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Q: Perhaps I can begin by asking you how you came to be writing about film in the first place? What was your entry point?

I guess my entry point, on a strictly personal level, was not doing any work at university at all, and going to see films. But the serious entry point was an involvement at Oxford with what was then the *Universities and Left Review*, and a general interest in trying to bring culture into political discussion.

Q: What period were you at Oxford?

1955-58

Q: So you were the generation before the *Oxford Opinion* contributors – the relevant issues of *Oxford Opinion* appeared in 1960?

I am confused now, because Victor was my contemporary, almost exactly I think. And indeed, one of the first memories I have of serious discussion of film was going to some kind of film group and meeting Victor.

Q: And there was already a strong political motivation for your thinking about film?

Yes, it was very much in a political context at that point. Given that there was an awful lot of energy developing in Oxford at that time – which led to *Universities and Left Review* – it was inevitably very politically coloured.

Q: What do you think the personal root of that political interest was?

It was to do with my own social background. Coming from a working-class background, and particularly going to Oxford, it's hard not to have views of politics and class.

Q: I remember your article in one of the issues of *Universities and Left Review* called 'The Scholarship Boy', which is about Hoggart and what you would wish to add to his argument.¹ It strikes me that the scholarship boy is a very interesting figure: Raymond Williams, Hoggart of course, you, Victor fits that description as well doesn't he?

Yes he does.

Q: ... Dennis Potter. It's a social phenomenon with considerable consequence for the movement we're discussing.

In fact, if you want to trace a real connection for me, I can remember going into Blackwell's in Oxford and discovering *The Uses of Literacy* – about which I knew nothing at that point, it hadn't been reviewed or anything – and being absolutely overwhelmed by the book: 'My God, it's the book I've been wanting to read all my life!'

Q: So you were very much involved in discussions from the *Universities and Left Review* perspective. What were your feelings when you encountered *Oxford Opinion*, and Victor and perhaps some of the other people?

My first impression of Victor and the others was that these were perfectly eager people who were also interested in film, and I had no strong sense of difference at all at that point. When *Oxford Opinion* started to first appear, and

then *Movie*, I felt strongly hostile to their choice of directors. It was hard for me, given the political background, to suddenly like all these American Hollywood directors, or to take them seriously at all. And I also felt there was no political dimension to their discussion, they weren't interested in politics.

Q: It seems to be one of the features of the New Left movement, in its first expression, is this strong distrust of certain aspects of popular culture, particularly American popular culture.

Yeah.

Q: That's very clear in *Uses of Literacy* where Hoggart is very keen to praise traditional popular art, but that's opposed with 'mass art'. But by the time of Hall and Whannel's *The Popular Arts*, and I suppose Peter Wollen's articles in the *New Left Review*, there's been a change hasn't there?

There has. I would roughly characterise it in the way you have, though I have a slightly complicated view of where Peter Wollen stood in relation to popular culture. One person I ought to mention as having a huge impact in terms of film and politics is Lindsay Anderson. Lindsay came to Oxford, and he talked to some kind of political group – I can't remember what it was – but I remember him talking about Vigo, and being very excited, and talking to him afterwards. As a consequence of that I developed a kind of relationship with him. And then being hugely impressed by his writing, particularly the article on *On The Waterfront*.

Q: That's interesting. Were you going back to discover the *On The Waterfront* piece.

Yes.

Q: And was that when you went back to discover *Sequence* as well? By the time of *Definition* it appears you're quite familiar with *Sequence*.

Yes, it probably was. It also was the time when Lindsay was writing things like 'Stand Up!, Stand Up!', about the need for commitment, which he published in *Sight and Sound* and which we reprinted in *Universities and Left Review*.

Q: *That is very interesting because that forms a direct link between Sequence, Anderson's expressions of commitment in Sight and Sound certainly, and your interest (as being that younger generation of around 1960), which isn't there at all in Oxford Opinion. In The Popular Arts there also seems to be a Sequence impulse in that Ford is the director whom they write about, and celebrate as valuable popular culture.*

Yes. In making that connection with popular culture Ford was invaluable – finding a popular artist you could really support.

Q: *How did you come to be involved in Definition?*

I can't exactly remember now. I met Dai Vaughan and Boleslaw Sulik ... it must have been when I first went to London, there was the New Left Review Club, I may have met them there. But it was the meeting with them. I guess they were the first people I had met who had similar political interest and wanted to connect film and politics.

Q: *That's interesting, the idea that it might have been the New Left Club where you met.*

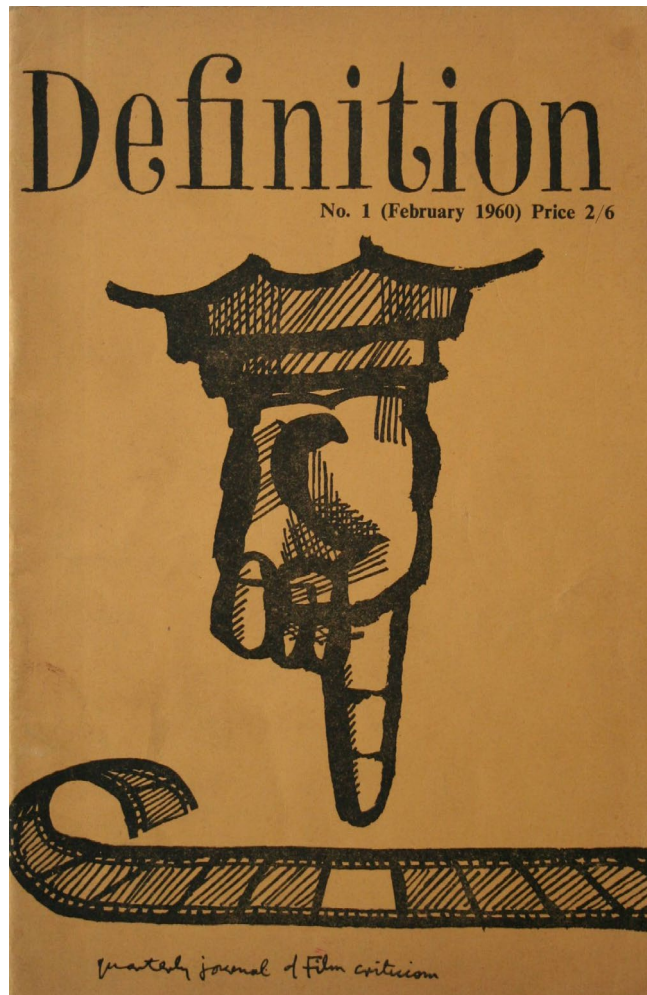
I can't think of any other context.

Q: *Perhaps you can clarify a point for me: Dai Vaughan is not the same person as the David Vaughan who wrote for Sequence and Sight and Sound?*

No, he's not, he isn't the guy who wrote about musicals for *Sequence*. David Vaughan was a dancer, or involved in dance? While Dai was an editor in the industry.

Q: *Did Dai Vaughan and Boleslaw Sulik have a background in the London School of Film Technique?*

They did, and that was very important too. Perhaps the connection came in that way? I'm not sure. I did do some



lecturing at the London School of Film Technique, but I think that was after I had met Dai and Boleslaw.

Q: *What sort of basis was Definition published on?*

Do you mean economically?

Q: *I do, really.*

Well that was entirely on the hope that we could sell enough copies, and that's why it was never viable. We used to operate with some very cheap Polish printers which Boleslaw knew. He was part of the whole Polish exile group in London and he had some connection with the printers who did it very cheaply for us, but even then there was no hope of meeting our costs.

Q: *Does he form a link with the interest in Wajda and that kind of cinema which was obviously important to Definition?*

Yes, but there's the other connection with Lindsay Anderson, because Anderson was the great champion of Wajda and the Polish cinema. Again this relates to the question of a popular cinema. We might now question whether Wajda and the Poles could be regarded as a popular cinema, but at that time it certainly seemed that they were people making popular cinema.

Q: *How did Anderson champion that, was it through writing?*

Yes, through writing. He was the film critic of *The New Statesman* for a time – in fact I think writing about the Poles got him sacked. He wrote about *Kanal* which came out in the same week as *Bridge on the River Kwai*, and he reduced *Kwai* to the last thing he dealt with, and *The New Statesman* thought this was the wrong order of priorities, and it was a parting of the ways.

Q: *What were you doing as a job at this point in time?*

I worked as a journalist for a pacifist newspaper called *Peace News*.

Q: *Can you tell me any more about Peace News?*

The history of *Peace News* is very interesting, it goes back to the 1930's and the development of pacifism. One of the editors was John Middleton Murray, who was a key literary critic of the 1930s, who championed D.H. Lawrence and was the husband of Katherine Mansfield. He was part of that kind of literary culture and he edited *Peace News* as well. There was a connection between *Peace News* and a lot

of people like Michael Tippett and Benjamin Britten who were conscientious objectors – so there was an historical connection with arts and culture. By the time I got there that had largely been lost, it was a narrow pacifist magazine, but then it got caught up in the whole Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament / New Left movement, and created space for people like me to write about film. And we had a theatre critic, a guy called Albert Hunt.

Q: So you were heavily journalistically involved at this time?

I was a journalist. *Peace News* didn't pay well, but I was employed as a journalist.

Q: Let us think for a moment about the battle over form and content and their relative value. In the editorials of *Definition* there is an appeal for a detailed criticism, it even appears in 'Stand Up! Stand Up!' which is the banner of committed criticism. But, and this may relate to only surviving for three issues, the reviews in *Definition* don't seem to be doing the kind of things reviews in *Oxford Opinion* are trying to do. Would that be your suspicion?

I think that's fair. The key thing, I think, in questions about style is that nearly everybody shares a root in something like Leavisite criticism. Obviously with Leavis the notion of close, detailed criticism – taking account of style – is very important. We were part of that, but that is in a sense compromised for us by politics, which leads in the direction of content. You're probably right that we didn't resolve that.

Q: So Leavis had, in a sense, been quite an influence on your methodology?

Oh, absolutely. At school in the sixth form we read Leavis, and when I was at Oxford I knew Stuart Hall, and Stuart was very much from Leavis – he was doing a PhD on Henry James. So we were absolutely steeped in a Leavisite approach.

Q: How interesting. Robin Wood was clearly influenced by Leavis, but one of the things I've been investigating is how

much of a literary basis there is for the work of the Oxford Opinion writers, none of whom were actually studying English. I think that relationship is often overstated in their case.

That's probably right. Robin seemed to be different from the others at that particular point because of that very deep involvement with Leavis – which kind of gives him a militant and, although it was not specifically political at that point, moral drive which is close to a political drive. Now that seemed missing from *Oxford Opinion*.

Q: Looking back from today's vantage point, how do you consider the relative ambitions of *Definition* and *Oxford Opinion*?

Definition now seems very limited. Almost accidentally it happened that three people – all of whom were kind of odd, particularly Boleslaw who was a Polish exile, but Dai was a filmmaker and I was a journalist and so on ... I'm not sure we represented anything much, outside of ourselves. Obviously we echoed that interest in politics, but in terms of film I don't think we had much. Whereas I think *Oxford Opinion* – and that's where Peter Wollen comes in – represent something in English culture which gives them more substance.

Q: So that's true of both *Oxford Opinion* and Wollen's association with *New Left Review*?

I think there are very interesting connections between *Movie* and the *New Left Review* – and disjunctions as well.

Q: What do you mean by 'something in English Culture'?

I think there's something – Anderson's very much part of that too ... Jennings ... – an interest in art and sophistication, taste, *mise-en-scène* and so on, as opposed to the vulgarities of content. And that interest being associated with a critique of England, and looking elsewhere to find your sophistication and taste. The other thing which differentiated me from them, in which I guess I'm influenced by George Orwell, was *Movie's* distaste for British cinema.

It seemed part of a long English tradition – Orwell comments upon it – English intellectuals don't like England, and are endlessly going on about how narrow and provincial it is. This is where *New Left Review* and *Movie* connect up: the interesting place is France. They go to different things, *Movie* obviously to *Cahiers* and *New Left Review* to Althusser, but French culture is very important for them.

Q: That's an interesting perspective, certainly. I'm not disputing your general point, but part of what is really remarkable about *Movie* and *Oxford Opinion* is the challenge to the established notions of 'taste': writing about Tashlin, or Fuller. It may well be about sophistication, but it's a very different kind of sophistication to that which is currently in place.

It would be really interesting to go back and look at how they wrote about Tashlin, but the discussion about Hitchcock, for example, particularly when it comes filtered through *Cahiers* or Chabrol, brings you into a world of great sophistication in art.

Q: It does, but it still seems an affront in 1960 to be advancing these ideas.

Yes, but the affront is much more 'this is Hollywood'.

Q: That's the stumbling block, not questions of taste *per se*.

That's where taste comes into it, that Hollywood is not part of acceptable taste, as it were.

Q: It seems there is something of a rapprochement between the *Movie* ideas about film and the new left emphasis, I suspect (correct me if I'm wrong) in the shape of the BFI education department and related activities. Would that be your impression?

The real rapprochement, in a way, comes from me because I was the person who got Peter Wollen the job at the BFI. It's almost as crude as that. I knew the *New Left Review* people, I read Peter's stuff and I thought it was really interesting, and I thought that the intellectual seriousness of

the *New Left Review* ought to come into film criticism. So I was very keen to get Peter in, and in fact the two candidates for the job were Peter and Victor.

Q: Really?

My candidate was Peter, but we all agreed that Victor was so good that we actually created another job for him.

Q: At what stage had you come to work for BFI education?

I had started to do freelance lecturing for them when I was still a journalist, and then I effectively became a freelance journalist and supported myself by doing a lot of lecturing. At that time the BFI had a lecture agency which organised lectures everywhere in the country. I already knew Paddy Whannel through *Universities and Left Review*. We used to come up to London from Oxford, and go to the National Film Theatre, and met Paddy who had just become the education officer.

Q: He seems a very important figure.

Yes, he was.

Q: Returning to the earlier point, I'd suggest Peter Wollen is very different from the *Movie* tradition. He's very keen to take American films seriously, so they have that in common, but he's always less interested in style. When he goes on to discuss authorship style clearly isn't his main point of interest, it's recurrent features. Whereas with Victor, style is the most important aspect.

My own view is very different now from what it was then, and this partly came out of a dialogue between my teaching at Warwick and what Victor teaches. I think in the end, Victor is not that interested in style. The emphasis is on the themes and ideas which you apprehend through style. The whole of the teaching at Warwick is organised on detailed criticism, that is for every course that you do you see a film twice, and it's assumed that's your basic method. But given that, the students know almost nothing about camera work. And I remember doing an introductory

course in which we simply talked about camera work. It always seems to me that Victor starts with *mise-en-scène*, but is very quick to get on to the meanings.

Q: When I talk about style, I'm really talking about the way style relates to meaning. But I'm quite surprised by your suggestion that Victor gets through the style half of that equation quickly.

There's not a huge awareness of style and lighting and sound, rhythm, pace.

Q: But thinking about the Letter from an Unknown Woman piece? That's probably the most detailed piece of his that I've read.

I don't remember it too well.

Q: He writes just about the Linz sequence. The other moment I tend to think about is those tiny fragments from *Caught* which he discusses in 'Must we say what they mean?', in the most recently published issue of *Movie* (34/35. Winter 1990).

My memory of the substance of the articles isn't very good. I think Noël Carroll gives a very good account of Victor's criticism in *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory*, when he talks about Victor's attention to detail and always finding a surplus of meaning in the work. It seems to me that's what's the real interest, it's the meanings, the extra meanings. Clearly, the way to find it is starting off with stylistic details, but I'm not sure that they detain him very long.

Q: Ok, but given that (I'm sure you're important in this, I'm sure Paddy Whannel is important in this, I'm sure that Victor's important in this) but some of what Oxford Opinion and *Movie* establishes is brought to bear in that BFI Education set up, isn't it? Be it taking things in detail or the amount of attention you're prepared to expend upon a film, or in particular a popular American film.

Leavis is the key thing there, because in a sense Victor is knocking on an open door with people like me or Paddy

who were influenced by Leavis. Immediately we will respond, 'yes, of course, you should look carefully at the stylistic qualities'. One of the debates we had at that time was with sociologists, who we felt always said 'oh well it means this, and it means that' and simply talked about the obvious features of the plot.

Q: So you were really taking a position saying, 'well, you haven't really understood how these things are qualified by ...'?

Yes, that you really have to look carefully and so on. Actually I would say that the *New Left Review* impulse from Peter Wollen was not influenced by Leavis in that way, in fact the *New Left Review* was quite hostile to Leavis for political / cultural reasons, and I think you're quite right that Peter doesn't take over that kind of interest in stylistic matters.

Q: Are there any other things that are worth recording about the activities of the BFI education department, that would be of interest to a history such as the one I am writing?

It's a question of things you take for granted. Clearly the thing which had the biggest impact was the seminars. I can remember Peter doing the first paper on semiology and nobody had a clue what semiology meant, desperately looking in dictionaries! Those seminars were pretty open, and a number of people from *New Left Review* came, like Tom Nairn and Jon Halliday. All the ideas of semiology, psychoanalysis, Marxism came out of those seminars, that's my really vivid impulse. Against that you have to put the lecturing we were doing all over the place, in which we were doing a lot of (in a sense) *mise-en-scène* work. The classic method was that we had an extracts library, and we would go and show and analyse the extracts. The famous scene from *My Darling Clementine* – going to church – was endlessly shown and analysed. And so I think that did influence a lot of people towards a *mise-en-scène* type of approach.

Q: *That must be a very important stage in the dissemination of those ideas. An exciting initiative, and not the sort of thing you can imagine the BFI organising today.*

No.

Q: *So Movie's hostility to British Cinema has always been a point where you diverge from them?*

Yes. And that connects with the *New Left Review*, because the *New Left Review* had a similar hostility to British Culture, regarding it as a philistine, narrow culture. That's what provoked me to do my paper about British Cinema, 'The Unknown Cinema'³ – nobody seems interested in British Cinema, they all just dismiss it.

Q: *Jacob Leigh was telling me about your more recent essay, 'The Known Cinema' in which, as I understand it, you discuss students' response to Saturday Night and Sunday Morning on the one hand and Rebel without a Cause on the other.³*

In a way it's a separate point to do with popular culture. Christine Gledhill was doing a course which I would describe as straight down the *Movie* line. She wanted to show the students *mise-en-scène* and so she showed them *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, *Breathless* and *Rebel without a Cause*. What I was really struck by was the students' response to *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, which was very direct. They really enjoyed it, it was very clear, and these were students who were untouched by all those debates, it was just the simplicity and directness and humour of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. In that context *Breathless* is a real smart-arse film. How is that going to relate to those students? So it was the sense of popular culture, the film, making a connection in a very direct way.

Q: *It doesn't have the ambiguity you might find in Rebel, but has that immediacy?*

Yes, and I came to think, which in a way I have always thought, that *Rebel* is very overwrought.

Q: *It obviously had a big impact at the time of its release. But perhaps that's as much to do with James Dean himself as with the film?*

I think it was James Dean. Stuart Hall and I actually hitch-hiked to London to see the premiere of *Giant*, because James Dean was in it! [laughter] There was no doubt about it, that's what we were going for.

Q: *An interesting element to the story! What are your feelings about mise-en-scène in criticism and theory today?*

I actually now think *mise-en-scène* is not a helpful notion at all.

Q: *Really? Why is that?*

First of all it's not very precise. I had an argument recently about whether the camera counted in *mise-en-scène*, and I then went to check up on this, and there's clearly some confusion. Some people talk simply about what's in front of the camera

Q: *That's partly the Bordwell and Thompson line. In Film Art they separate the mise-en-scène chapter from the cinematography chapter, which I think is a big mistake. One of the interests of research like mine is that it involves thinking about the different ways of conceptualising mise-en-scène. In Movie the emphasis is very much on directorial realisation and camera movement and framing are crucial, whereas they wouldn't be at all for Bordwell and Thompson. There's also that interesting Robin Wood definition of mise-en-scène in Definition, which includes editing and sound.*

But then it becomes style.

Q: *It does.*

And that's the other ambiguity, it seems to me. You're talking about style, about being in charge of the whole film – I wonder where 'direction' is considered in all this, it seems to be a hidden word?

Q: *It's interesting that Victor almost never writes about mise-en-scène. He almost always talks about direction.*

That's interesting, I didn't realise that. In some respects, it sounds right, when I think about it.

Q: *He uses it in Oxford Opinion, but barely since. Perhaps we can rephrase the question. How important do you think a detailed consideration of style is to criticism and theory into the next millennium?*

Well, what a question!

Q: *My impression is that with the advent of theory, it gets displaced to a significant degree. Perhaps it's in the nature of theory to talk in general rather than in particular terms, but it seems to me that detailed criticism tends to be pushed to one side.*

I think that's probably right. In a sense what theory has produced is ideological criticism. I don't actually think it's very different from a lot of the sociology we were objecting to at the BFI. People endlessly interpret films in terms of feminism or ethnicity, in terms of ideological meanings, without that stylistic sophistication, when it comes down to it, because that's the real preoccupation of those social, political kinds of readings rather than style.

Q: *It strikes me that the anchoring of those things together is potentially very fruitful, but that doesn't often happen.*

It doesn't often happen, but I think there is a real problem which goes back to reading. If you say that style is very important, and you're really curious about political and social meanings, you have to ask yourself what kind of readings are made by audiences who see it once, like the people who go to the multiplexes. Now a lot more would need to be discovered, but I would guess most people do not make careful readings of camera movements and compositions.

Q: *I quite agree this is a continually vexed question. Camera movements and compositions might be shading their*

experience of what it is that's on the screen, shaping one's response even if one isn't always aware of it.

One would have to have an account of that shaping of consciousness by style. That seems to me to be missing. In a way, it seems in part what they're trying to do in Wisconsin now.

Q: *Except, that Bordwell himself has this ambition to divorce interpretation from his discussion of style. He's trying to talk about the way in which we understand style, but he's very resistant to interpretation. And there's also a danger of the Wisconsin work becoming rather mechanistic in that kind of discussion.*

I think that's a big problem with their position. As far as I understand that position, it depends on a notion of the mind in mechanistic terms: rather like a computer, seeking cues, a very rational kind of process.

Q: *That strikes me as one of the most difficult things to do – to write about the balance of different feelings that a really complex piece of film can engender. I'm sure it's very difficult to build that into your film, but it's also very difficult to write about.*

I think there's a question whether what you're looking for all the time are meanings. That seems to me a very powerful notion. And it might well be that the influence of camera movements and sound (the other thing that mise-en-scène forgets about) is not to be talked of in terms of meanings but in terms of some kind of emotional affect or quality

Q: *I'm certainly very resistant to the idea, and I think Movie were too, that film is about a simplistic conveying of messages. I want to be able to talk about camera movement and sound shaping and qualifying, and about dramatised themes*

But at the end it's themes or meanings, something like that? However sophisticated it is, at the end you are trying to discern themes or meanings.

Q: *It's true.*

What's at stake, I think, is an understanding of what art is. There's a strong feeling that what makes art is themes and meanings, they give it weight and importance.

Q: *We're returning to the debate circa 1960 by a round about way! But what's your perspective on this question?*

I think you have to think not in terms of meaning, but a different sense of affect, emotion, excitement, why people are moved to tears. All the things a mechanistic account of mind can't deal with at all.

Q: *What's really interesting in those terms is when you have those conflicting, changing impulses. Andrew Klevan gave a very stimulating paper at Reading on Tin Cup, and it included a very useful elucidation of the scene at the end where he keeps trying to hit the golf ball over the lake, the whole complex of emotions which are in play and shifting delicately over the sequence. That's one of the examples I can think of where someone has managed to write successfully about that kind of complex experience.*

But words like 'complex' have such a long history, they're Leavis words actually. I think you always have to ask yourself whether an audience who sees *Tin Cup* is actually involved in this complex experience.

Q: *My feeling is that they are.*

Well then I think you need to be able to demonstrate that. In talking about this I'm reacting to Victor. Listening to Victor talking about *Strangers on a Train* which he has seen about 30 times, and the detail which he goes into – you can't possibly expect anybody to make that kind of detailed reading.

Q: *I suppose Leavis would say that criticism is about helping you toward that kind of reading.*

Yes, but that again raises big questions about what we are trying to do on a film course. Are we trying to create specialised readers, more attentive readers?

Q: *So what do you feel your chief ambitions for teaching film at the present are?*

I would say to increase enjoyment. The simplest thing I do is expose students to a range of movies, encourage them to appreciate that there's a variety of enjoyments. The old political impulse is still there in that I want students to be curious about audiences. (Despite a certain amount of discussion of audiences, there's a general lack of curiosity.) I do certain things like send the students to the cinema and tell them to write about the audience – what kind of people they are, and how they respond to the movies. I want that kind of curiosity about audiences, and the realisation that they as film students are different from people at multiplexes. Another major emphasis in my teaching, which is different from your concerns I guess, is an understanding of the nature of the film industry. Films cost money, and there are consequences as a result.

Q: *One further question about style, something I've asked the other people I've interviewed and which would be interesting to ask you. It's about the death of mise-en-scène, or that sense that post-classical films are not as rich. Can you say the kinds of things you might say about Hitchcock of today's Hollywood films, and if not, why not?*

That's a question I asked Victor. Why is it there is no film made after about 1960 which you think is any good? Is there a structural reason for this? This was a rather casual conversation we had in the staff room at Warwick a few years ago, and we never concluded the discussion. In terms of a straightforward response, I see no great difference now from 20 years or so ago. I don't think there's a decline in Hollywood at all.

Q: *What if you were to take an extract around the country with you? If you took Clementine and you took something else?*

Yes, what would I take? That's an interesting question I'm not sure I can answer it directly. To come at it a slightly different way, when I was teaching at Warwick a few years ago I saw *Frankie and Johnny*. I said to the students

– we were discussing the dominance of American cinema squeezing out British cinema – ‘in the end I had a really good time seeing *Frankie and Johnny*, not the greatest film I ever saw but I had a really good time, and in the end I don’t mind if there was no British cinema’. So if you were going to take a popular entertainment, the equivalent of *My Darling Clementine*, that’s an example. But with *Clementine* there was much more of a sense of ‘this is art’, which I wouldn’t want to say about *Frankie and Johnny*, I wouldn’t want to make the same kind of claim.

If you were to say to me ‘are there as good directors in Hollywood now?’ ... I don’t have so much of a pantheon. A name that comes to my mind is Jonathan Demme, I guess. I think he’s rather got caught up in big projects with cultural responsibilities recently, but the stuff he did before that we could argue in the same kinds of ways if you wanted to. But it is very hard.

One of the things that influenced me about *mise-en-scène* is sound. You have to talk about uses of sound now, I think, it’s really important. One of my colleagues, who is actually an ex-Warwick undergraduate, is doing a PhD on sound. In fact, he did an essay for me on sound when he was an undergraduate, which really woke me up to it. He recently went out to Hollywood and met a lot of big sound designers, fantastically interesting guys in their ability to talk intelligently about what they think they are achieving with sound, and shifting between artistic considerations and technical considerations.

Q: *That sounds very interesting.*

It’s very hard to fit that into *mise-en-scène*, and Hitchcock’s camera movements. The other way I’m disconcerted, is that I now believe precisely the opposite of the *mise-en-scène* attitude to the script. Nobody talks about the style of the script, because the thrust of *mise-en-scène* is that cinema is a visual medium and you must be able to deal with it as a visual medium – and then you just ignore scripts, which are taken as givens, they’re somehow literary and so on. But scripts are organised in certain kinds of ways.

Q: *It’s certainly the case that interesting things can be said about narrative structure. Of course, there’s a polemical history which explains why *mise-en-scène* doesn’t talk about the script, it’s everything to do with a commissioned cinema, or one’s impression of what a commissioned cinema might be.*

The auteur theory seems to be a total mess. I know I like particular directors, but there seems to be no proper account of authorship. Once you start to raise questions sound and script and so on, you start to lose the sense of the director in terms of somebody doing *mise-en-scène*.

Q: *I’m quite happy about some of the arguments about directors advanced on grounds of style ... but we’re not interviewing me!*

It would be interesting to hear what you think.

Q: *Well, I like that piece by Victor – ‘Authorship: The Premature Burial’.*⁴

Yes that’s very good, because it raises the key question that what you’re talking about is quality and not just personal expression. Just to see personal expression doesn’t necessarily tell you anything about whether it’s a good film or not.

Q: *No indeed. Just because a film is distinctive, doesn’t mean it’s distinguished.*

Exactly. ... I think the question of value is often ignored because of the old opinion of mass culture. The basic assumption is that we live in a mass anonymous society where anything personal is to be valued. That seems to me almost part of the intellectual framework that everybody inhabits: people talk about shops in towns, we don’t want all these anonymous Marks and Spencers everywhere, we want small distinctive shops. And then you get a criterion of value that personal expression is valuable.

Extra information from correspondence:

Arnold Wesker didn’t have much of an impact on *Definition*. He was a friend of Dai Vaughan’s and I think

attended what was then the London School of Film Technique. I only got to know him later when he created Centre 42. He was part of the web which connected *Definition* with the Royal Court Theatre and Free Cinema.

¹ (1957) ‘The Scholarship Boy’, *Universities and Left Review*, 1. 2, 33–4.

² ‘The British Cinema: The Unknown Cinema’, paper presented to the British Film Institute Education Department Seminar, 13 March 1969. A revised version of this paper was published as (1972) ‘The Unknown Cinema of Britain’, *Cinema Journal*, 11. 2, 1–9.

³ (1997) ‘The British Cinema: The Known Cinema?’, in Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book*. London: BFI, 235–243. (p. 242)

⁴ Perkins, V.F. (1990) ‘Film Authorship: The Premature Burial’, *CineAction!*, 21/22, (Summer / Fall), 57–64.