatic climaxes. Instead 'a most penetrating feeling for situation, rather than a consciousness of dramatic highlights, dominates the style. Firm, finely observed, magnificently (and only in some rare instances too consciously) composed, Visconti's handling is that of a compassionate, sensitive observer'.[29]

On the other hand, the film's commitment to absolute verisimilitude is ultimately at the expense of filmic *art*. The film turns out to be a little *too* slow, a bit *too* harrowing, much like an objectively rendered Pathé newsreel or documentary. 'One wonders whether obeying the demands of realism to such an extent must not finally cause the director to lose control over the material and thereby indirectly lessen the film's final impact', notes Reisz. 'Unlike *The Grapes of Wrath*, with which *La Terra Trema* might reasonably be compared, there is here none of the skilful variation of dramatic tension, none of the subtly controlled pathos'.[30] Once again Ford is held up as the apotheosis of style for the sake of critical comparison because he is unafraid to manipulate concrete reality for the sake of poetic effects that might lead to a higher truth (another future watchword for Free Cinema). The touching farewell scene between Ma and Tom Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*, for example, is probably more emotionally and ideologically authentic *because* of the hermetic claustrophobia derived from its obvious studio artificiality than in spite of it. Ultimately, *La Terra Trema* comes close to true poetry but falls into the trap of transparent mimesis. As Reisz concludes, 'The film is a deeply felt, compassionately told chronicle rather than a completely realised artistic achievement'.[31]

This lionization of Ford (and other Hollywood auteurs such as John

Huston, Preston Sturges, Charlie Chaplin and Frank Capra, who were considered to be of comparable status) is all well and good but what about the more problematic case of directors working within the commercial Hollywood studio system who didn't have control over their choice of scripts or hadn't yet reached the status of producing their own films? In 'The Showman Producer', Reisz's brief but incisive article for *The Cinema 1951*, he bucked the *Sequence* trend by approaching the subject from the other side of the coin, arguing that the voice of the director or writer is largely irrelevant in the context of the average Hollywood commercial film. In this case 'authorship' is almost entirely the responsibility of the producer. This raises another key question: is it possible for a producer to impose a personal style on a specific film or, more importantly, leave his signature on an entire body of work? Reisz argues that it is, and more often than not it is the producers – powerful creative voices personified by Samuel Goldwyn, Walter Wanger, Stanley Kramer and Arthur Freed – who exhibit a consistency of style across a studio-produced oeuvre rather than specific directors or screenwriters.

A good example is Louis de Rochemont (1899–1978), the former originator and Executive Producer of the *March of Time* documentary series from 1935 to 1943, who subsequently produced *The House on 92nd Street* (Henry Hathaway, 1945), *13, Rue Madeleine* (Hathaway, 1946), *Boomerang!* (Elia Kazan, 1947) and *Lost Boundaries* (Alfred Werker, 1949). Reisz correctly notes that these four documentary-like films, 'bear obvious affinities to factual reportage; in their sober, efficient dramatisation of real events, they are all quite distinguishably the work of a single controlling personality'.[32] In contrast, if we examine the other studio work of these films' varying directors and writers, we find little or no individual personality or stylistic consistency. To underline his point, Reisz then cites another group of films, describing them as follows: 'All these films show a markedly consistent dramatic atmosphere. They are without exception elegant, most efficiently mounted melodramas, all dealing in one way or another with themes of sadism. Most of them are concerned with the lives of neurotic, utterly amoral characters, and display a sophisticated attitude to extreme violence. There is a peculiarly vicious sting in [these] films, easily identifiable by the connoisseur'.[33] He could easily be describing the oeuvre of director Don Siegel (*The Killers*, *Madigan*, *Dirty Harry*), but he is actually discussing several films produced by Hal B. Wallis and directed by a wide range of Hollywood studio technicians including Lewis Milestone, Anatole Litvak, William Dieterle, Robert Siodmak and Anthony Mann.[34] Once again, the writers' and directors' larger resumés show no sign of consistent theme or poetic style, leaving Reisz to conclude that 'in the normal American