

Charles Barr

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The interview began with a discussion of the people writing for Granta at the time of Barr's involvement (1960-61).

Certainly David Frost wrote things on films and other topics, and Peter Graham, though he's not really a film person now, was quite influential and edited the compilation on the New Wave which was, I guess, more effective than anything in England in putting André Bazin's actual text in circulation. He wrote a lot about films in Cambridge at that time – and became Paris correspondent of *Films and Filming* for a few years in the early 60s.

Q: *Am I right in thinking he took over your editorial role on Granta?*

I forget whether it was directly afterwards, but yes he certainly did. And there's no problem if you want to get in touch with Peter Graham, that could be arranged. In fact he's always rather pleased when people contact him. He made a film called *A Shilling Life* – which maybe you ought to look at, I've got a copy of it here – a year or two after I'd left Cambridge, funded by the Cambridge Film Society. It's a 20 to 25 minute film set in Cambridge and it very much reflects the influence of the New Wave and

Antonioni; I'm sure he wouldn't mind me saying that it's a very pretentious kind of film. It has a number of people in it who became quite well known: Laurence Gordon Clark, who is a television director; Richard Boston, of *The Guardian* etc.; and Stephen Frears. It is very typical of the film culture of the time and the interesting thing is that it takes no influence from the American cinema at all, whereas now, intelligent, ambitious filmbuffs would be likely to make something that was a recreation of Film Noir perhaps, or influenced by Tarantino, or Hartley maybe ... but the influence would tend to be American. That's always the thing to remember about that period (I can't remember quite what aspects of it you're investigating) that the dominant influence came from European cinema, and partly perhaps from the American cinema filtered through the New Wave, more than from, say, Nicholas Ray and Hitchcock. In a sense there were two currents; if the *Movie* people themselves, if Ian Cameron, Victor Perkins and company, had made student films – and I have a feeling that Ian Cameron did make a film while at Oxford – they might have been modelled on Ray and Fuller. But generally I think that people at the leading edge of university film culture still took Bergman, Antonioni and the New Wave more seriously than anybody else.

Q: *What must have been so exciting was to have not only to have these exciting things going on in Europe, but also you were getting the late films of Preminger and Hitchcock ...*

Yes. You've probably talked to Jim Hillier about this, but when I was at Reading [in March] he gave me a handout which was a proposal for a book about precisely the films of around 1960, with a strong emphasis on that idea that the great generation of American auteurs, many of them with their roots in the silent period, were making their last mature films at that time – Ford and Hitchcock and Hawks, and then the post-sound directors like Minnelli as well. But there was a conflict between the champions of European cinema and the champions of American cinema, putting it very crudely, and of course *Movie* unites the two (as *Cahiers du Cinéma* does) – there's almost an

equal enthusiasm for both, and it's the coming together of both which is the key. There was quite a strong sense, perhaps wider than we are led to believe now, of regarding the celebration of American cinema as pretentious, not serious. You find it in the *Sight and Sound* articles of the early sixties. Who are these young flippant people who haven't grown up yet and don't realise that European cinema is inherently more serious than American popular cinema? And they take seriously the films of such commercial filmmakers as Ray and Fuller! I'm sure that was quite strong at Oxford, as well as Cambridge and the wider world. So many films around that time were the site of struggle about critical value – *Psycho* and *The Birds* and Minnelli's films ... and Ray as well.

Q: *At an earlier stage the Sight and Sound generation, as it were, had been quite keen on Ray but their ardour had cooled by the end of the fifties.*

Yes. Although it is so interesting that Gavin Lambert went off to work with Ray. Have you read the thing Gavin Lambert wrote in *Film Quarterly*, 'Goodbye to some of all that'? I think it's in *Film Quarterly*, where he's saying goodbye to England really, and is keen to go to America, and there's a certain amount about Nicholas Ray in it. But it is interesting that the *Sequence* people sort of discovered Ray and seem to have been responsible for getting his first film *They Live by Night* shown quite widely and written about by other critics. And then *Sight and Sound* review some of his films in quite a friendly way, don't they, but they feel that after *Rebel Without a Cause* he goes down hill. I don't know if Lindsay Anderson was ever very interested in Ray, I can't remember if he writes about him, but Lambert certainly was. Lambert was interested enough in him to go and work for him on *Bitter Victory* and *Bigger than Life*, which were exactly the sort of films which according to *Sight and Sound* (which Lambert had just left) showed how Ray had been beaten by the system, or alternatively had become in thrall to hollow, formalistic, nonhumanist values.

Q: Party Girl.

Yes, exactly. *Party Girl* was a great site of dispute. But getting back to what you said, it certainly does seem a very rich period, in retrospect, partly because now it's become such a commonplace to use 1960 as the date for the definitive crumbling of the old studio system. Directors were having to adjust to those changes, and I don't know quite what effect that has in itself, but perhaps they suddenly found they had more freedom? You have to find some way of gathering together the range of American films that were made. What do you think of those films? Do you see that as a very rich period?

Q: *I do. One of the questions I was going to ask you later on was whether you were a subscriber to the hypothesis of 'the death of mise-en-scène'?*

I don't quite know what's meant by 'the death of mise-en-scène'. Remind me what it is.

Q: *Well, Victor Perkins says that nowadays – this is 1975 – films, in terms of their style, are divided between 'arbitrariness and pointmaking' in the decisions they make about camera placement, those sort of decisions.*

There isn't a kind of 'organic' structure? ... the values of *Film as Film*.

Q: *Yes. I suppose Altman must be a key figure in that discussion – and perhaps one can contrast the camera movement, or the lens movement, in *The Long Goodbye* which seems to be mainly there to draw your attention toward the director and the fact that this is an Altman film, as opposed to, say, *Caught with those subtle shifts of point of view that the opening of that film provides*.*

Well, Robin Wood uses that thing in *The Long Goodbye* to say that mise-en-scène isn't dead, doesn't he?

Q: *He does.*

I don't really subscribe to that, I don't think, partly because there are some very strong distinctive filmmakers adjusting to the changing scene, but making films which

are extremely expressive in visual structural terms – like Peckinpah. You can't fit Peckinpah, for instance, into that sort of schema. I'm not sure whether Victor Perkins would do so, or whether he'd take him as an exception. Peckinpah is 'making points' strongly, but then so was Fuller. I'm not sure quite how you would place people like Scorsese or Ken Loach, not that he's a Hollywood filmmaker, but these are all people who seem to have a style which is intricately, intimately related to the subject matter. Whether it's as good or not? – I don't really see that as a particularly strong issue. And I think Victor Perkins was probably being provocative. Well, he was being provocative when he said it, but that doesn't mean he doesn't believe it. There's also the complication of the fluidity around the term mise-en-scène. Does mise-en-scène come in your title?

Q: *Yes.*

I think we talked about this earlier, but Robin Wood has that early definition of mise-en-scène (in *Definition*) where he includes editing in mise-en-scène. Whereas I find the useful sense of mise-en-scène is related to its meaning in stage terms, the staging – to do with the profilmic event. I think Victor Perkins' notion of the death of mise-en-scène includes the découpage. That sort of muddles the issues, so I would find it quite difficult to reconcile this with the dictionary meanings of mise-en-scène, and with the Bordwell and Thompson meaning which has become so dominant – Bordwell and Thompson say this is what mise-en-scène is and everybody uses the book, and it is a very workable and very useful definition which I think is actually better than the *Movie* definition, not that it was really a definition, it was a sort of evocation meaning, in a sense, film style.

Q: *Don't you think it's important to include the frame in a definition of mise-en-scène?*

Do Bordwell and Thompson include the frame, I can't remember?

Q: *I don't think they do, actually, because they have that separate chapter on cinematography. I suppose I'm going to have to decide at some point exactly what definition I'm going to work with.*

Well I think you've got to at least have a discussion of it, and maybe part of your project (it's not for me to say) would be to trace the development of conflicting notions of the term mise-en-scène and what is at stake in each separate definition. Or what is perhaps masked and obscured by the fact that the definition does slide through the years.

Q: *I'd certainly like to include the frame and I'd like to also include camera movement, camera positioning – and that would fit in with the polemical sense of mise-en-scène where it is what the director does, in that worse case scenario when ...*

Yes, true, the director's contribution. But then isn't there a further complication to wrestle with: the conventional distinction between auteur and metteur-en-scène, which is *Cahiers du Cinéma's* distinction, and then *Movie* in a sense picks that up (Indeed, doesn't Tony Richardson use the same terms to make a distinction, in a *Sight and Sound* article in the 1950s?)

Q: *Well, I'd always felt it wasn't so important to *Movie* – as it might be to Andrew Sarris, say. My impression is that you don't find 'auteur' referred to an enormous amount in *Movie* or that evaluative sense of auteur theory. When I interviewed Ian Cameron he said 'I think all directors are auteurs but some of them, like Fred Zinnemann, are lousy ones'.*

Ah. Is that the argument in the article 'Films, Directors, and Critics' which Ian Cameron wrote in an early issue of *Movie*? I remember the bit where he says the dominant personality in the movie can be all sorts of people, but it is more often the director, and certainly so in the best films That implies that he doesn't always think the director is the auteur.

Q: *That's true, of course, but other than that 'histogram' of directors at the beginning, my impression is that you don't get*

a strong sense that this person is an auteur and this person is a metteur-en-scène. I'm not even sure that the term 'metteur-en-scène' crops up in *Movie*.

No, it may not do. But it is still quite an influential division, isn't it, the auteur or the metteur-en-scène. It certainly still gets referred to, and that rather labels mise-en-scène as the thing which is mainly looked after by people other than the director, the profilmic event. And then the real author puts his signature on it by the way which the camera moves, the framing, the 'layout of shots' as Victor once put it, which I think is just a translation of *découpage*.

Q: Do you remember where he uses that?

No. I'm sure it's somewhere in *Movie*. I think it might be in the *Movie* discussion in number 8, where he uses it as a criterion: a good director does a layout of shots that is expressive and makes sense, that is not distorted or arbitrary.

Q: When I interviewed Victor he did say that he felt that modernday films like *The Piano*, say, are very calculated in the way that they position the spectator, but I wonder whether you think those later films have, in other senses of the term mise-en-scène (I suppose I'm thinking of the way in which décor might be expressive of character or those other sorts of things), whether you think post-65 films display the same kinds of strategies?

I find that a rather difficult question to answer. Partly because there aren't that number of modern films that I feel a strong allegiance to, say, after Peckinpah. There's not that many very modern films that I use in teaching, or have written about. *Heaven's Gate* seems pretty much in the classical tradition. What was the question again?

Q: Do you get that detailed construction, in the sense of those evocative examples in *Film as Film*? Or I imagine the sort of work you can do with a pre-1965 film in class, in terms of

detailed discussion – do you find you can perform that sort of operation with a post-65 film?

Well, I don't do it very much. I tend to work with earlier films. I don't do much teaching of modern cinema, as opposed to modern television (though that's another story).

Q: Is there a reason for that?

Partly laziness. Partly, like Victor, being attached to certain periods and partly having focused almost all my research on film history, including early cinema. I don't know how this affects your project, but it seems to me that the major thing that has happened since the moment of *Movie*, since the 1960's, is a scholarly rethinking of the silent period and the very beginning of cinema, and the relationship of this early cinema to other media etc., which opens up areas that *Movie* was never interested in – not that many other people were in those days. A really dynamic rethinking of the scope of film studies.

But returning to the question of more recent films ... I think that Peckinpah, and for that matter Arthur Penn, are very interesting cases, and Scorsese and Cimino ... and Ridley Scott for that matter. All sorts of things come back to me that I do quite like working with. You're saying, basically, is the sort of closeto the text analysis of *Film as Film* still performable? Well, I'm not sure how much I ever wanted to do the sort of thing that Victor was doing with *Film as Film*, it's very idiosyncratic. I remember the scene that Victor writes about from *The Cardinal*, where Tom Tryon is cycling and the camera picks up the movement in a particular way and pans around. I did see that again quite recently, on the big screen as well, and I thought 'Great, this brilliant moment is coming up' and it was good, but still somehow a bit of a let-down ... nowadays I would just see that as a building block in the film, not that Victor would say otherwise, and as representing a relatively small part of the influence and importance and pleasure of that sort of film. I find somebody like Ken Loach very interesting in close formal terms – different from classical Hollywood, indeed rather hostile to

classical Hollywood, but in terms of mise-en-scène and framing and texture and everything (and in an almost consciously oppositional way to the way that Preminger or Hitchcock would do it) I would say that Loach is using the film medium in the same sort of organic and integral way. Victor would probably be shocked to hear that, I don't know what he thinks about Loach. Loach, of course, is not a Hollywood filmmaker, but he's somebody working in the age of television, in the age of video, of euro coproduction, who moves with the times, much in the way Hitchcock moved with the times. Directors can sustain a long career by adjusting intelligently, just as Hitchcock adjusted to sound, to colour, to the television era, to industry change etc. Then there's Michael Mann. *The Last of the Mohicans* is a really handsome Scope film. Do you know *The Last of the Mohicans*?

Q: I'm afraid I've never seen it. I remember Andrew Britton making some very dismissive remarks about the casting of Daniel Day-Lewis, but I don't think he'd seen it either.

Well, I've seen it once in the cinema and some of it again on television and I thought that there's a film like certain Ford westerns, like *Revolution* – which is almost my favourite 80s film. Have you ever seen *Revolution*? Now there's a mise-en-scène film, in the old sense, though again I suspect this claim might shock Victor. The British *Heaven's Gate*, really, and a much maligned film, but squarely in the great tradition of Hollywood cinema, in terms of the relation of the individual story to history and a very bold concept of a certain kind of mise-en-scène. I don't really go for films like *The Piano* very much, and I can see exactly what Victor means by 'calculation'.

Q: What about the sort of activity you perform in your article on Dodge City in *The Movie Book of the Western*? You manage to point to an enormous amount of suggestive material in that opening sequence, though I suspect your point is almost that in the western you can do this because the genre is so rich ...

Yes. I suppose in a way that's a subversion of *Movie's* detailed criticism, because it's detailed criticism saying it's nothing specially personal, and it's 'only' Michael Curtiz. I'm not quite certain whether that points in the direction of decentring the auteur in favour of the genre and the studio and the historical moment, or if it's saying Curtiz is an underestimated auteur. I think it's both. *Movie* clearly, in retrospect, was much too prescriptive about who were the great directors and who weren't. I find when I'm running survey courses on film history, which is one of the things we do at East Anglia, that I'm getting very interested in the concept of the journeyman director – like Curtiz and Mervyn LeRoy, both of whom are sort of chameleon directors who will take any sort of material and treat it in a professional and insightful way, certainly in their best decades. Maybe you take the Cameron line and say that all directors are auteurs but some of them are not very good ones, and some of them are worth a lot more attention, like Curtiz and LeRoy. But the whole *Movie* project was such an innocent one, and in a way predated such a lot of research and knowledge about film history. My article on CinemaScope was a terribly innocent article in historical terms.

Q: *Although, interestingly, it's more scholarly than most of the writing in Movie at that time, in the sense that despite not knowing much about the history of film you certainly make an attempt to examine in some detail earlier theories that had been advanced about film ...*

Yes

Q: *And you employ points of reference in ways that early Movie articles don't. Is that a reflection of the fact that it was produced as part of your research?*

I suppose so, yes. I don't know when people like Victor read Paul Rotha, Eisenstein and Roger Manvell and company. And maybe they had done so but just didn't feel that it was worth spending time on. I was doing a year's funded research, part of which was spent in reading a lot of books. Since I knew I was wanting to challenge critical

orthodoxies in ways other than writing about a particular director or a particular film, it was important to get a handle on those critical orthodoxies. But the whole field of early cinema had simply not been explored, so there are some references to Griffith which have no understanding of what Griffith stood for. That wasn't satisfactorily confronted until the seventies I think, understanding what Griffith stood for and what he did, and how he related to the economic development of the industry.

Q: *I suppose also, it's a theoretical article whereas the articles in Movie are for the most part reviews of films.*

Yes. What's the title of your thesis?

Q: *Well at the moment it's called 'Critical Approaches to mise-en-scène'.*

Oh well if it's 'Critical Approaches to mise-en-scène' then I think there is a potentially very productive sorting out to be done of that tangle of what I would say is really three definitions. (It's not for me to tell you how to do the thesis! But partly I'm wondering what your research gathering and your questions, are actually aiming towards.) The *Cahiers du Cinéma* definition of auteur vs. metteur-en-scène, the Robin Wood / *Movie* one of mise-en-scène as everything to do with directorial style, and Bordwell and Thompson's much more formalist one, which is more satisfactory in terms of clearly delimiting what mise-en-scène consists of. Some of the words that Raymond Williams deals with in his book *Keywords*, like 'realism', 'personal' or 'national' are similarly a site of struggle between certain kinds of values or critical contexts. It would be very interesting to untangle mise-en-scène in the same way.

Sometimes the influence of *Movie* is referred to in terms of close textual analysis. Are you engaging at all with Leavis, the precedent of Leavis?

Q: *I have been trying to assess the claims, often advanced, which suggest that Movie is applying models of close analysis derived from Leavis and other parts of literary criticism. Is that a view you have any sympathy with?*

Well, there's no doubt that Robin Wood was influenced by Leavis, but as far as I know the only other people this applies to were both marginal to *Movie*. That is James Leahy, who wrote a couple of things in *Movie* and later took over from Thorold Dickinson in running the film research unit at the Slade School, and me. We were both at Cambridge and were both influenced, though not nearly as directly as Robin Wood who was actually a pupil of Leavis. I certainly read I.A. Richards and read Leavis' books, and went to some of his lectures. But, as I said, both James Leahy and I were very marginal to that first impact of *Oxford Opinion* and *Movie*. Ian Cameron, Victor Perkins, Paul Mayersberg and Mark Shivas certainly weren't Leavisite, and in so far as they knew about Leavis they were rather scornful. Robin Wood came from somewhere very different from the others, and I think had a big influence because with Robin Wood it became impossible to accuse *Movie* of being flippant, which was one of the initial reactions – 'Here is a glossy magazine which celebrates empty Hollywood movies'. The underlying seriousness, of particularly Victor I suppose, wasn't as apparent as Robin Wood's, because Robin was deploying a certain amount of Leavis terminology and actually citing Leavis. Ironically, the opposition which initially appeared to many people – *Sight and Sound* versus *Movie*, serious versus flippant – was shown to be the other way round. It was *Sight and Sound* which was shallow, relatively speaking, and *Movie* which had a more earnest moral weight behind it.

Q: *When do you think that Robin Wood would have made this impact?*

I'm not sure when he first met the *Movie* people, but he wrote for the second issue, the Preminger one – so it must have been before that. To work out the dynamics of it fully, you'd have to talk to them – have you asked Victor when he first met Robin?

Q: *I didn't think to. When did you first come across them?*

It must have been 1960. I was one of a lot of people who got very interested in films at university, and obviously there

was no sort of structure within the university system for absorbing that, it was all unofficial culture. There were all these contexts for seeing films, talking about films, and writing about films – there were a lot of journalistic outlets, however primitive. It was a case of finding out your values and standards as you went along, at (certainly in my case) a very callow, adolescent time. I remember going to a bookshop in Cambridge, probably in my second year, and picking up this magazine *Oxford Opinion* and glancing through it and thinking, ‘Oh it’s got some writing about films, I’d better buy this’. And then reading the first issue of *Oxford Opinion* with the writing on film, and being rather outraged by it, rather shocked. It was obviously powerful writing but it seemed so wrong, it was challenging everything that one had just started to read about correct and responsible approaches to film Here were a lot of films being celebrated that I either hadn’t heard of or just assumed were very minor, like a Randolph Scott B-western. It was exciting but unsettling. And then there was another issue and I remember writing a letter to Ian Cameron (I do hope he hasn’t still got it, I certainly haven’t) saying that I was interested to see this but I thought they were very wrong about everything – I remember quoting De Sica, referring to humanism, European cinema etc. And referring to *Sequence* as well, because there’s a reference in that first issue, more or less the first thing. Ian Cameron says ‘Film criticism in Britain is dead. Perhaps in the good old days of *Sequence*’, something like that, and in my letter to him I said ‘You invoke *Sequence*, but surely *Sequence* stood for this and that’ and quoted Lindsay Anderson. Ian Cameron wrote back, a very courteous and considered reply, sticking up for the *Oxford Opinion* position, and saying ‘As a matter of fact I’ve never read *Sequence*, I just put that in because it’s the sort of thing people say, it’s caricaturing what people say about the good old days of *Sequence* – and we don’t need to read *Sequence*, we’re making a fresh start’. Anyway, I went on reading *Oxford Opinion* with great interest and made sure I went to see the films, and thought ‘maybe there is something in this’. Other people, Peter Graham for instance, thought it was pretentious rubbish.

There was a certain kind of division at Cambridge, as there must have been at Oxford, between people who were actually rather impressed, and struck, and influenced in spite of themselves, and other people who resisted and thought Bergman, Orson Welles, Antonioni and the New Wave were incomparably more important than all these Hollywood filmmakers they were writing about. It was such a complete break with everything. It didn’t seem to have any connections with Leavis, for instance, I don’t think I made a connection at all. And then came the film issue of *Granta*, and after that I was surprised to get a letter from Ian Cameron saying, ‘We rather liked the film issue of *Granta*, we don’t like *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, but we did like your article on criticism (or whatever it was) and would you like to write something for *Oxford Opinion* or for another magazine that we’re putting together’. So there was a sort of *rapprochement*. Then somehow I met them (it was probably in London) and there was this joint issue between *Oxford Opinion* and *Granta* where I got them to give me an interview with Losey which they hadn’t been able to publish.

And then I went to do the year of research in London Did I tell you that they all applied for that studentship? I’m not sure they all did, but certainly Ian Cameron did, and I have a feeling that Victor might have as well. Ian told me that he had gone in for the interview and they’d asked him what he meant about his project of revising the orthodoxies of film criticism, and he said ‘Well there’s one particular book *The Art of the Film* which represents everything I distrust most about traditional film criticism. Ernest Lindgren isn’t here by any chance, is he?’ – and somebody put his hand up, Ernest Lindgren was indeed there. I remember that he was there on my own interview panel but I must have been more tactful. Anyway, I got the studentship, and by then I’d met them occasionally at the National Film Theatre. In those prevideo days, the wonderful facilities we had at the Slade school were very useful. The great thing was that you could see any film you wanted to, you just asked them to book certain films and they were booked. So Gavin Millar and I watched masses of films, some projected in 35mm on the big screen, and

some we just ran on 16mm. For the Preminger issue of *Movie* I think Ian Cameron or somebody had arranged to borrow 6 or 8 of his films on 16mm, and they came in and saw them all at the Slade School, at different times of the day and night. Likewise, Ian Cameron watched quite a few films there with me on the Slade’s Steenbeck for his book on Antonioni. So I got to know them a bit then, and so did James Leahy who was in London at the time. I wasn’t confident enough to write anything for *Movie* at the very start, nor was I particularly pressed to I don’t think, but I was working on my dissertation and I guess it was early 1963 when I finished it. Then I met Robin Wood, I’d just been introduced to him at the National Film Theatre by the *Movie* people, so they obviously had met him, he must have written to them after *Oxford Opinion* or after the first issue of *Movie*, and been coopted by them. When I finished my dissertation and sent it off to *Film Quarterly*, I remember sending a copy of it to Robin because I had been shown something that he had written for the British Film Institute Education Department on *Ugetsu Monogatari*. I don’t think it has ever been published, though he has written elsewhere about Mizoguchi. I think there was going to be a series of essays on great films, and he’d done one on *Ugetsu Monogatari* which was a very good example of early Robin Wood criticism: very close to the text, very serious, and arguing that here was the film of a serious moralist. It had some very nice stuff about deep focus photography and long takes, and I wrote to him and said I’d seen this article and really liked it and felt it was in tune with some of the things I had been working on, and here was a copy of a thing that was going to be in *Film Quarterly*. He wrote back and said he could see the connections, and we arranged to meet and got on well. And James Leahy and Robin and I became friends, I think better friends than Robin was with any of the *Movie* people, or than either James Leahy and I were at that time with any of them.

James Leahy would be worth talking to, particularly if you were reconstructing critical lines of force that followed *Movie*. James was probably slightly more on the fringes of *Movie* even than I am (because, after all, I am a

member of the editorial board still!). He very impressively got a film lectureship in Chicago, and then was appointed to succeed Thorold Dickinson, which was slightly surprising because he sort of came from nowhere, in comparison with Thorold, and hadn't written very much – but then in those days nobody had written very much, and there were no academics ready to take over from Thorold Dickinson, indeed there were no film academics in this country. His job could have been taken over, at that time in the early seventies, by someone like Karel Reisz, I suppose, someone who like Thorold Dickinson had, had a career in the industry which had then slowed down, or by someone, say, from the documentary movement. But James, as an English academic with a post in America and some publications, got the job. He updated the Slade in terms of opening it up. I don't mean just to *Movie*; it was already quite open to *Movie*'s kind of approach, because the attractive thing about Thorold Dickinson was how sympathetic he was to the work being done under him, by Raymond Durgnat primarily, who was perhaps the most important of the Slade students because so much writing came out of the period that he spent there, and then by Gavin Millar and myself. We got in some Budd Boetticher westerns, and Thorold Dickinson was enthralled by them, he said, 'This is really opening my eyes, CinemaScope – wonderful thing! Look at that composition etc'. (You can see the results of this in his book *A Discovery of Cinema*.) But James not only consolidated the connection of the Slade with close textual reading, which Thorold Dickinson was sympathetic to, he also took on board various developments in scholarship as they were happening – he had Noël Burch and Barry Salt working with him before they had published much – and that was an important growth point. A lot of people like Pam Cook were students at the Slade, and James was very influential, at the same time as being rather disorganised in some ways and, I think, a poor politician. He never made it into an MA Course, it was always just a diploma course, and the end result, the writing done by the students, was often disappointing, without the spur of the degree qualification. So you had this wonderful spread of films being shown by, for

instance, Barry Salt and Noël Burch, who were developing what later became their major works, but it wasn't so productive at the student end, at least not in the short term, and it left the Slade very vulnerable, so that when there was a demand for cutbacks at London University the film department was just snuffed out completely, and James was left rather in limbo.

But getting back to where I was, in the early sixties, this was Robin Wood's first period of very productive criticism. It was when he was very family oriented and before he had 'come out'. He had a wide circle, including the *Movie* people and some post-Cambridge Leavisite connections; he kept in touch with a number of former English Literature colleagues. That was the time when Robin was writing for the early issues of *Movie* and developing the Hitchcock book. And then *Movie* had an interruption, it had several interruptions, and then the *Movie* paperbacks started to appear.

That was certainly a key time for me in the early 60s, I suppose I was ready for it. As soon as you take on board the significance of *Oxford Opinion* and *Movie*, you see the traditional criticism in a new light. You no longer read Lindgren and Manvell with that reverence, the feeling that 'here are the key texts for understanding film'. My CinemaScope article certainly came out of that reorientation. It was when I had learned not to resist what *Oxford Opinion* was doing, had seen enough films, and had seen *Psycho*, which seemed so absolutely decisive in validating what *Oxford Opinion* was doing. On the one hand, there was Penelope Houston saying that you have to understand this is Hitchcock's joke, and on that basis you can enjoy and respect it, within its limits. On the other hand, *Oxford Opinion* took it as 'the work of a great tragedian' or however Victor phrased it. And then Robin Wood wrote about it in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, and I was taking the magazine, because I read French, though not as well as Peter Graham, who is very francophile (and lives in France now, and has done since the 60's). So *Cahiers du Cinéma* was to hand, and suddenly there was this article on *Psycho* by Robin Wood. I read it before I knew who Robin was, wondering 'Why has this Frenchman got an English name?', and

then suddenly he turned up, he was in England. He says somewhere that when he wrote his article on *Psycho* he sent it to Penelope Houston, and she returned it and said 'Interesting, we'd like to hear more from you, but we don't think we can publish it because the thing to understand about *Psycho* is that it's a joke'. So he sent it to *Cahiers du Cinéma* and weeks passed, he never heard anything, and then he picked up a copy of the magazine and it was the lead article.

I'm sure that this sort of enlightenment happened to lots of other people, but because I was in a privileged place, Cambridge, there was the opportunity just at that moment to apply for a scholarship to study film properly. 'CinemaScope: Before and After' became one of a number of articles in different places that challenged orthodoxies and did have some influence. But I think talking to James Leahy might be a good idea, if you're reconstructing the film culture of the period and not simply writing about textual analysis and the concept of *mise-en-scène*.

Q: *I'm not sure I have seen the film issue of Granta, is this an issue with a whole range of articles?*

Yes. I might have suggested it, or David Frost might have suggested it, but it seemed a good idea to have a film issue, because film was such a coming, trendy thing. It's got Anthony Perkins in *Psycho* on the cover. I wrote two things in it, one is about *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and the other is a general article about criticism, I can't remember what it is called, but it was essentially reproducing and endorsing a sort of *Oxford Opinion* aesthetic. I'd be quite curious to see it again, because I haven't read it for twenty years. Then the magazine has a report on the London Film Festival where masses of important, influential new films came out – *Rocco and his Brothers*, *Shoot the Pianist*, some Antonioni, there were lots of reviews by people like Nicholas Garnham and Peter Cowie who have become well known in their different fields.

The key stages, if you were constructing a single narrative history, would be *Oxford Opinion*, then their move to London to set up *Movie*, then the *Movie* Paperbacks, and then people going into educational institutions as

several of us did, though not really until well into the 70s. That would be the simple linear history, but there's not only Oxford to London, there's Cambridge in a minor way, and then there's the Slade School. Gavin Millar and I were there in the second year of the department's operation; before that there had been Don Levy, the experimental Australian film-maker, and Raymond Durnat. Durnat is an important figure because he was so productive, and he was so anti*Sight and Sound*. He had a sort of rapprochement with *Movie* doing his article on Michael Powell, though that wasn't till 1966. Then there is the British Film Institute Education Department, and the network of contacts it had with schools and adult education. I can't reconstruct exactly who was in the Education Department at what time, but a key figure was certainly Paddy Whannel. He died when, the 70s? I remember him quite vividly, because he was a friend to a lot of people. He was a very friendly, dynamic sort of person and he went to Chicago as well – he may in fact have replaced James Leahy there. He wrote a book on popular culture with Stuart Hall, and made some television programmes about cinema, including one on John Ford that was directed by Mike Dibb (who writes in *The Movie Book of the Western*, on Budd Boetticher). Paddy was certainly in the Education department by the time that the whole shift that we are talking about took place, and he embodies that significant position of being someone who really came from the old humanist tradition but was very struck by and receptive to the new influences. In a way like me, only in a much more important role, at the BFI. And the Education Department was also the base for people like Jim Kitses, Victor Perkins, Alan Lovell, and Peter Wollen.

Another quite important place is *Motion* magazine – like *Movie* a small independent magazine, that just didn't cohere in the same way. Raymond Durnat was important to it, I wrote something in one, and Ian Johnson wrote an article on *Peeping Tom* which was way ahead of its time, the first serious article on *Peeping Tom* in the English language. And *Definition*, which was sort of anti*Movie*, and yet Robin Wood wrote for it, didn't he, before he wrote for

Movie? That's where his writing on the concept of mise-en-scène appears.

Q: And Alan Lovell wrote for *Definition*.

Yes, I'm sure he did. And Paddy Whannel wrote at least one important article in *Universities and Left Review*, which later became *New Left Review* – that was another place for debate about film. Retrospectively, it seems that *Movie* was the big thing that was happening, and maybe it was the most influential, the one with the most enduring influence, because it was making the most telling, the most important shift from the orthodoxies that preceded it. But there were such a lot of other currents that were partly competing, and partly coalescing. The kind of person I am thinking of here is Dai Vaughan, who also wrote for *Definition*, and has remained a professional film editor, while continuing to write very intelligently about films from time to time; he has never been aligned with *Movie*, but he also seems to me very much a part of that 1960s rethinking.

Q: Just returning to literary criticism, what was the nature of that influence? Did you consciously say, 'This is what Leavis and Richards are doing with poems, let's try it with film'?

I can't remember it being conscious, but I certainly read Richards' *Practical Criticism* several times when I was at Cambridge. I can't really remember the early things I wrote about films, to what degree they contained close textual analysis.

Q: My impression (given that I am yet to see the special film issue) is that your writing varies even during the period you write for *Granta*. The earliest article I've seen is 'Anatomy of a Film' which is on *The Angry Silence*, which seems to be very much part of the humanistic tradition

Yes, that was in an earlier issue, and it would be a very good example of the humanistic tradition.

Q: And then a bit later on there's the one on *Spartacus* and one on *The Entertainer* in particular which seems both in its methods and its attitudes much more in line with Oxford Opinion.

Yes, I'd forgotten the one about *The Entertainer*. As a matter of fact I think I have to revise things, it was after that article that Ian Cameron wrote to me, and then he wrote again after the film issue of *Granta*. They'd obviously rather enjoyed picking up *Granta* and reading a strong attack on Tony Richardson. And of course that was before *Movie* had come out, so I suppose I was the first person to be in print with a strong attack on Tony Richardson. I remember Ian wrote and said 'We like your attack on *The Entertainer*, although we don't like *Room at the Top*', because I'd had some remark like, 'Unlike *Room at the Top*, *The Entertainer* doesn't successfully integrate its characters with their backgrounds' ...

I'm sure I was influenced by *Practical Criticism*, and also by Leavis' style of attack – Leavis could knock down respected works, and one could imitate that by attacking *The Entertainer* with a few well chosen details. Although that doesn't mean I feel I was being insincere. The *Spartacus* piece, as I remember it, contained the germ of my writing about CinemaScope. I was in the situation around that time of thinking 'This new studentship would be a nice thing to apply for', and you had to say what you were going to write about, and there suddenly seemed to be a great gap; and *Spartacus* had just come out, to add to all the handsome Scope films by Ray and others that I'd seen and liked previously. It was an area that seemed wide open, ready to be written about, and that is how it turned out.

Q: Do you think CinemaScope as a process acted as a spur toward developing a mise-en-scène criticism?

Yes. As I think I probably say in that article, once you had that really big screen it was no longer possible to write about a film sequence as if it was a translation of a literary sequence. It was certainly a catalyst for changing the ways of writing about film, and Mark Shivas had already

said something about that in an article in the first film section of *Oxford Opinion*; the title was something like 'Commercial Cinema: a few basic principles'. I can remember being very influenced by the way he evoked and then answered the common objections to CinemaScope, on the lines that this sort of criticism is blind to the visual richness that CinemaScope provides 'in any circumstances'. I think he did say 'in any circumstances', claiming that the wide screen was automatically a factor for greater visual richness and density.

Q: *Thinking back, it seems clear to me from the article that the argument about the spectator being required to do the work has everything to do with a view of cinema that dramatises themes rather than conveys messages. Do you think that's an important point?*

I suppose so, yes.

Q: *You talk very eloquently about the Pudovkin / Eisenstein model where the spectator has to follow a proscribed route to make meaning, and you're firmly against the idea that cinema exists to convey messages.*

Yes. Well that's certainly a lot of the thrust of it. I'm sure it's a rather facile opposition. I actually now really like Pudovkin's films, in some ways I prefer them to Eisenstein's films, and I think that, now that a psychoanalytical approach to movies is available, Pudovkin's films don't seem like message films, but more like very intense family melodramas – but that's another story. Nobody was writing about psychoanalysis and cinema then.

Q: *I think it's less an argument about the films than about criticism. 'A poem should not mean but be', as opposed to the more propagandist view of art which Definition was seeking to put across.¹*

Maybe there's an unconscious reaction there against the whole schoolmasterly tradition of British criticism, and indeed British culture. We all in a sense came out of the war period and its aftermath, and there's that very strong tradition of documentary and propaganda, and of realism

being good for you, teaching lessons. So it was quite intoxicating to find a kind of cinema that was morally engaged, and was telling meaningful stories, but through giving the spectator experience rather than a lesson.

Q: *How far do you see your work at that time as an attempt to relate the material features of the text to meaning in other senses?*

I don't know. It's very difficult to think back into that time, there certainly wasn't a conscious agenda to do that. I think everyone had a project of doing justice to the pleasures and the experience of cinema, and so much of the pleasure was, and is, the sensuous richness and complexity of it all. Like, as you say, the complexity of poetic language, and it just seemed to be so brutally reduced in the standard writing about film – Roger Manvell being typical of that. The summit of cinema was reduced to certain kinds of patterning of shots at the beginning of *Great Expectations*. Certain things were held up as typical of expressive filmmaking – Ernest Lindgren has all these examples of the highangle shot and the lowangle shot. Meaning and experience seem to be defined in such a reductive way, with no real scope for complexity of texture and complexity of response and ambiguity.

I've realised one key name has been left out, I'm not sure how I managed not to mention him before, which is André Bazin. Undoubtedly for me the most important influence, on a reading level, was Bazin. More so than Leavis, and more so than I.A. Richards because Bazin was writing about film and was writing in a Leavis / Richards kind of way. Bazin's work became known at that time, partly because he'd just died and there were articles celebrating him. I think I commissioned Peter Graham, who was always going to Paris, to bring back André Bazin's collected essays which had just come out (in French, I've still got them). His essays on Wyler were particularly memorable, which was strange, because no-one especially liked Wyler. Wyler's reputation had gone down, but here were these great Bazin essays which used his work, and also of course Welles', as a key example of visual density and complexity. Do you know his essays? 'Montage

Interdit' was another important one, and very relevant to the line I was developing on CinemaScope. So Bazin was as important as any of the people I have mentioned. I think everyone knew about *Cahiers du Cinéma* and its hard line about certain things, and Bazin was part of that, and somehow transcended it all because he was known to have resisted what were seen as their wilder excesses.

I now see Bazin as having quite a lot in common with Leavis. They're both writing from before, and to some extent against, the spread of critical jargon. 'The real' is an absolute key term for both, although Leavis uses 'life' just as much – they both have this almost mystical attitude to life and reality which of course can seem terribly naive, and which helps to make Leavis easy to deconstruct and criticise. They both have this way of writing very vividly about particular texts, about particular lines of poetry in Leavis' case, from Shakespeare or Hopkins or whoever, and, in Bazin's, particular sequences of Welles or Wyler, Rossellini or De Sica. And making it part of a moral vision, a vision of life, which in Bazin's case is a sort of Catholic acceptance of the world, and in Leavis' a struggle for integrity and certain puritan values. They had a comparable earnestness which they mobilised in attacking – more explicitly on the part of Leavis – a shallower, less serious tradition of criticism. In terms of the relation of close textual analysis to moral issues, Bazin was a major inspiration. His death meant that he couldn't be writing about current cinema, and Leavis wasn't interested in the cinema, so Robin Wood and everybody else who was influenced by them were freed from actually following in their footsteps. Robin could write completely freshly about Hitchcock because nobody had really written from that perspective. Bazin had never written much on Hitchcock, and the approach of Chabrol and Rohmer and the other *Cahiers* writers was, though intriguing, somehow so distinctively French that there was no sense that he was following them. And for me, writing about CinemaScope in the context of American mainstream cinema, it seemed virgin territory.

Q: You mentioned the difference between French criticism and English criticism, what is the crux of that?

I think there was a significant difference in tone and context in French writing. Partly the language question, the French have this distance on American culture which enables them to see past certain distractions, but I don't think the Chabrol and Rohmer book could have been written by English people – I don't quite know what I mean by that. I think Bazin's work is perhaps closer to certain traditions of humanistic text-centred English criticism than it is to the much more impressionistic writings of Godard and Truffaut or, to some extent, Chabrol and Rohmer in their book. Bazin was quite anglophile, he liked a lot of English films. But I wouldn't attach much weight to my opinions on the difference between French and English criticism.

Q: What about the MacMahonists? You told me you were a subscriber to *Présence du Cinéma*.

Yes. I don't know how much influence the MacMahonists had, and I don't know how MacMahonist *Présence du Cinéma* really is because a lot of it is interviews and filmographies. I can't remember being influenced by anything I read in *Présence du Cinéma*. But it was a MacMahonist, Michel Mourlet, who wrote that 'Lang, Losey, Preminger and Cottafavi – these are the greatest of the great' – that was very striking, along with the notion of things being stripped down, bare and austere, that was characteristic of the early Losey. In the first thing I wrote for *Movie* I quoted the word *dépouillement*, meaning a sort of stripping down. I'd read this thing about Cottafavi; a Cottafavi film came out, *Hercules Conquers Atlantis*; I rushed out to see it a few times, and wrote about it for *Movie*. So there, in a way, you can see the influence of *Présence du Cinéma*, through Cottafavi, and I latched onto this idea of 'stripping down'. I think that was part of the attraction of the French view of films, they caught something very important about American cinema (and others in the case of Losey's early British films, and Cottafavi) which opened up popular genre cinema and nonrespectableseeming

films to attention. *Hercules Conquers Atlantis* must be the least 'serious' film that *Movie* addressed.

Q: Other than your appreciation of Bazin, do you feel that the most important thing about the influence of Cahiers, and perhaps *Présence du Cinéma*, would be in terms of what sort of films would be worth looking at?

Yes, I think it was mostly the question of what and who was important to look at. As far as I'm concerned, and it probably applies to other people, André Bazin was the important critic, on the whole via work which hadn't appeared in *Cahiers du Cinéma* but had been written earlier. We read *Cahiers* and liked the rating system; seeing which films got high ratings and which didn't was always interesting. They named a range of directors whose work was interesting, and people did then at least check them out. I don't know if Ian Cameron wrote about *Comanche Station* in the first issue of *Oxford Opinion* because André Bazin had written about Budd Boetticher and signalled him as an important filmmaker, or if Ian just happened to see the film and thought 'this is interesting, I'll write about it'. Did he say anything about that? Certainly I picked up on Cottafavi because he was mentioned in *Présence du Cinéma*, or maybe in an article quoted in *Cahiers*. Many of the directors that *Oxford Opinion* and *Movie* wrote about were the Cahiers ones. Paul Wendkos had been mentioned in *Cahiers*, so I noticed a Paul Wendkos film was on in a double bill in an obscure cinema, and saw it, and then wrote about it in *Motion*. I would never have gone to see it, or if I had seen it I might not (who knows?) have thought much about it, if Wendkos hadn't been picked up as an interesting young director. Of course, we knew Hitchcock and Hawks were the two top people because there were these Cahiers people called *les hitchcockohawksiens*, and then duly in the first issue of *Movie* Hitchcock and Hawks were ranked top, and there was a lot of writing about Hitchcock and, soon, a special issue on Hawks. Some people said that it was all copied from *Cahiers du Cinéma*, but Hitchcock and Hawks were very established figures in the American cinema. I can't say that I went to see Hitchcock and Hawks films because they were mentioned in *Cahiers*

du Cinéma, they were famous anyway – this only applied, for me, in the case of minor figures like Wendkos and Cottafavi, people whom *Oxford Opinion* and *Movie* hadn't picked up – so this was my chance to investigate two new people, and make a contribution to this whole scholarly project. Mind you, nothing much happened subsequently with either of them. Cottafavi made hardly any more films, though I think Wendkos may still be working. I used to go and see his films fairly religiously, but I haven't kept it up.

Q: What about method, an interest in close textual analysis, *mise-en-scène*? Is there any link there?

You mean with *Cahiers du Cinéma*? No, I think it's a combination of Bazin and the Cambridge English tradition. Not that I was doing English, but I.A. Richards and Leavis transcended the boundaries of the English courses. I was reading classics, and I wasn't stimulated to spend all my time doing classics, so I spent a lot more time reading English critical works and novels and so on. So for me I don't think close reading came from *Cahiers du Cinéma*, and I don't know if it did for anybody. I think it's much more an English thing. I don't know where it came from for Victor. I think it just came from him! He doesn't have to be influenced by anyone. And from some intelligent and lively people getting together in Oxford and stimulating each other and talking about why they liked certain films.

Q: And for you, presumably having access to that technology at *The Slade* would have been an important factor.

Yes. And Antonioni was very important, particularly, for me and also Ian Cameron, *Le Amiche* – have you seen that?

Q: I haven't. He mentioned in his interview that you got him on to an editing table to see that.

Yes. We ran it backwards and forwards a lot of times, looking especially at the dazzling instances of the *plan séquence*, handling whole group scenes in a stunning long-take way. Without a Steenbeck, you used to have to

go into a cinema and see a film two or three times, and write a lot of notes and then try to recapture it on paper, since of course there were no videos to refer to.

Q: *You said that you knew Sequence as well when you were at Cambridge.*

Yes. I came across a second-hand set of it in a Charing Cross Road bookshop, and read it and was impressed by it, because it's very well written. It didn't really rub off on what I was writing, except possibly to some extent in style. Ford is an interesting case. *Movie* was initially very anti-Ford, as you may have picked up. When did the first Ford thing appear in *Movie*, was it Victor?

Q: Cheyenne Autumn?

Yes, which is very late.

Q: *Yes, about number 12.*

Yes, and the first film issue of *Oxford Opinion* has a very scathing reference to Ford, by Mark Shivas, and that set the tone. *Sight and Sound* liked Ford, *Sequence* liked Ford; not that they'd read *Sequence*, but anyway *Sight and Sound* and Lindsay Anderson were very enthusiastic, seeing Ford as the justification of the Hollywood system. So that was a clear was of distancing themselves from the English orthodoxy. And *Cahiers du Cinéma* hadn't yet become very keen on Ford. I think it was Bazin – or was it Roger Leenhardt? – who wrote 'A bas Ford, vive Wyler', 'Down with Ford, Long Live Wyler'. Ford was what the oldguard liked. So through the first part of the 60s Ford was almost a nonperson. I remember going with Gavin Millar, during our year at the Slade, to watch *Two Rode Together* at a cinema in Islington. And we came out and said, 'What an awful film, what a terrible film' and we slagged it off for quite a long time. And now I think it's a wonderful film. I'm sure that first reaction was influenced by the fact that Ford was not fashionable, and you'd have had to be quite bold to argue for Ford. It was rather like *Peeping Tom*. I was interested in horror films, which on the whole other people around me weren't, and I wanted to see *Peeping*

Tom, it sounded a rather scandalous film, and I went to see it in its first week and was bowled over by it and went back to see it the next day ... but nobody I knew had any time for Powell then, and I remember Victor saying very scathingly that 'Peeping Tom could have been a good film if it had been made by a decent director', or something like that – writing it off completely, as indeed did *Cahiers*. So although the project was to overturn critical orthodoxies, it operated with its own sort of peer group culture – Tony Richardson was bad, Ford was old hat, Hitchcock was great, etc. And Powell and Pressburger were liked by nobody, *Sequence* included. And *Peeping Tom* we can now recognise as being way ahead of its time – the modern version of *Movie* has duly celebrated it.

And I think the case of Ford was rather similar. My own turning point was going to see *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* long after its first release, at a remote Irish cinema, and thinking it was terrific. But by then people were starting to come round. James Leahy always rated Ford, in fact it was he who convinced me that he was an important director. But it was a long time before anything affirmative appeared in *Movie*. Who was the first *Movie* person who wrote at any length about Ford? I suppose Doug Pye, and Robin Wood.

Q: *Robin Wood talks somewhere about the experience of going to an Education Department session on Ford run by Alan Lovell.*

And possibly Paddy Whannel also.

Q: *Well the two of them I think, and being won over during the course of the workshop as to Ford's qualities.*

Oh yes, well that is the BFI Education influence. Have you read *Sequence* yet? I still like the *Sequence* stuff on Ford. To have all that lyrical writing about *My Darling Clementine* at the time that it first came out, coupled with the fact that *My Darling Clementine* is such a great film ... that's an area where *Sequence* really has been vindicated, in the way that *Movie* was in relation to Hawks and Hitchcock.

Q: *And Preminger.*

I don't know about Preminger, Preminger is a person who's almost forgotten now.

Q: *Well that's interesting. At Reading, Doug and I and some other research students sat down and did some work on Bonjour Tristesse to see if it really was good, and we thought it was wonderful. We were really very impressed. You're absolutely right that he's a forgotten figure, but I think that Movie was absolutely right about his qualities.*

Well it certainly seemed to be at the time, and *Exodus* was a very important film. I never really that much liked *The Cardinal*, but I'd love to see *Exodus* again on a really big screen. I can remember seeing that in Dublin two days running, with Mike Dibb, whom I mentioned earlier – he represents the Dublin fringe (he was at University there) of this movement. He was a great friend of Paddy Whannel's, he directed the television programme I mentioned with Paddy about Ford (I wonder if he's still got it?) – that must have been about 1965.

Q: *Is there anything else that you particularly want to say?*

Talking about it all has reminded me of a lot of things, and I think the main thing is that complexity and multiplicity. If you're engaging with this period it is very important not to have a simple linear view: that there was this and then *Movie* came in and gradually undermined it. It is a conjunction of such a lot of different things and influences: *Definition*, *Motion*, the Slade School, the Education Department of the British Film Institute, certain people working in adult education, even things like *New Left Review* and *Universities and Left Review*. And the complexity of the French influence. And, certainly as far as I'm concerned, André Bazin was very important.

Q: *Victor was very keen to pay tribute to André Bazin.*

Ah, good. Part of the complexity thing is the balance of attention to American and non-American cinema in *Movie*.

Q: *The fact that there was such a balance does tend to be overlooked.*

Yes. And also in *Sequence*, *Sequence* was fairly evenly divided between American cinema and European cinema.

Q: *I remember you saying that you saw a number of affinities between the *Sequence* project and *Movie*.*

Absolutely. They both come out of Oxford for one thing, and they're both consciously reacting against an established orthodoxy, represented by people like Roger Manvell and Paul Rotha. But *Sequence* was opposing itself particularly to the dominance of the documentary people, of Griersonian Puritanism – and to all the euphoria about British cinema and its revival during and at the end of World War II. I think the defining moment in early *Sequence* is Lindsay Anderson writing on Ford (it's reprinted in the Preface to his book *About John Ford*). He says that when he got back from war service to London, he had a choice of seeing *Great Expectations* or *A Matter of Life and Death*, which were the great hyped-up films of the British renaissance, or *My Darling Clementine*, which nobody was very interested in. He perversely chose *My Darling Clementine* and was bowled over by this wonderful poetic film.³ And then he celebrates *My Darling Clementine* very eloquently, and goes on to write about other Ford films equally strongly. And the *Movie* project, likewise, is defined at the time of a period of hype of the new British cinema, in this case *Room at the Top* and *Look Back in Anger* and all the other Tony Richardson films. *Movie* is saying the same thing as Lindsay Anderson who writes, at the beginning of his article on Hitchcock in *Sequence*, to the effect that 'British Cinema has always been uneasily caught between Hollywood and Europe' – not having the bold commercial confidence and generic rootedness of one cinema, and not having the seriousness and personal vision of the other. *Oxford Opinion* and *Movie* were more or less doing the same thing, saying that both British Cinema and British criticism are fatally flawed, wrapped up in tepidity, failing to appreciate the real potential of film. It's interesting that one of the contextual similarities is this hype about British

cinema which both are strongly opposing. There's almost exactly the same position occupied by Tony Richardson for *Movie* and Powell and Pressburger for *Sequence*, who represent vulgarity and bad taste.

Then there's the similar balance between the American and European. The new Italian cinema is taken seriously in *Movie* – Antonioni, late Rossellini – and in *Sequence* it's the neorealists. They both admire different periods of French cinema, and they both like Renoir. And interestingly, in American cinema Nicholas Ray and Minnelli are very important for *Sequence*, as they will be for *Movie*, which has forgotten, or didn't know, that Ray and Minnelli were important for *Sequence*. Also, *Letter from an Unknown Woman* is a key film for both of them. So actually there's a lot more in common than Ian Cameron would have liked to admit, and maybe nowadays as a mild middle-aged person he would actually rather like *Sequence*, I don't know. But Gavin Lambert, have you traced what happened to Gavin Lambert?

Q: *I was reading that interview with him that's in the same issue of *Screen* as your *Straw Dogs* piece just yesterday.*

Gavin Lambert is a very positive figure, I think. He wrote a very sympathetic book on Cukor, and he had gone originally to Hollywood with Nicholas Ray; and he wrote an essay on Hitchcock in the early 70s which is certainly not in any way following the Lindsay Anderson disapproval of Hitchcock's work in Hollywood. I met Lambert two or three years ago in Hollywood when we were making the *Hundred Years of British Cinema* programme; he and Alexander Mackendrick are the two people who talk together in Hollywood with Stephen Frears, under the direction, again, of Mike Dibb. Unfortunately the interview gets chopped up, but there are still good things left. Yes, I definitely think the *Sequence* / *Movie* parallel is very interesting. As I said, *Sequence* started as the magazine of the Oxford University Film society and then moved to London, rather like *Movie* growing out of *Oxford Opinion*.

Q: *I think you even suggested a link between 'poetry' and *mise-en-scène*. [As I now recall, the parallel that had been*

made in an earlier conversation was between 'poetry' and 'beauty'.]

Yes, Anderson does talk a lot about 'poetry', and he means the texture of the image, the sort of thing which is very difficult to pin down on paper. And he does sometimes have some quite detailed shot-by-shot analyses, obviously not done in quite the same way as *Movie*. But the notion of 'poetry' is also I think, like the Leavis notion of 'life', that there's an indefinable something, that all the critic can do is point to the details, the sensitivity and precision with which something is realised, and stand back and say 'there you are', there is 'reality', there is 'life', there is 'poetry', there is 'beauty'.

Q: *Thank you very much.*

Some further thoughts:

I tend not to look very intensely or closely at modern films, partly through being more of a film historian, and partly from a sense that films just don't now have that same cultural centrality.

I don't care enough about current films now, in the way I used to do. When *The Courtship of Eddie's Father* came out, that was the most important thing that was happening in the world at that time and it was terribly important to keep seeing it and to celebrate it. I think it is partly to do with the postmodern culture, if you use that word, that makes everything continuously accessible. If a film comes out now there's no special reason to catch it at the cinema because it will be on rental video, it will be on sell-through video, it will be on television again, it will always be available.

Q: *It's almost like the sense that the Wednesday Play or Play for Today had an audience, when you only had a couple of television channels, and almost the whole population would have watched it.*

Yes, and you had to see it now. You had to see *Cathy Come Home* then because it was never going to be repeated. It was like you had to go to the theatre to see something because when the production stopped that was it. And

Cathy Come Home was exceptional in being repeated, and then it took ages before it was available. Something like *The Courtship of Eddie's Father* wouldn't automatically stay around and form part of a repertory.

A very strong admiration for Peckinpah is something I have in common with Doug, not just *Straw Dogs* (I'm not sure how I rate that compared with the others) but I feel something like *Junior Bonner* works on a level of intensity, eloquence and complexity level with any Western by anyone. But that's early 70s, isn't it? I'm just not sure if something like *The Last of the Mohicans* could repay the same close attention. I know very well that a film like that has the same level of detailed serious input, that it is worked out over a very long period, and is put together with immense care and commitment. Maybe I should set myself to really look at a film like that. And then Loach and Scorsese. Perhaps. But I suppose I just don't feel the urge to settle down and do such close analysis. What am I doing now? I'm working on *Vertigo*, and Hitchcock's British films, and British World War II films – those are the three things I've got to do before I can do my book about *Wicket Keeping*. And 1958 is precisely the moment before I started to get interested in films, and before the *Movie / Oxford Opinion* generation started to come through. So *Vertigo* in a way marks off that period, at the end of the classical era.

¹ Wimsatt, William Kurtz (1954) *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 81.

² Barr's recollection of critical material is generally extraordinarily accurate. However, I think Anderson's recollection of seeing *My Darling Clementine* only appears in *About John Ford* – although he, Ericsson and Lambert did indeed celebrate the film and its director.