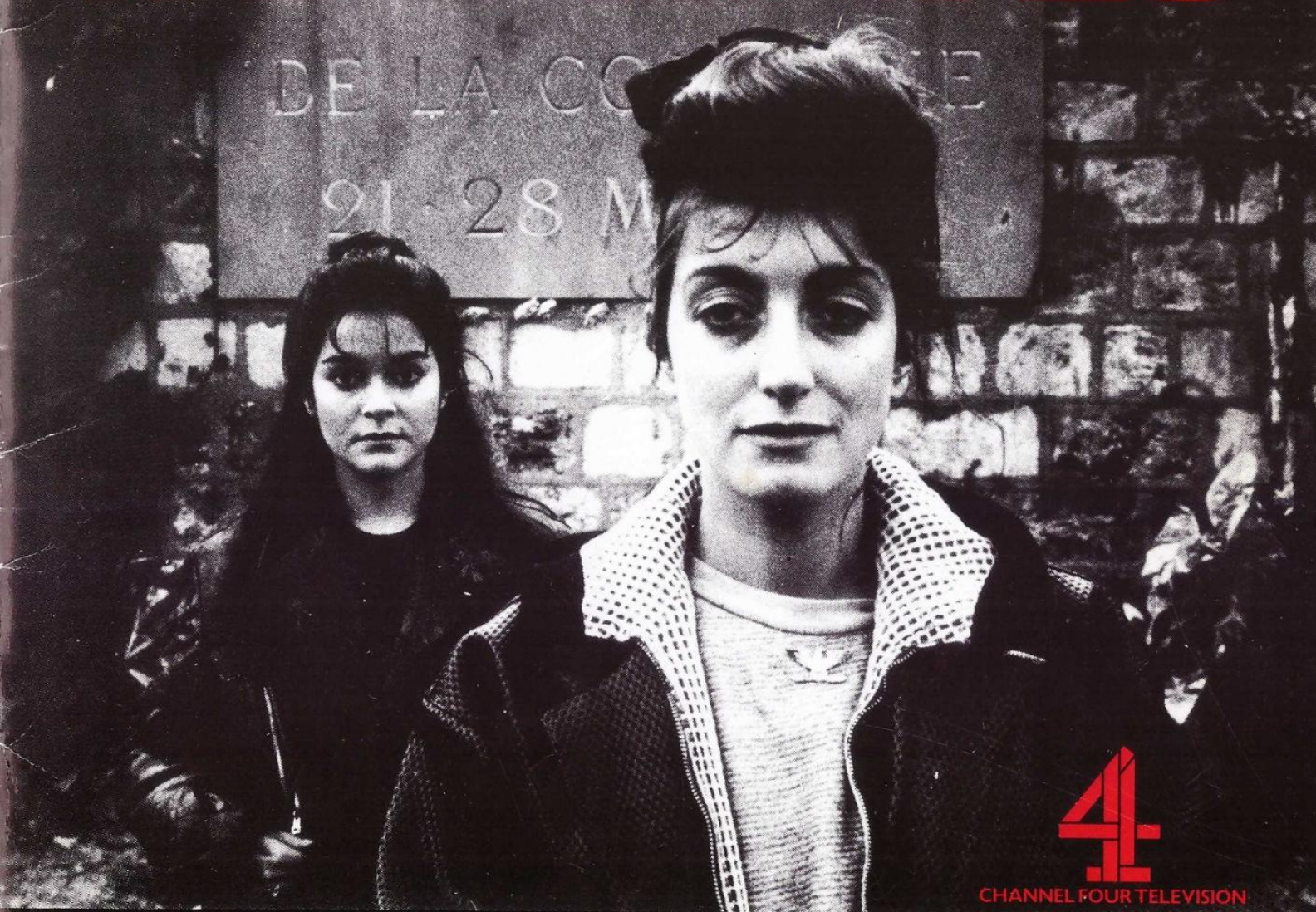


ELEVENTH HOUR PRESENTS

'NEW WAVES'



CHANNEL FOUR TELEVISION

ELEVENTH HOUR PRESENTS

'NEW WAVES'



Channel Four Independent Film and Video: Alan Fountain, Rod Stoneman, Marian Whale.

Text by **Jane Root**, Designed by Michael Leedham, Andy Chambers. Typeset and printed by Lithosphere.

Front cover: *Ghost Dance*. Back cover: *Through an Unknown Land*. Title page: *Ascendancy*.

Further copies of this booklet available free from: Marian Whale, Channel Four Television, 60 Charlotte Street, London W1P 2AX. Telephone: 01 631 4444

Introduction

Until recently, most of the attention afforded the much heralded 'renaissance' of British film-making has been concentrated on potentially Oscar-winning big-budget feature films. But alongside these internationally visible achievements there has been another, less public but equally important development in British film-making: the production of an increasing number of provocative and daring feature films by younger film-makers working on comparatively smaller budgets.

These films, of which eight of the best are featured in The New Waves season, are not afraid to take risks either with how they look or what they say. Several take a caustic look at old established film and television conventions: both *Ghost Dance* and *Darkest England* make jokes at the expense of what we might expect from films centred, respectively, around inner city decline and Victorian sexuality to be like. *Brothers and Sisters* meanwhile, has been described as a 'subversive thriller' and includes a visually stunning Hitchcock style section and *Acceptable Levels* delivers a hard headed broadside against traditional documentary techniques of 'getting the story'.

Neither are they scared to touch the politically sensitive spots which might be shunned by over-cautious film-makers: the films featured in this season ask awkward questions about the Falklands war (*Through An Unknown Land*), the experience of being black in Britain today (*Burning an Illusion*), Ireland (*Ascendancy*, *Acceptable Levels*), industrial decline (*Ends and Means*, *Ghost Dance*). An investigation into just what it means to be British today surfaces in very different ways in several of them, as does a more than simply nostalgic interest in the past: 'So where shall I look for history?' one of the narrators asks in Mick Eaton's *Darkest England*, 'What was it like? The present in drag? Just like now – but in fancy dress?'

The risk-taking extends beyond the willingness of individual film-makers to

thwart established expectations – the fact that these films have been made at all is itself a result of the preparedness of several different organisations to actively support new types of projects and new ways of working. *Ghost Dance*, *Through An Unknown Land* and *Darkest England* were directly funded by Channel Four's the Eleventh Hour – the part of the station with a brief to work outside the relatively conservative traditions of British television. Three other members of this new generation of feature films (*Burning an Illusion*, *Brothers and Sisters* and *Ascendancy*) were the result of finance from the production board of the British Film Institute.

Perhaps most interesting of all, however, is the fact that the other two – *Ends and Means* and *Acceptable Levels* – are the first feature length result of 'the workshop agreement', a unique partnership between Channel Four and the ACTT, the film and video-workers union. The agreement means that for the first time filmworkers in several different cities around Britain are guaranteed stable employment at a standard wage within a self-managed work situation. The groups 'enfranchised' by the agreement hold the rights over material they produce and are allowed to feed their profits back into new production. This frees them from what many had come to see as the tyranny of continually searching for insecure short time funding from arts organisations and the commercial industry. 'I thought I was supposed to be making films' one director says 'but in fact I was spending my whole time waiting in corridors for some committee or other to make up their minds.'

'The Workshop Declaration is interesting because it is not an art-oriented declaration centred on some notion of high art or culture' on of the Frontroom Workshop who made *Acceptable Levels* comments. 'It is a real industrial document, about jobs, about the creation of a new kind of film

industry. Two years ago we were spending our whole time knocking on doors. Now we are in a situation where people come to us with scripts and there is a conceivable chance that we would be able to work with them and put money into their projects.' Trade Films, who operate from Newcastle, are similarly optimistic, but in different ways: for them the crucial importance of the agreement is that it allows them to produce films with a strong regional content – something which has been missing for a long time from Britain's excessively London based film culture. Trade also work closely with their local community, in education, research and distribution and alongside the Northern Film and Television Archive which they established in 1983.

Almost all of the other workshops enfranchised by the agreement have major film projects either being made or in the process of development. The London based Newsreel Collective are working on a fiction film about motherhood, for example, while Cinema Action are nearing the completion of what they describe as a 25 minute 'black doo-wop musical'. Amber films who are situated in Newcastle, like Trade, are working on a project about T. Dan Smith, the Northern Labour leader implicated in the Poulson scandal.

The diversity of these projects is itself a tribute to the new energy in British film culture, as is the acclaim which those films in the season that have been shown in cinemas have received. What must be hoped now is that the momentum that has been built up will not dissipate (as has happened with some other much discussed 'rivals' of the British film industry) so that other individual directors and groups of film-makers will get the chance to challenge, excite, amuse and, perhaps occasionally, shock their audiences.

Acceptable Levels

by Frontroom

**The best Ireland can
hope for is a return to
an acceptable level
of violence**



The title of this new feature film set in Catholic Belfast is taken from a mid-1970's pronouncement by Reginald Maudling that the best Ireland can hope for is a return to 'acceptable levels' of violence. In part, *Acceptable Levels* is a detailed evocation of the day-to-day experience of living in a community that politicians can so casually and crassly dismiss. But the phrase also has another meaning: it crops up throughout the film, used by a television sound recordist when he is confident that sound levels are suitable for professional quality recording. It is a clever and appropriate pun, since the heart of *Acceptable Levels* is a drama about how such apparently neutral technical standards can be an excuse for the confirmation of prejudices – prejudices which in this case include the deeply ingrained English idea that violence in Ireland is unexceptional, inevitable, and even, perhaps, acceptable.

The film's investigation of these connections begins with a visit to the 'notorious' Divis Flats by a BBC documentary crew headed by the ambitious and overbearing Simon Ward, a producer with an eye for what comes over strong on television and few qualms about how he gets it there. His team's task is to film material for a special 'violent Ireland' episode of 'Britain's Children', a series which claims to see the world through children's eyes. Prior to their arrival, Sue McKenna, a well-intentioned Irish-born researcher, had worked hard to assuage the doubts of the McAteer family and eventually succeeded in persuading them that, for the sake of all Divis residents, they should allow Roisin, their daughter, to be the focus of the programme. Sue McKenna's role, in the words of Robert Smith, one of the production team that made *Acceptable Levels*, is that of 'sharp end of the wedge'. Behind her comes the rest of the BBC machine, which then proceeds to trundle relentlessly over the lives of the McAteers.

From the point of view of the crew everything is proceeding reasonably smoothly until Roisin's

best friend, Jackie, is shot dead outside the McAteer's flat by an army-fired plastic bullet. Simon's team arrive just in time to film the raw, angry, aftermath of the killing which includes a neighbour brandishing the bullet and shouting 'Show this on your British TV'. This footage becomes the pivot of *Acceptable Levels*, the point around which questions are asked and compromises are slowly and irrevocably made. While Jackie's mother wonders whether it can be of any use in publicising the circumstances of her daughter's death, the army gets scared about the impression the film could make and ineptly attempts to convince Simon and Sue that they should also show 'their side of the story'. Simon, meanwhile, frets about technical quality, and worries if the harshly authentic accusations might unbalance his increasingly bland and sentimental film about an innocent caught in the cross-fire. . .

Frontroom Productions, who made *Acceptable Levels* in collaboration with the Belfast Film Workshop, believe that one of the most important things about the film is its concentration on the institutional pressures that shape the media's coverage of subjects like Ireland. 'We were interested in the conflicts over the way you work with material' Gordon Hann, one of the script-writers says. 'I think that the difference between this and films like *The Ploughman's Lunch* and *Year of Living Dangerously* is that they all end up suggesting that in one way or another an individual journalist can change the world, by getting hold of a particular piece of information and then presenting it to the nation in a way that alters the course of history. If they fail, then all kinds of moral invective is poured on the journalist's head for chickening out.'

Robert Smith agrees. 'The film tries to expose the broader system that these people work in, to make it not just a little individual drama of which they are centre, but something much bigger than that. For instance, we were very concerned about self-

censorship, the way people talk themselves into things, because in the long run that can have much more power than corporate censorship.'

As part of this approach Frontroom tried to avoid creating either heroes or villains. Although it could be argued that they weren't completely successful in this aim – Simon, for instance, is a particularly nasty piece of work, personifying most of the clichéd failings of a Hampstead media-personality – *Acceptable Levels* is remarkable for the honesty with which it portrays the likeable but unromanticised



McAteers and the working-class technicians with the crew, figures who are mysteriously absent from most of films about television. 'We wanted an interaction between a good strong family and good strong crew' Smith says. 'We didn't want to sink one in favour of the other.' Hann continues 'The film crew are presented as doing a job, which comes from the experience of Robert, John (Davies) and Ellin (Hare). They knew that it involved going out on the streets, but also meant finding somewhere decent to eat that night and wanted to capture the texture of that experience.'

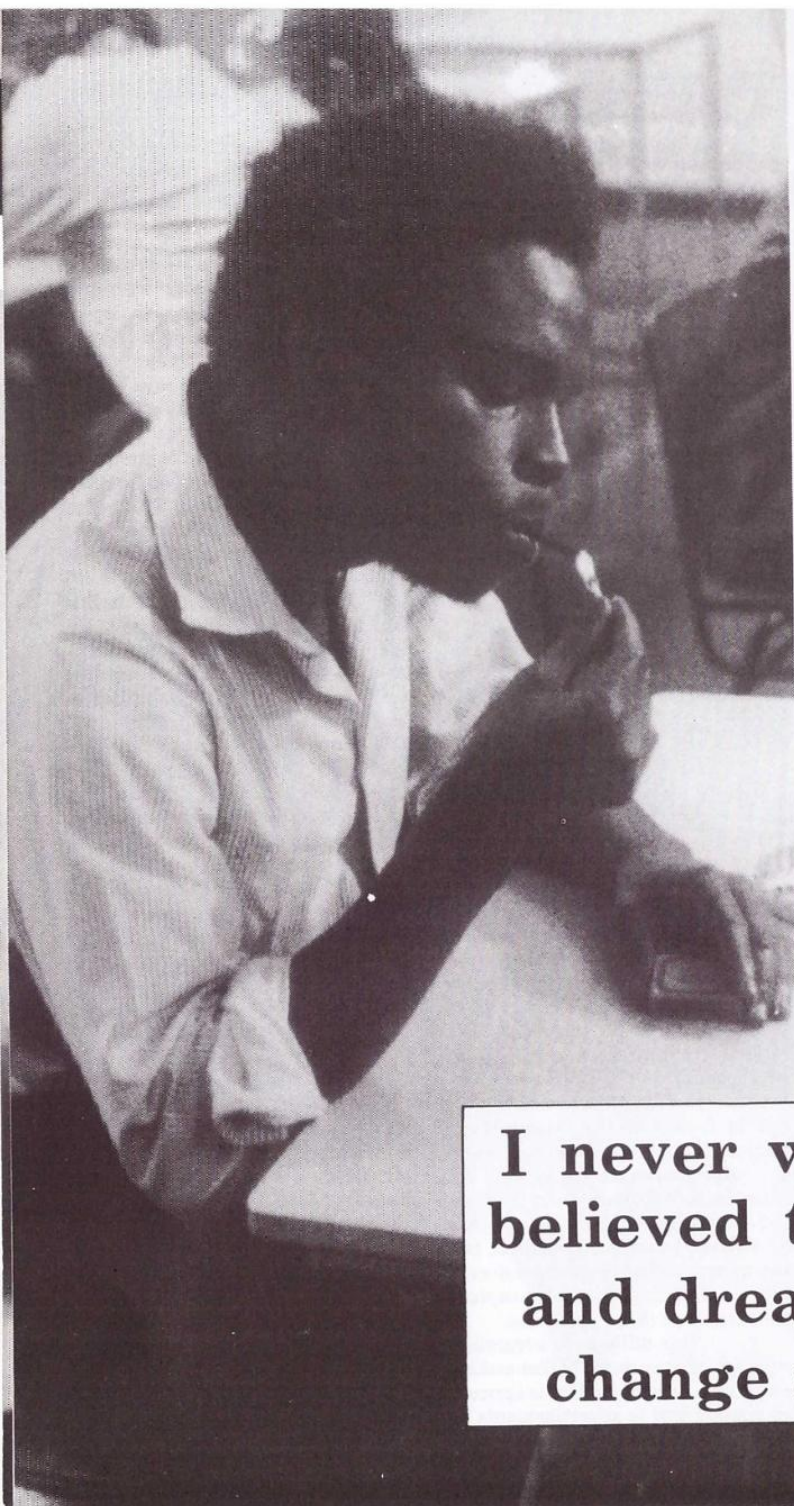
It is difficult to accurately represent the processes of film-making – although *Acceptable Levels* appears on posters and in advertisements as

'John Davies' *Acceptable Levels*', the film is actually a rare example of a feature film made by collective working procedures. There are, for instance, no less than six credited script-writers, and two assistant directors alongside the overall director. Smith says that 'At a very early stage we decided to conceive it as a group, with very different people having an input.' The passage from the original plan to finished film was not easy – even Frontroom's own leaflet says 'no-one would pretend the production was bloodless' – but, despite this, the remaining members of the group still firmly believe in developing projects as a group and working on the set without absolute demarcation between jobs, although a system of division of labour does apply.

Acceptable Levels is the first full length feature film to be made under ACTT's Workshop Declaration, a development which has been vital to Frontroom's growth. John Davies and Robert Smith set up the group in 1979 to make *City Farm*, and Ellin Hare joined the following year, during the making of *Maeve*, Frontroom's collaboration with Irish film-maker Pat Murphy. 'We used to talk about making some sort of contribution to English film culture, but the problems that came from being just a few individuals trying to make films and get them shown were immense'. Smith remembers. 'But we were working in a way that was more or less inside the terms of the Workshop Declaration even before we had set eyes on it. When we heard about it, it naturally followed that we would try and get involved. At the time we didn't understand all the implications, but now, two years later, it is extremely exciting. We can actually take the kinds of issues which wouldn't normally be dealt with by the mainstream and develop them in a way that so-called 'ordinary people' will feel is a response to their lives, something which is personal to them.'

Films by Frontroom: (1979) *City Farm*. (1981) *Maeve* (with Pat Murphy).

CHANNEL FOUR: April 30th 1984



Burning



It is rare to see black communities presented in British fiction: rarer still to see them portrayed from within by a black film-maker. And yet Menelik Shabazz's British Film Institute funded film *Burning an Illusion*, described by one critic as 'the best film yet about British black people' not only shows the experience of growing up black in Britain today, but does so in a way that manages to be affectionate, tough, shocking and amusing at the same time.

The film is centred around the experiences which force Pat (brilliantly played by Cassie McFarlane), into realising the possibilities and pleasures that can come

from thinking about life in a political way. At the beginning of the film she is a fashion-conscious young office worker who hankers after marriage, a better flat and more clothes: by the end she has literally burnt the illusions of Barbara Cartland and become a mature and self-confident fighter against black oppression. 'I never would have believed that my life and dreams would have changed so much' Pat says in one of the gently self-reflective voice-overs which punctuate the action.

Pat's steps along this road are not easy, motivated by painful experience rather than abstract theory. The violent and arrogant attitudes of Del, Pat's lover, force her to throw him out her flat, but then once they have started to re-build their relationship he is wrongfully arrested after a fight at a night-club and brutally assaulted by the police. Branded a trouble-maker, he is sent to prison for four years.

'I was trying to understand the personal process of becoming conscious of oppression' Shabazz says. 'The circumstances that people find themselves in narrow their choices; once Pat has met Del and made a

I never would have believed that my life and dreams would change so much *Pat*

An Illusion

by Menelik Shabazz

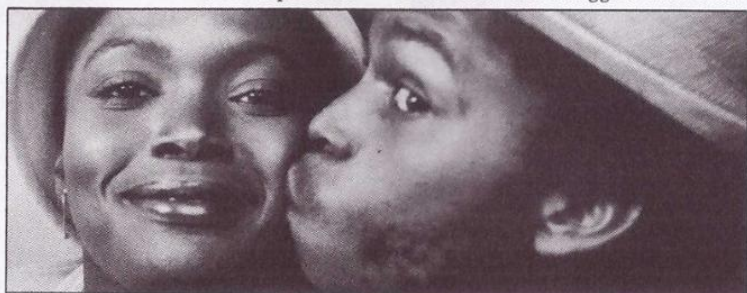
commitment to him that narrows her choices. When I was writing the script I saw that the SUS laws and the institutional pressures on black people, especially young ones, were caught up in the materialist values of putting self first. Like Pat in the film, people are beginning to question things, not out of wanting to, but because they have to. This is happening more and more.'

One of the most powerful aspects of *Burning an Illusion* is its knowing examination of what it is not only to be black, but a black woman. Pat's close relationship with her friends is affectionately depicted, but the film does not shrink from a more caustic look at the macho aspects of

you into stereotypes, but also to show relationships aren't isolated but connected to outside forces as well.'

Although *Burning An Illusion* deals with complex issues of race and sex it is also an intensely enjoyable film, one that, as a critic said at the time of its general release, 'Lets you leave the cinema with a smile on your face.' That was a conscious decision' Shabazz says, 'Its partly because people don't want to see films that portray life in a very down way and go home depressed – the people experiencing most hardships can't afford to live like that.

'But its also because I'm an optimistic person and see an optimism manifested in black people. Right now a lot of changes are happening and I feel the energy of black people getting stronger, not weaker. The fact that I'm working has to do with the struggles that black



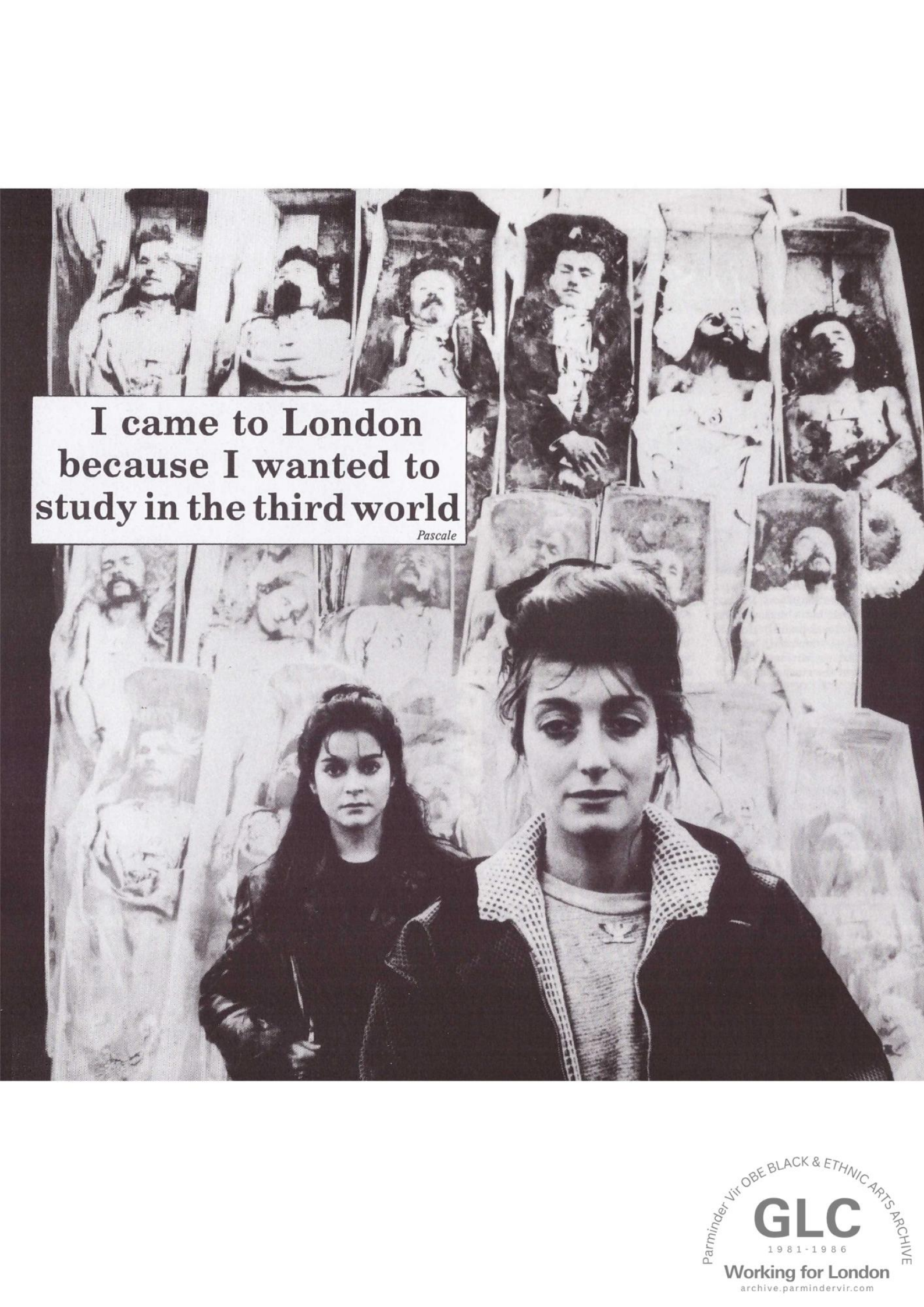
black male culture. 'As a male it is easy to become stereotyped in certain attitudes. I think that a lot of men that write are not really conscious of women. But all around me there are people I have fed off, both in terms of showing them what I've done and just watching them. All those things are bound up in just watching and living. I don't just see it as a story about women, but as a story of all black people. I wanted to get people to question the way society conditions

people are waging; it was after the uprising in 1976 that ATV woke up to black people like me who already have positions that tend to ride on the changes made by the people at the bottom. That is why I feel that there is an important responsibility to reflect truthfully the lives of black people here, both their oppression and their liberty.'

Films and television by Menelik Shabazz: (1976) *Step Forward Youth*. (1978) *Breaking Point*. (1983) *I am not Two Islands* (producer).

CHANNEL FOUR: May 7th 1984





**I came to London
because I wanted to
study in the third world**

Pascale

Ghost Dance

by Ken McMullen



Ghost Dance in a European rather than purely British context. It has also been suggested that there is something slightly un-British about McMullen's willingness to take the risks which have resulted in a film in which many sequences work brilliantly, while a few have failed to communicate anything to most people who have watched the film.

McMullen appears to have sympathy with these points of view, commenting 'A lot of British independent work has had a rather puritanical streak. There were very good reasons for this, but I wanted to avoid it and its tendency to say "here is the truth". Instead, I wanted to say "here is a proposition, some of which is rational, some of which is completely irrational". I'm very interested in the Cuban notion of a cinema of non-perfection, the idea that firstly a film shouldn't be seen as a perfect product, and that secondly it's not complete without the varying readings that different kinds of audiences will make. Obviously you can't follow this making films at all. But some engagement with those kinds of ideas is good, and that's what *Ghost Dance* is partly about'.

Films by Ken McMullen: (1971) *Room to Move, Pieces*. (1972) *The Discussion* (made with Joseph Beuys). (1972) *Beuys in London* (made with Joseph Beuys) (1973) *Blackness* (made with Stuart Brisley and Brian Eno). (1974) *Lovelies and Dowdies*. (1976) *Resistance*.



CHANNEL FOUR: May 14th 1984

verge of extinction. Ken McMullen explains that 'At these points reality becomes difficult to deal with, even impossible. When a clear look at reality becomes a kind of despair, the gap is compensated for by magical thinking. Societies on the point of change produce compensatory myths. With the industrial decay or whatever it is that we are now going through they have become a possible phenomena in Britain'. The scope of the project expanded, but the theme remained: when Marianne asks Pascale why she has come to London, she replies 'I wanted to study in the Third World'.

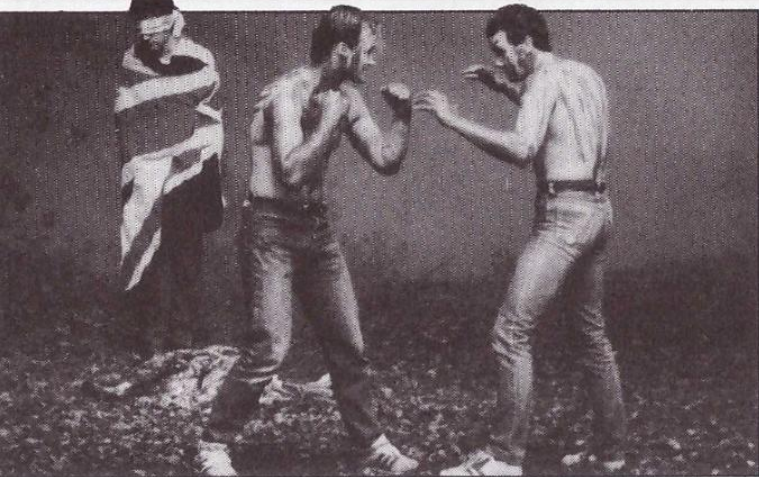
This fracturing of society is mirrored by the structure of *Ghost Dance* - by the ghosts in its own machine. Evocative but obtuse titles divide the film into sections. Disembodied voices, representing the splintered psyches produced by crisis, recite myths and read quotations from Freud, Trotsky and, of course, Derrida. And yet at the same time, the potentially rather domineering authority conjured up by these gurus is swiftly undercut by the women's

Inner city crisis, impossible day-dreams, industrial decline coupled with technological innovation, unemployment A superficial list of some of the themes of Ken McMullen's *Ghost Dance* can make it sound like another in the growing list of films concerned to show the effects of economic crisis as realistically as possible. Expectations along these lines will inevitably be thwarted, however, for *Ghost Dance* is a glittering, mysterious and deliberately poetic film, about as far from the gritty naturalism of recent docu-dramas as is possible to imagine. Although Britain's malaise is central to the film, its real premise is, as one of its many narrators says, that 'When things are breaking up, people will believe in anything'.

The signs of this dissolution are ghosts: ghosts which inhabit the streams of traffic which flow silently through cities at night, ghosts that flicker on cinema screens, ghosts that have been forced out of older residences into electronic machines. In *Ghost Dance* these manifestations are encountered by Marianne, a hard-headed, witty Englishwoman and Pascale, a Parisienne attempting to finish a thesis on cargo cults. Both women are trying to stop time and exorcise the accumulated historical ghosts that haunt their memories. It is their quest, which includes encounters with performance artist Stuart Brisley, France's current philosopher-hero Jacques Derrida and the oafish George, Marianne's sex and long range weather forecast obsessed flatmate (played by Comic Strip performer Robbie Coltrane), that forms the backbone to the film.

The first drafts of what eventually became *Ghost Dance* were structured around cargo cults, the myths and rituals which develop in some primitive communities on the

Through An U



**A vision of England
to put the rest of the
things you see on TV in
a different perspective**

Phil Mulloy



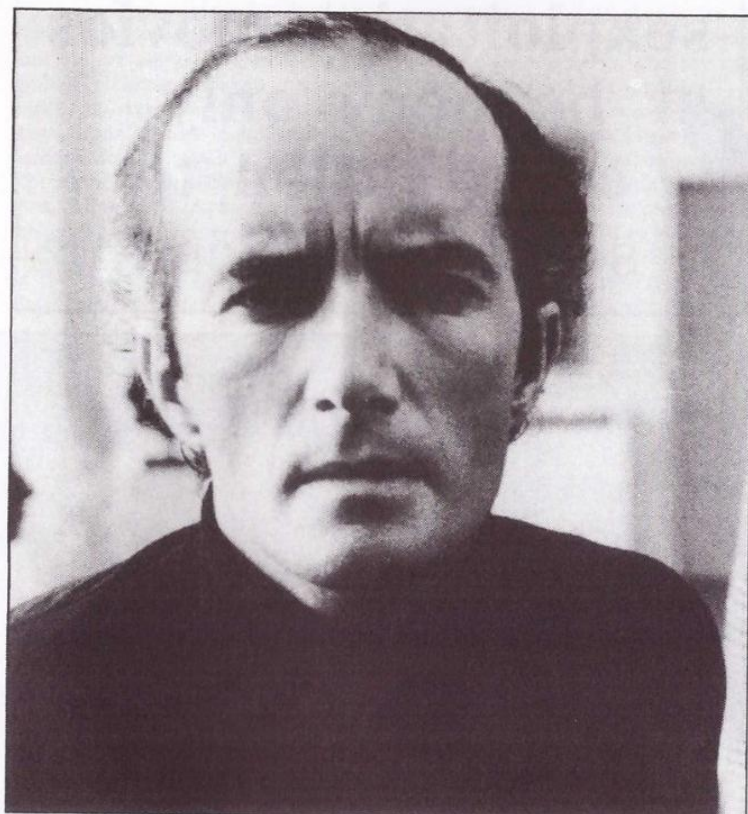
The title of *Through An Unknown Land* makes the film sound as though it could either be a science fiction-type fantasy, or a documentary-like investigation of Britain today. In fact, Phil Mulloy's film has touches of

both, using an engaging combination of realism and hallucination to look at the situation of the Todds, described by Mulloy as 'a perfectly ordinary working class family'.

The father of the family,

Unknown Land

by Phil Mulloy

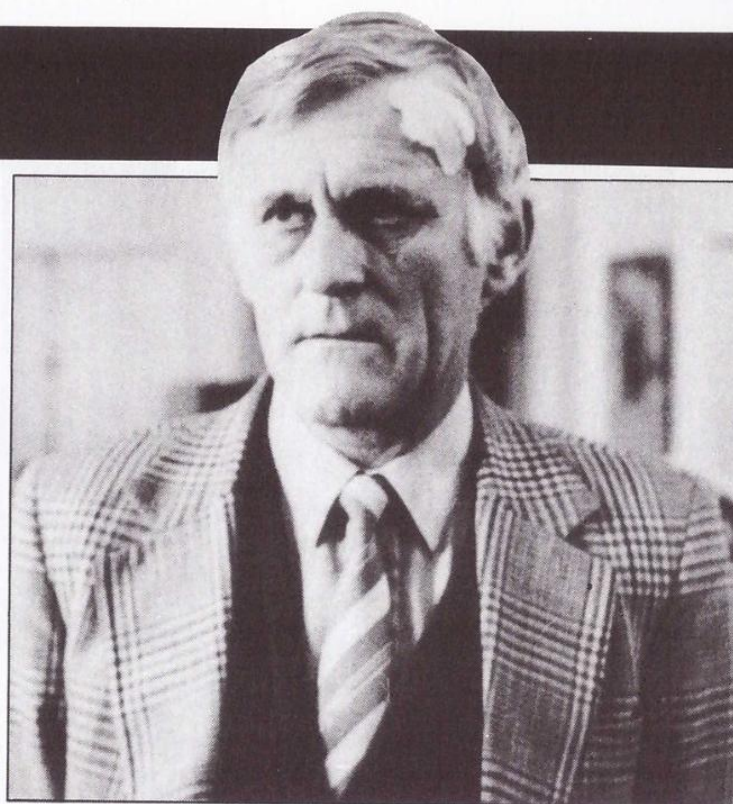


the Churchill-obsessed Mr. Todd, is sickly and irritable, unable to get used to his new council house on a 'working man's utopia' of an estate. His only pleasure is his vast collection of patriotic ephemera which dominates the family's cramped living room. He worries, his wife confides to Kathy, (the girlfriend of their son, Pete) that he is turning into an animal.

'I wanted an image of Britain where people are being dehumanised'

Mulloy says 'And the degree of that is expressed by the father. He's devoid of any kind of self except for his bodily functions and just mouths what is given to him. He's become just a body'.

But, Mr. Todd is not the only character in *Through An Unknown Land* disturbed by dreams and visions. Kathy herself is appalled by nightmares of violence in her native Belfast. Charlie, the Todd's other son, is a



psychological casualty of the war with Argentina. The momentary star in a Falklands video endlessly played by his father, he is haunted by tableaux of bloody, Union Jack bedraped, boxers. Even the owner of a garage where they stop for petrol is having a screaming, hysterical row on the telephone with what we assume is his ex-wife. As Pete and Mr. Todd watch, he takes a sledgehammer to the cars on sale. When they drive past later he is in the process of burning the entire garage down, a gesture of violence and frustration twinned with, but also very opposite to, Charlie's sweaty and fearful cowering.

The Britain envisaged in *Through An Unknown Land* is a place where disorder and shock threaten to burst through the superficial calm of neat council estates, pub gardens and elegant country houses. While the rest of her family is out, Mrs.

Todd goes to work in an electronics factory. The camera watches the women from a distance and then slowly follows the worker who brings around the wage packets. Mrs. Todd opens hers and finds that she, the family's main wage earner, has been made redundant. 'I wanted to tie together the violence of rising nationalism and the presence of the army in Northern Ireland with other types of violence, such as is done to the woman in the factory,' Mulloy says. 'The way people have been brutalised by individual violence, industrial violence, state violence. It's a vision of England which should put the rest of the things you see on TV in a different perspective when placed next to them.'

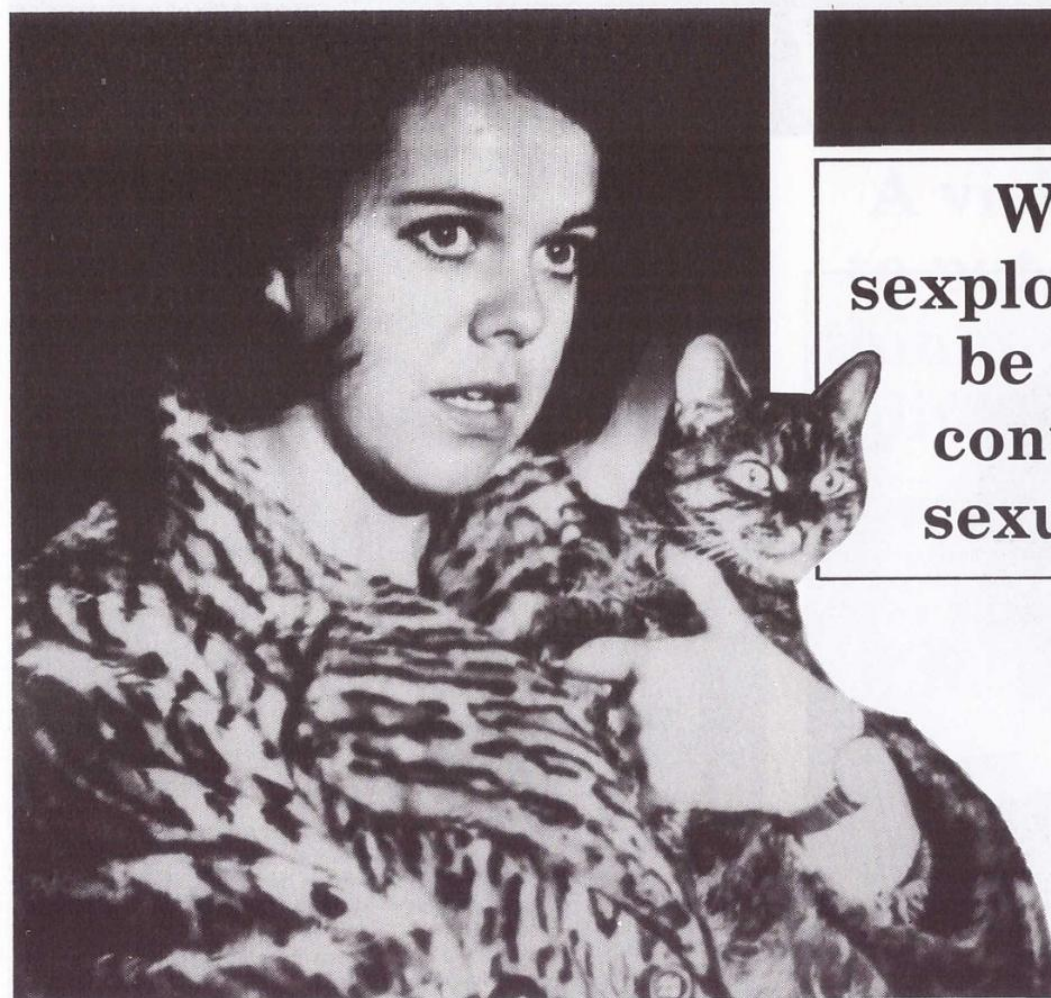
Films and Television by Phil Mulloy: (1977) *A History and the City*. (1978) *In The Forest*. (1981) *Gertler, Fragments of a Biography*. (1982) *Give Us This Day*.

CHANNEL FOUR: May 21st 1984

Brothers

Why should
sexploitation movies
be men's only
contribution to
sexual politics ?

Richard
Woolley



Night. A woman walks nervously down a dark street, her high heels clicking on the pavement as she goes. In the background cats screech and yowl. As she reaches a patch of wasteland the music on the soundtrack starts to boom. Someone lurches at her from behind a tree, but it is only a drunken tramp. Relieved, she gives him a few coins and then goes to wait on the doorstep of a derelict house for a taxi. A cat mews plaintively, and despite her fear, she goes inside to investigate. The door slams behind her and the shadow of a man advances towards the by now terrified woman. She asks

who is there. No-one replies. The figure moves closer and closer and the woman starts to scream . . .

Despite the similarities of this sequence to those of woman-in-jeopardy genre once jokily described as 'He Knows You Are Alone and Dressed To Kill On Halloween', *Brothers and Sisters* is a very different kind of thriller. Funded by the British Film Institute and described by its director, Richard Woolley, as a 'subversive whodunit', it is a provocative investigation of sexual violence and mores both inside and outside of films.

When Jennifer Collins, a part-time prostitute, is found murdered, two upper-class brothers become suspects. Neither have alibis, and although political rhetoric divides David Barrett, a self-indulgent 'revolutionary' living in a communal house from his brother, James, a right-wing army major, both men are linked by their shared sexual hypocrisy. James, it seems, prefers secret liaisons with prostitutes to sleeping with his wife, while David, who has been sneakily conducting an affair with Theresa, the dead woman's sister employed by James as a nanny, bleats that he



and Sisters

has just been 'trying to work out new codes of sexual behaviour' when challenged by Patricia, his live-in lover.

The catalyst for *Brothers and Sisters*' intertwining of 'private' matters of sexual deception and 'public' violence between strangers came from the exceptionally heated discussions of male sexual violence against women which followed the Yorkshire Ripper killings. 'I was at a party about 200 yards from where one of the early Ripper murders took place', Richard Woolley says, speaking of the genesis of the film. 'One of those parties full of aggression and

arguments about people sleeping with each other. Then, the next day, after I had heard about the murder I was walking around the streets with a man friend. I realised that as far as women were concerned either one of us could have done it. And the two strands became fused together.'

Woolley is convinced that it is vital for men as well as women to deal with questions of sexual politics. 'Topics like these shouldn't become "women's issues" left for only women to deal with while the men look at the "hard politics" like strikes. It is important that men face the contradictions of their personal lives and

by Richard Woolley



deal with them if they can. I know for myself, that the women's movement started to affect me in 1974-5, but by about 1976 I was starting to think "I've got it solved, I've just got to be nicer, and that's all". A lot of men are still behaving the same as they were, but with the added veneer of a certain way of saying things'.

Brothers and Sisters is unusual in that it regards the sexual activities of men with a suspicious and enquiring eye, rather than concentrating on inconsistencies in female behaviour, as the majority of films do. Jennifer's motives for becoming a prostitute, for instance, are shown as straightforward (she needed the money) while the brother's interest in prostitutes is shown as anything but obvious.

At the same time, however, *Brothers and Sisters* has been criticised by feminists in magazines like *Spare Rib* for using the techniques of conventional thrillers to make the audience both scared on Jennifer's behalf and keen to see the dramatic killing that has already been signalled well in advance. Woolley admits this is 'a difficult point'. 'I had hoped that I

could put the murder into perspective by spending much of the time which is normally spent in a thriller on the background attitudes. There is only about twenty minutes of thriller out of an hour and a half.'

'I wanted to try and draw attention to the way thrillers are constructed. The film is almost Hammer horror – a pastiche of how commercial cinema works, with a particular stylised form of tension built up by wind howling and cats miaowing. The real problem was that if I hadn't stuck to a standard thriller format then my ideas of showing up its exploitative nature would have gone. I felt I had to show that atmosphere of a horror film, but also the real fear that women feel walking around. I admit it is a very fine line between showing up exploitative film and yourself being exploitative. But it was always very important to me not to show any violence and not to make the film commercially successful through violent scenes.'

Films by Richard Woolley: (1974) *Kneiphofstrasse*. (1975) *Inside and Outside*. (1976) *Illusive Crimes*. (1978) *Telling Tales*.

CHANNEL FOUR: May 28th 1984



Darkest England

by Michael Eaton



'With this constant call for a return to Victorian values you have to look at the kind of values we are being asked to return to... Think about what they mean' says Mick Eaton, director of *Darkest England*, a film which deftly and wittily exposes Victorian attitudes to sex, to the poor and to the rest of the world.

'At the same time though,' Eaton continues, 'you could say that we don't have to return to Victorian values because we already live within them and carry them around inside of us. Every man in this country is implicated in the legacy of masculine codes left by the Victorians.' Codes, the film implies, which include a predilection for military adventures overseas and a tendency to see the body as dangerous alien territory which requires subjugation, by force, if necessary.

Darkest England dissects this 'white man's burden' – the burden of his white fathers' by an investigation

of the career of William Seymour, younger son of a manufacturer who, in Eaton's words, 'fails to make the grade'. We follow Seymour as he travels to Africa on the imperial mission to bring 'advancement to the lesser breeds', only to find that he, himself, is the lesser man. Returning to England, Seymour sets out on safari to the 'jungles of the city' – the squalid slums of Victorian London. Again he has an eye for good works; as before Seymour fails to find what he expected.

'When I started looking at the Victorian period I found that there were enormous connections between the way that middle class writers, politicians and social theorists talked about "the savage" in Africa and the way they talked about the "wretched poor" in London, Eaton says. "The metaphor is made explicit in the book that the film's title comes from: *Darkest England Or the Way Out*, by General William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army.' Booth

talks about the "jungle on our doorstep", "the foul and fetid swamps of Africa and the foul and fetid miasma of the streets of London". I became interested in teasing out the links between the two.'

But, the jungle in Africa and the jungle in the city were not the ultimate challenges to the Victorian upper-class male; far more threatening was the 'jungle of the body'. Seymour's aim in setting off for Africa is the subjugation of his 'baser nature in the service of my country'. He fails, and is forced into an irrevocable confrontation with his own sexuality or, as Seymour puts it, 'the ape that lives within the Trinity scholar'.

'Before the Victorian upper-middle class man could step into his father's shoes he had to serve a lengthy apprenticeship which was largely to do with the repression of sexuality' Eaton says. 'It started in the public schools, continued in single sex universities and the services.

Africa, the terrain on which young men had to prove themselves, was talked about in the same terms men we use today to talk about the unconscious – a dark unknown continent. I began to realise that it wasn't such an impossible connection for me to make.'

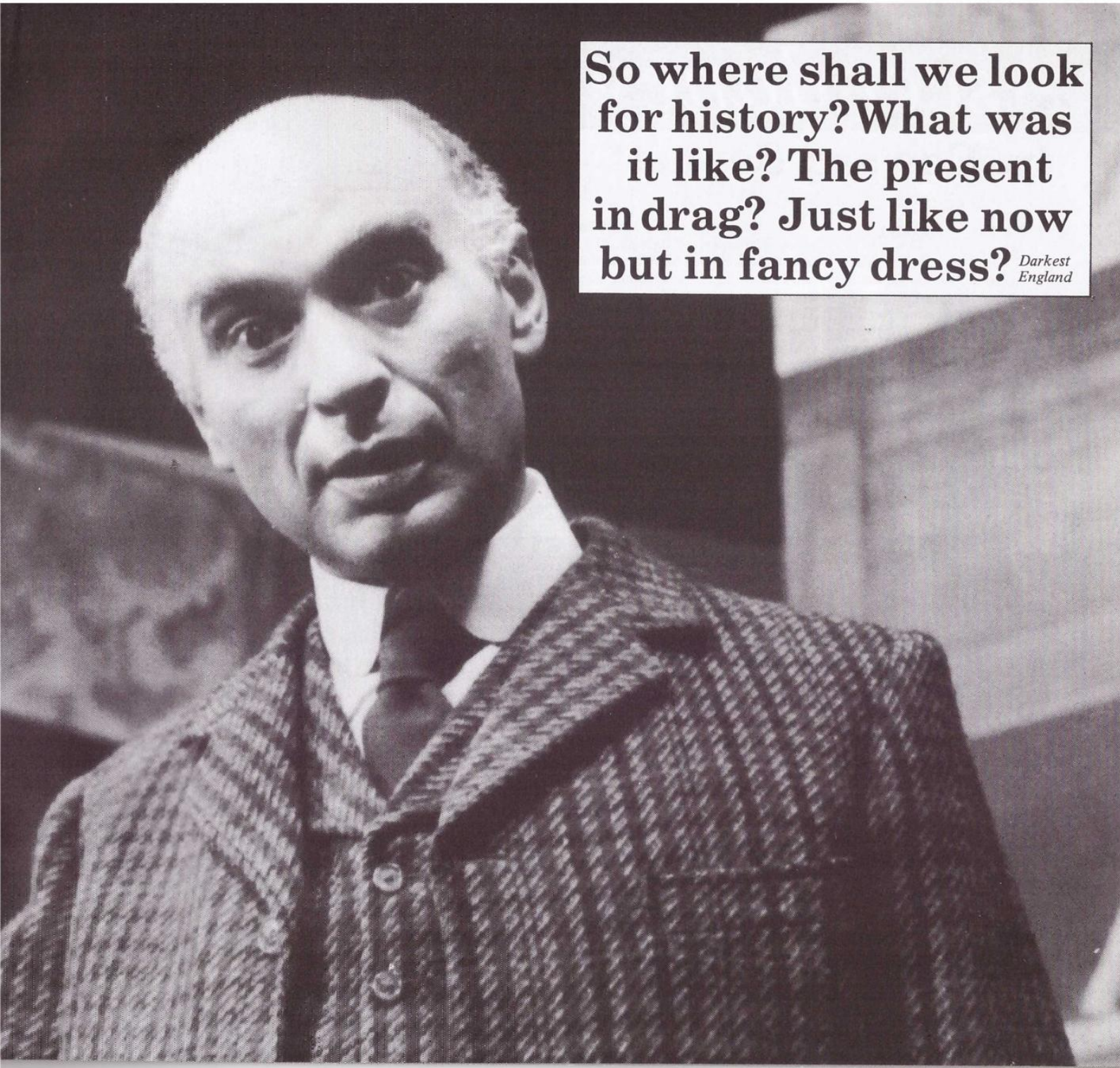
'I set Seymour up in order to knock him down' Eaton continues. 'The film is my revenge on middle class men. Not belonging to their class, I've always had an incredible amount of personal resentment towards them, but at the same time also had an ambiguous fascination for the people who run the show. We ought to be more interested in the ruling classes, not just the way that they rule, but the psychic ramifications of being born to rule. I wanted to know about the fallout from this process, why certain things were the object of so much worry and so much study.'

Eaton's interest in why the Victorians should have spent so much time on the people they exploited is continued in his amused questioning of the processes of history; 'What was it like? The present in drag', he says at one point in *Darkest England*. His film mercilessly plays around with the brands of history seen on television: bizarre imperialist photographs are inappropriately coloured, a slightly batty medium successfully challenges the logic of Seymour's historian grandson – the film's nominal anchorman.

'On TV you get Magnus Magnusson coming on and saying "I'm Magnus Magnusson and I'm really interested in Vikings" and that's it. It leaves out why anyone is interested in the first place. What is this enquiry all about? Making us better people? More aware people? Freeing us from the chains of the past? Or creating a tradition which we, as contemporary English people, are supposed to be proud of? *Darkest England* doesn't come up with all the answers but it does at least make the process of enquiry more explicit.'

Films by Michael Eaton: (1981) *Description of the World*. (1982) *Caution – Images at Work*. (1983) *Frozen Music*.

CHANNEL FOUR: June 4th 1984



**So where shall we look
for history? What was
it like? The present
in drag? Just like now
but in fancy dress?** *Darkest
England*

Ascendancy

by Edward Bennett

Edward Bennett's *Ascendancy* begins with delicately blue-tinted newsreel footage of the First World War: chaotic bombed out churches, shells landing in the middle of running, anti-like soldiers, tanks careering over the wasteland that was once Northern France. Then, the scene shifts to another, different kind of war where women bang dustbin lids to warn of an army which marches through the streets with the support of the land-owning classes. It is Ireland, in 1920. The uprising against the British is gathering strength and the Protestants are preparing to fight the Fenians and set up their own, six county, state.

To Connie (played by Julie Covington) the perfunctory drilling of eager, uniformed young men is sickeningly and ominously familiar. Since the death of her deeply loved brother on the Somme four years earlier, she has spent her time writing him letters as though he were alive and trying to force her way into his old room. Her right arm hangs uselessly by her side, the fingers clawed as the result of hysterical paralysis. For Connie the past is both unbearably close and impossibly unreal – just as film of the First World War is for contemporary audiences.

'A hysteric is someone who suffers from unacknowledged memories' Edward Bennett says. 'I wanted to show in a poetic kind of fashion that the past isn't really dead, as it's not for Connie and it's not for the people in Ireland. Without making it too stiff a symbol, there is meant to be a metaphorical correspondence between the person who suffers from the past and the place that also does so.'

'It's very odd if you look at newspaper reports of fighting in Belfast in the 1880's or 1920's, because you find the same streets being mentioned as you get in the news now. There are particular street corners where again and again bombs have gone off, barricades have been erected and workers trams and buses have been attacked. In Belfast you don't

Waving flags isn't a tradition — It's just a nasty habit *Connie*

feel that history progresses in a straight line, but rather goes round and round. Although *Ascendancy* isn't in any way a Marxist film, you could say that it echoes the quotation from Marx that "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living".

The deteriorating situation around Connie has an increasingly detrimental effect on her, until a confrontation with Ryder, a young officer who reminds her of her brother, makes her flee through the devastated Catholic streets of Belfast. On her belated return to her father's estate Connie takes to her bed and refuses to either talk or eat. 'Connies makes her body into a living metaphor and brings the violence into the house, which is precisely the domain it has been carefully excluded from. She does it by refusing, though, rather than crusading – she does it in the





only way she can. If she was a young man she could have done something romantic like gone off to fight for the Republicans. But she can't. She's a woman' Bennett says, in a statement which will not endear him to the feminists.

'I was interested in looking at someone who does not have a political view of the world trying to make moral sense of a situation like that' Bennett continues. 'By the end of the film Connie has realised that it isn't the kind of situation which you can chat about round a table in a good old British fashion. That's what Ryder wants to do when he goes to see her at the end – talk about it. But Ireland's not a problem you can solve in an English, democratic way. The situation was created by a cynical exploitation of the democratic ideal – a democracy designed to favour one part of the population. During the

time *Ascendancy* deals with, something which calls itself a democracy yet is in fact anything but, was created. Connie wakes up to the horror of this. She realises that talking, good intentions and kind ideas are not enough. It happens to be one of those parts of history that are about fighting.'

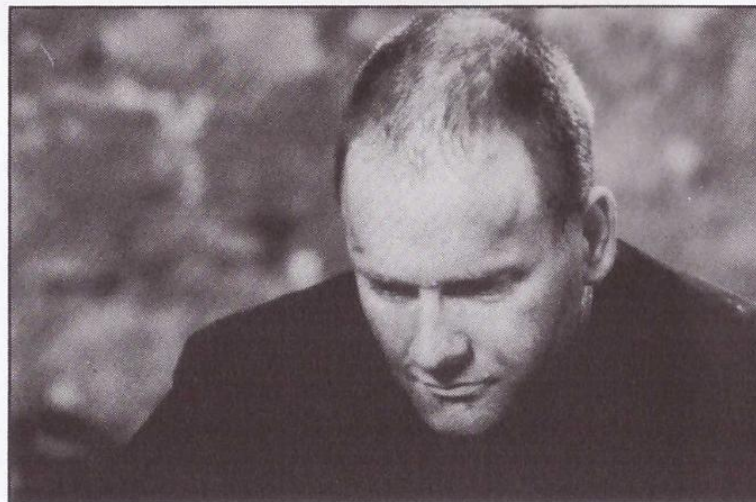
Ed Bennett's film, produced by the British Film Institute, won the Silver Bear award at the Berlin Film Festival in 1983.

Films and television by Edward Bennett: (1976) *Hogarth*. (1977) *Life Story of Baal*. (1979) *Four Questions About Art*. (1982) *Flying into the Wind*.

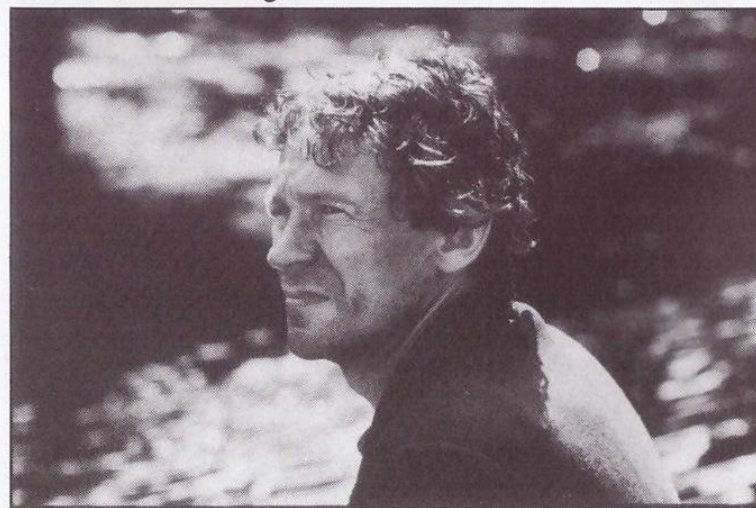
CHANNEL FOUR: June 11th 1984

Ends and Means

by Trade Films Workshop



Government consists in nothing else but so controlling subjects that they shall neither be able to, or have cause to, do you harm *Machiavelli*



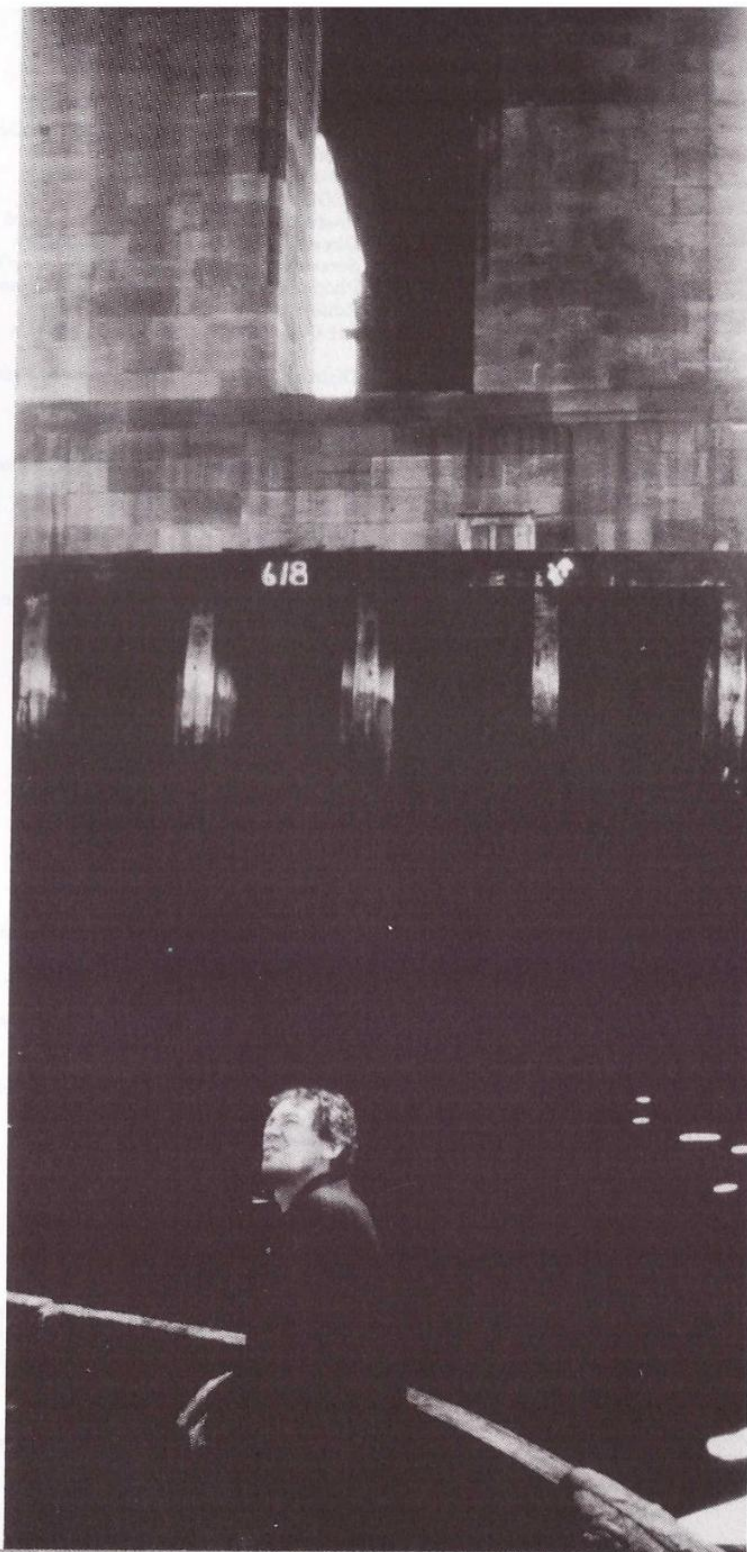
Ends and Means asks questions about money, influence, industry and class. It looks at the slump devastating the industrial towns of the North; at how much – and how little – politics have altered over the last hundred and five hundred years and at the birth of what we now call capitalism. But most of all, *Ends and Means* is a provocative examination of power; the getting, the keeping and the using of it.

Less imaginative directors than Stewart MacKinnon might have balked at the suggestion that such material was filmable at all, while others might have opted for the safely well-trodden technique of counterposing interviews with academics and documentary style 'real life' footage. *Ends and Means* rejects such ploys and substitutes an elegant, if uncompromising, three part investigation into political theory, a no-go area for conventional film-making.

The starting point for the film is the writings of sixteenth century Machiavelli, who has been described as the 'first modern political scientist'. 'Machiavelli was writing at a time when capitalism as we know it was just beginning to consolidate itself', McKinnon says. 'It was the beginning of a new epoch in European and world development.'

In a prologue we see the young Machiavelli at work tutoring his pupil, a boy-prince, in the ways of governing. Later, Machiavelli, now in exile, sets off on a long and lushly photographed journey, during which he argues at length with a merchant bound for England. Machiavelli and the merchant part. The latter, a representative of the newly emergent middle classes, sets his course for the North of England, confident in his belief that not only will trade change the world, but that it is through the self enrichment of individuals like him that social progress will be made. The merchant comes to the coast and stops to sleep on a rock: and he has a dream.

The merchant's vision is immediately recognisable – it is the story of *Robinson Crusoe*, depicted through an extensively re-cut, and



sometimes exceptionally beautiful 1920's silent movie. 'The film is an integral part of what I am trying to say' McKinnon comments, '*Robinson Crusoe* is the archetypal myth of capitalist development – a man who inherits a small body of technology, crucially, gunpowder which enables him to subordinate 'colonial' labour and accumulate through exploitation.'

Awakening, the merchant finds that he has arrived in England's North East too late: rather than the thriving and expanding capitalism he has hoped for, he faces the bleak signs of a dying industry. But the merchant is not depressed. On the contrary, he regards the wasteland he confronts as a sign of the success of capitalism – someone has made their money and then moved on to better pastures. The boatman who is transporting the merchant up the Tyne argues with him, recounting the history of the North East and patiently describing the situation of the people discarded by the departing industry.

Later, as they pass by the abandoned piers and wharves he attempts to answer his unblinking passenger's questions: How come, he demands to know, people can get rich from invisible earnings? Why are some men ashamed of their wealth these days, hiding it in banks rather than building palaces? What is it that makes ordinary people say they own their houses when in fact they belong to building societies? *Ends and Means'* device of having a figure from the past interrogate the present has something in common with the science fiction technique of basing humour around a confused alien. Suddenly, crucial and complex questions are thrown into sharp relief. It is no longer possible to assume that economic decline is a *natural* situation about which nothing can be done, no longer possible to believe that concepts like 'power' and 'influence' are only of use to political scientists.

Films by Trade: (1981) *Industrial Britain*. (1981) *Because I Am King*. (1982) *The NUPE Tape*. (1983) *Labouring Under the Law*. (1983) *Paul Rotha*. (1983) *Tony Benn*. (1984) *Who'll Keep the Red Flag Flying?*

CHANNEL FOUR: June 25th 1984

Acceptable Levels**CAST**

Key Adshead (Sue McKenna)
 Andy Rashleigh (Simon Ward)
 Sally McGaffery (Mrs. McAteer)
 George Shane (Mr. McAteer)
 Tracey Lynch (Roisin McAteer)

PRODUCTION

Production Company Frontroom Productions
 Director John Davies
 Screenplay John Davies/Alastair Herron/Kate McManus/Robert Smith
 Art Directors Alastair Herron/Kate McManus/Robert Smith

Distributor Frontroom Productions, 79 Wardour Street, London W1V 3TH

Burning An Illusion**CAST**

Cassie McFarlane (Pat Williams)
 Victor Romero (Del Bennett)
 Beverley Martin (Sonia)
 Angela Wynter (Cynthia)
 Malcolm Fredericks (Chamberlain)

PRODUCTION

Production Company Production Board of the British Film Institute
 Director Menelik Shabazz
 Screenplay Menelik Shabazz
 Editor Judy Seymour
 Art Director Miranda Melville
 Photography Roy Cornwall

Distributor BFI Film and Video Library, 81 Dean Street, London W1A 6AA

Ghost Dance**CAST**

Leonie Mellinger (Marianne)
 Pascale Ogier (Pascale)
 Robbie Coltrane (George)
 Jacques Derrida (Himself)
 Dominique Pinon (Salesman/Guide)
 Stuart Brisley (Himself)

PRODUCTION

Production Company Looseyard for Channel 4 in collaboration with ZDF (Germany)
 Director Ken McMullen
 Screenplay Ken McMullen
 Photography Peter Harvey
 Editor Robert Hargreaves

Distributor The Other Cinema, 79 Wardour Street, London W1V 3TH

Through An Unknown Land**CAST**

Julia Watson (Kathy)
 Max Hasler (Pete)
 Iain Anders (Mr. Todd)
 Hamish Kerr (Charlie)
 Clive Merrison (Lord Arlingham)

PRODUCTION

Production Company Spectre Productions for Channel 4
 Director Phil Mulloy
 Screenplay Phil Mulloy
 Photography Witold & Stok
 Editor Charlie Ware
 Art Celia Barnet

Brothers and Sisters**CAST**

Sam Dale (David Barratt)
 Carloyn Pickles (Therea Bennett/Jennifer Collins)
 Jenifer Armitage (Patricia Snow)
 Robert East (James Barratt)

PRODUCTION

Production Company Production Board of the British Film Institute
 Director Richard Woolley
 Screenplay Richard Woolley/Tammy Walker
 Photography Pascoe MacFarlane
 Editor Mick Audsley
 Art Director Miranda Melville

Distributor BFI Film and Video Library, 81 Dean Street, London W1A 6AA

Darkest England**CAST**

Mark Wing-Davey (Dr. William Seymour)
 Elvis Payne (Witch Doctor)
 Michael Robbins (Thug)
 Ken Campbell (Alienist)
 Anthony Peddler (Peddler)

PRODUCTION

Production Company Victoria Films for Channel 4
 Director Michael Eaton
 Screenplay Michael Eaton
 Photography Jeff Baggott
 Editor Roger Buck
 Art Director Caroline Amies

Ascendancy**CAST**

Julie Covington (Connie)
 Ian Charleson (Ryder)
 John Philip (Wintour)
 Susan Engel (Nurse)
 Philip Locke (Dr. Strickland)

PRODUCTION

Production Company Production Board of the British Film Institute
 Director Edward Bennett
 Screenplay Edward Bennett, Nigel Gearing
 Photography Clive Tickner
 Editors Charles Rees, George Akers
 Art Director Jamie Leonard

Distributor BFI Film and Video Library, 81 Dean Street, London W1A 6AA

Ends and Means**CAST**

Jake Denman (Child Prince)
 Doyne Byrd (Cardinal)
 Andrew Rashleigh (Machiavelli)
 Philip McGough (Merchant)
 Paul Copley (Boatman)

PRODUCTION

Production Company Trade Films for Channel 4 in collaboration with ZDF (Germany)
 Director Stewart MacKinnon
 Screenplay Stewart MacKinnon/Andrew Smith
 Photography Ian Dobbie
 Editor Brand Thumim

Distributor Trade Films, 36 Bottle Bank, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear NE8 2AR

