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"Run Britain, Run" – Steps Toward the Stylistic History of Post-war British Cinema

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to outline the modifications in cinematic style based on examples taken from post war British film art. I have decided to single out a specific visual motif – the representation of running, chases and escapes – upon which I base my arguments. This topic-treatment would have been rather unconventional a few decades ago due to the general air of critical hostility regarding British cinema. Anyone who recalls the very first pages of *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema,* where Charles Barr quotes provocative statements from directors Satyajit Ray, François Truffaut, Alfred Hitchcock and notable critics Pauline Kael, Dwight MacDonald, and David Shipman, will know about the strong scepticism regarding the existence of a truly cinematic cinema in Britain. Their opinion may testify to the general preconception that British cinema has no aesthetic appeal (exemplified by the use of only a limited number of stylistic devices, like the close-up), that it is overshadowed by the achievements of English literature and theatre and develops along tracks not specific to film art. In sum, they were convinced that contemporary cinema is suffering from the curse of early filmmakers who were not seeking stylistic diversity.

According to another, generally held opinion, British cinema's main contribution to film art is its long and strong documentary-realist tradition. As Andrew Higson argues "British cinema as a whole has habitually been thought through (that is, constructed) in terms which derive from the documentary idea" (73). This movement set out to explore the human reality, which from the very beginning meant a social reality and as film history demonstrates, the reality of class boundaries in society: a class reality. The characteristic features of realist aesthetics that were put down in the initial stage of its development are opposed to the formalist approach of heavy stylisation, and a preference for a "particular de-dramatised naturalistic form" (Higson, 76): shooting on location, improvisation, dialogue and montage editing. In short, in the case of realism there is a clear distinction between aesthetic concerns and social concerns with the latter evidently being the more important.

Despite the fact that British cinematic realism has always emphasized the manifest content of films, my aim is to follow through the valorisation of the aesthetic field and stylistic devices paying special attention to movies that were created in this tradition. I do not want to argue for the inseparability of form and

content, only suggest that with the passing of time style gradually came to be recognized as an ally of cinematic expression.

I intend my paper to be read as a snapshot-like outline of this transformation, an overview of the long decades during which the stylistic strategies of socially-conscious filmmaking developed. To make my arguments more to the point, I deliberately chose segments for analysis that lack or are not dominated by speech, in which personal talents and acting skills are more or less irrelevant – and most importantly – in which a genuine cinematic style is revealed. By ascribing a certain degree of "athleticism" to a cinema that for its initial decades had been described as in a state of perpetual standstill, I hope to outline the most basic tendencies in post-war cinematic development, a progress towards a socially aware visual cinema.

Apart from the aforementioned, there are further reasons why I chose the motif of running for discussion. In my view the capturing of human motion (the complexity of the body in movement) is not only a natural capacity – and with the development of narrative films a necessity – of cinema, but a device of a compound communicative process. Cinema became an autonomous form of art, an independent system of communication after it had come to understand and master the richness of this capacity. The physiognomy of movement is capable of expressing not only the emotional, spiritual and intellectual layers of a person, but reveals him/her as a socio-cultural entity constituted upon various customs, conventions and rules. The rich semiotics of the human posture is best illustrated by the perpetual interest it receives in fine arts, especially in sculpting. If sculptors had created uncountable openings through which the innermost reality and dynamism of the human nature reveals itself even in its stillness, it was the task of filmmakers to capitalise on these achievements and widen the cracks to enable an ever richer notion of dynamism come to the fore.

Capturing character movement/the moving character requires a deep understanding of style and the wide range of aesthetic possibilities it offers. These are not limited to photography, but extend from the recording of sound through the editing of the material to the harmonisation of the music and the image tracks. Photography is nevertheless crucial, as it will determine all the ensuing stages of construction through the angle, the distance, the height of framing and the lens and filters fitted to the camera. In short it establishes the basic visual atmosphere of the final product. We should include here the open choice of the cinematographer and director whether to use a static or a moving camera (panning, tacking shot), decisions that result in different compositions (*mise-en-scène*s). Sound is an issue of similar complexity, the choices not only include whether to use sound recorded on the set, "canned" sound or post-synchronisation, but how to interlink sound and image (e.g. synchronism, asynchronism, commentative).

If we understand editing – like Noël Carrol does – as "a means of communication […] whose practice enables filmmakers to convey stories, metaphors and even theories to spectators." (403), the way a scene is edited (e.g. continuity cutting, cross-cutting, match cutting, jump cutting) is just as much an

interpretative activity as a constructive one. The same stands for music which can create emotional, symbolic, intellectual, descriptive, decorative, evocative, provocative, and metaphorical moods and may be fused with images to emphasise realist, abstract, ironic or dramatic modes of addresses. Needless to say, these options are never exclusively technical. Aesthetic choices should never only be a means of beautifying movement for its own sake, or used as an atmospheric effect. The final choices must reflect dramaturgical considerations and be motivated by the director's thematic concerns as well. While each tiny piece of the puzzle finds its place in the final stylistic set-up, the filmmaker can freely direct the audience's attention, and construct his/her individual attitude to reality. At the same time awareness towards the constructedness of reality is made emphatic.

Any scene – including scenes with running characters – structures and interprets narrative information simultaneously and this twofold nature must always be considered. In the upcoming sections I will determine, on the one hand, how each audiovisual material is structured, how it becomes a meaningful unit, a representation. On the other hand, I analyse the ways these sequences correspond to the filmmaker's themes and as such become cinematically formulated symptoms of changing social behaviour, individual and national self-image, and the transformation of values and tradition. The second aspect seems crucial and points towards the very transformation that the above mentioned critics of British cinema were missing: the transformation into a visual cinema. If it is legitimate to say that stylistically formulated units of expression may be seen as reflections of a cultural and socio-political landscape, then the "new image" is able to enliven a richer context of communication and a more complex reality than the more traditional and less cinematic/audiovisual attitudes of British cinema. Consequently, stylisation became a self-conscious way of shaping meaning. In essence, my essay aims to determine the degree in which the representation of running/running characters involves social allegories, in other words use signifying structures for social reflections.

In short, my paper relies on the insight that the representation of human motion on screen is a complex – technical, stylistic and dramaturgical – semiotic field that can serve similarly complex – atmospheric, characterisational and thematic – strategies. As such, its accomplishment always reveals a certain sensitivity of filmmaking, sensitivity towards specific constructional paradigms and techniques of address. In the upcoming sections I will discuss film segments, case studies of what in my understanding are examples of how style emerges as social commentary. My line of inquiry is historical and points towards British cinema's shift towards a previously unconquered terrain, the acquiring of a predominantly cinematic style. This long road was covered in numerous stages involving filmmakers who either individually or on a collaborative base (forming schools or movements) steered British national cinema towards international acclaim.

Pre-war Developments

Interestingly enough, the motif of the chase dominates one of the first British productions, Cecil Hepworth's best-known film entitled *Rescued by Rover* (1905). As Charles Barr notes, *Rover* is a remarkable film of systematic organisation and "lucid succession of visual images" (Barr 1997: 7) in which running figures (a dog and his master) are central to the establishment of spatial continuity and the main line of action. Hepworth's film served as a model for D. W. Griffith, who in his own films would dramatize and turn escapes and rescues into heroic acts, leading up to the decisive encounter between characters of good and evil. To make the scenes more exciting, Griffith would develop the technique of parallel editing to emphasise tension. In the cinema of Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, Stan Oliver and Laurel Hardy running is portrayed frequently and serves as the main source of burlesque. The improvised, wild, anarchic and often absurd chases form the backbone of the films, the tremendous pace of the narrative flow is grounded in these scenes. With the dominance of the escape-pursuit type of action and the strong causality underlying it, the events follow one another in the manner of an explosive chain-reaction offering strong doses of thrills to the audience.

David Bordwell clarifies why the classical Hollywood paradigm of narration is able to reach this speed and explosiveness without falling into chaos. He points at the canon of stylistic and narrative devices that pre-exists and dominates any constructive activity and also conditions the spectators' comprehension. In this canon characters always belong to clearly identifiable character types (e.g. hero, villain) and act to reach clear objectives. The behavior, values and aims these characters embody are unambiguous and are set down at the beginning of each story, consequently, in the classical paradigm there is no place for modifications in character behaviour. There is strong and uninterrupted causality and continuity between events, according to which each scene fully receives and interprets the action of the previous one and only performs modifications to the plot that will be exhaustively accounted for in the subsequent one (170-178). The classical paradigm makes style invisible, stylistic devices are useful only as long as they take part in the general distribution of narrative information.[1]

How does the dramaturgically controlled field of stylistics portray running characters? How are characters framed during running in these films? They are done ideally in eye-level medium-long or medium shots with a static camera. For gestures and facial reactions a tighter framing, preferably the *plan américan* is used. Editing is rare, a feature reinforcing Bordwell's argument that within the classical canon the shot really functions as a scene (175). Neither is there character development, one may add. The chases never alter the identification patterns set down at the beginning of the narrative. Classical narration works

[1] This is what director Stanley Kubrick suggests when he says that Chaplin is all content and no style (Walker 23, Strick 135).

through easily identifiable stock characters: love-stricken suitors or vagabonds as the stampeding escapees and cheated husbands, angered shopkeeper, or the police as the pursuers. The chases become a genuine spectacle due to a detailed choreography of movement, the playfulness and clumsiness of the hero (portrayed in a sympathetic manner) and the conformity of the pursuer(s) is always opposed. Nevertheless, these scenes reveal a naïve, childlike understanding of human contacts and reality at large[2]. Burlesque portrays life through distorted lens, not as it is, but as it should be.

Although the burlesque genre never reached such popularity in England as it did in America – mainly because the British always had a preference for the music hall tradition as far as cinematic comedy was concerned – crime stories and early thrillers did feature chase scenes. The first British sound picture, Alfred Hitchcock's 1929 *Blackmail* includes an exotic chase sequence as the climax of the film. It is exotic, not only because it takes place in the British Museum, but because it introduces music and parallel editing. Whereas the music reflects the mental and physical weariness of the escapee, the editing puts the viewer into a similar situation of disquiet: it is made evident that the 'man' the police are chasing is really a woman. Hitchcock exchanges the long shots of the 'wrong man' and the close-up of Alice to create dramatic tension.

The Man in White Suit (1951)

The first sequence I analyse in more depth is the finale of Alexander Mackendrick's *The Man in the White Suit*. It bears stylistic influences of both traditional pursuits of the burlesque and the more sophisticated crime stories, like Hitchcock's above mentioned film. Mackendrick made his films at Ealing, the studio that was on the forefront of British comedy's revival after the World War II. Opposed to the European decline of the genre, American burlesque went through a period of flourishing after WW I. Whereas in America the naïve belief that the old-world can be restored and the traumas of the war healed by comedies was strong, pessimism prevailed on the other side of the Atlantic. But by the 40's the situation changed and Ealing must have capitalised on the general air of post-war euphoria, just as Mack Sennet Keystone's production company did in the 20's in America. As long-standing studio boss, Michael Balcon recalls, his "first desire was to get rid of as many wartime restrictions as possible and get going" (Pulleine 117). With the passing of the euphoria,[3] films became more inquisitive into the general social climate of the country. Although a comedy, *White Suit* raises with a certain sharpness questions concerning the

[2] I believe it is one of the main reasons why the burlesque gags survive and work so well in cartoons.

[3] The strong generic models fuelling burlesque could maintain an air of existential positivism well into the 20's and – and as Chaplin's body of work proves – beyond. Ealing comedies lack the permanence of narrative-stylistic structures, they express an openness of generic experimentation.

relationship between science and economy, the working and ruling classes, community and individual.

The chase-sequence in question appears at the end of the film as a dramatic climax. At first sight it resembles great moments of burlesque chases, in which we see a large crowd running after the hero, Sidney. The five minutes long sequence also contains a couple of classic gags, like the misdirection of the pursuers by an "innocent" young girl, and the appearance of a 'double' who is mistaken for the real escapee and is forced to take flight himself. But the differences are more important. The question is not whether Sidney escapes, but whether he deserves to, whether he possesses the values that make a hero. After all he is an idealist scientist, who having invented a fabric that does not wear away, threaten the textile industry with bankruptcy and its workers with unemployment.

The scene employs forward and backward tracking shots (in one instance even a crane shot), low and high angle cameras. The low angle perspective is used especially effectively, it practically blocks the running characters who are required to push each other around the camera, adding to the realism of their sweeping charge. Yet the classical paradigm is challenged not by these stylistic alterations, but by the capacity of the stylistic sphere to motivate both the emotional and intellectual legibility of both the narrative and the filmmaker's vision. Intervening in the events of the chase, there is shot of the laboratory where the viewer learns that the magical fabric is an unstable material and deteriorates after a few days. This is an essential piece of information that foreshadows a happy ending to the chase and the story alike. But before this actually happens we return to the streets where the exhausted hero begs an old lady for help. She refuses with the words: "Why can't you scientists leave things alone? What about my bit of washing when there is no washing to do?" (01:17:28– 01:17:39). [4]The apparent anguish of these words is an expression of existential fear, brining on the moment of truth for the hero, who realises that technological innovation and social good are not always reconcilable. This insight is revealed not with words, but through stylistic means: the close-up of his face captures his realisation that well-intended actions may sometimes have a destructive effect. Understanding that he is running away from a truth more irresistible than any scientific success or chemical formula, he stops running and ends the chase in critical self-examination.

In sum, Mackendrick's use of the stylistic field is not limited to serve exclusively dramaturgical needs, it plays a crucial role in expressing thematic issues. Ealing comedies in a broad sense signal a departure from the slapstick music hall tradition that had dominated previous decades of British comedy. This move included a partial estrangement from films containing lengthy dialogues, dances and singing, yet screenplays and personal acting talent (in many of Mackendrick's films that of young Alec Guiness) still dominated.

[4] Brackets contain references to particular video-segments specified as follows: hour:minute:second (hh:mm:ss).

Ealing comedies made an unmistakable move towards a more visual cinema that was willing to address the social reality openly. As long as the post-war euphoric stupor lasted, cinema safeguarded community values and welcomed the emerging welfare state. And a welfare state it was to be, even if welfare was still waiting to be made common.

The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner (1962)

The "Free Cinema" of such notable directors as Karel Reisz, Ken Loach and Tony Richardson set out to explore the other Britain of the working class which unlike the middle classes saw little benefit from the measures taken to establish general welfare. Similarly to the French New Wave, the new voices in British cinema lacked a unified stylistic-narrative approach, although realism – pretty much in line with the documentary tradition established by John Grierson in the early 1930's – was a trait they all shared. Tony Richardson's *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962) is especially close to Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* (1959). Clearly Truffaut's story and treatment was an inspiration for Richardson; it is no chance that the nonconformity of both Antoine Doinel's and Colin Smith's character is stylised in scenes of running.

These sequences are clearly symbolic, the forces from which the young characters escape are immaterial. With the characters running away from invisible forces, the rendering of their motivations become more complex. In classic narratives heroes ran either to get away from someone or to reach a given place. Here neither the object of fear nor the desired target is explicit: the characters seem to be damned by an enigmatic curse. Richardson's film expresses Smith's inherent demons during the second extended running-sequence. This is markedly different from the scene we see in which him training, where the atmosphere is euphoric, expressing the freedom of a mind free from the harsh reality and monotony of the boy's reformatory. The autumn forest, the bare branches of the towering trees under the sunny skies are revealed in 2-3 second long handheld shots, supposedly the character's optical point of view. The jumpy images and the hasty editing seize the ecstasy of the character, who is more dancing than running, his dangling arms, swinging head and smiling face – as if moving to the jazz score underlying the images – lack all the discipline of a training session. I understand the juxtaposition of the circular pan pointing skywards and the close-up of Smith at the end of the sequence to be a stylistic technique of characterisation, expressing his disengagement and uncontrolled animalistic energy. A rebellion against control, both inner and interpersonal is being ascribed to the character expressed in his union with the woods.

In my view, this intimate union is the very opposite of the artificial role we see Smith occupy in the cross-country competition, where he refuses to win. In the scene of some six minutes – dominated by close-ups – the boy is shown as an unwilling participant with a grinning face of pain taking no pleasure in athletic movement. He is not himself and by including "voices of old friends"

and cut-ins from the previous part of the narrative, where he is being instructed by his superiors, inmates, family and girlfriend how to lead a proper and worthy life, Richardson gives literal evidence of this. Bleak memories invade his mind, memories of people who allegedly want to help, but really use Smith as a means to reach purposes of their own. According to the voices he is a person unable to control his life and needs others to control it. His mother's voice stresses financial dependence – "everything in this house belongs to me, so just get that straight" (01:33:44-01:33:46), his girlfriend talks of his indecisiveness – "can't understand why you always try to run away from things" (01:35:19-01:35:21) – and the police inspector treats him as a person easily bribed: "if you play ball with us, we'll play balls with you" (01:33:17-01:33:20).

The cacophony of voices and images in his head adds up to a finely woven net of control, into which Smith is thrust and forces him to develop a marionette figure-like image of himself. The great physical-emotional pain we see on his face throughout the race marks a dramatic transformation, at the end of which he ceases to be a runner and turns into a man allegorically drowning in the swamp others have cooked up for him. An earlier scene, where his galloping figure is photographed as a reflection in a puddle, may be taken as a visual underpinning of this allegory. As the lengths of the flashbacks shorten and the speed of the montage sequence takes to new heights, Smith cuts the invisible cords of control and halts, refusing to win a race for others' sake, for people who would take the victory as an instance of self-justification. By refusing to "play ball", he rejects to be treated as a puppet. In a historical perspective he advances beyond Frank Machin of *This Sporting Life* (Lindsay Anderson, 1963), who despite his success as a rugby player looses control of life altogether. Smith's defeat is a moral victory, the refusal to be a mere a projection of others. Instead he becomes a reflection of their mediocrity and conformism, their inability to form a community based on tolerance, only a society reliant on control and humiliation.

Stylistically the final shot of the film is identical to Truffaut's closing. There an exhausted Antoine Doinel comes up to the sea where his anguished gaze into the camera is eternalised by a frozen frame. Richardson also uses the freeze frame technique, but with the inclusion of the hymn entitled *Jerusalem*[5] (based on the words of William Blake's poem *And Did Those Feet in Ancient Times*) his finale carries ironic overtones. The patriotic imagery and the powerful Biblical perspectives of Blake's poem receives an ironic edge, or rather – taking into account interpretations which call attention to the criticism of a hypocritical Christian faith in the poem –reasserts Blake's ironic edge. The "dark Satanic mill" that seem to have taken control over "England's mountains green" and "pleasant pastures" (95) is alluded to by the image of the boys

[5] The music was composed by Sir Charles Hubert Hastings Parry in 1916 and was included in the Anglican hymnody. It has also been favourite of early socialist and egalitarian movement, but later became a traditional, national hymn (an alternative national anthem) sung at various places and occasions including weddings, pubs, schools and has been nominated as the official hymn of the England cricket team. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/And_did_those_feet_in_ancient_time

assembling gas-masks back at the penitentiary. Richardson uses *Jerusalem*, a symbolic text of cultural memory and national identity as a dark commentary on contemporary social reality; he contrasts the elevated tone of the hymn with the working-class reality of terror and humiliation experienced by the juvenile hero.

Chariots Of Fire (1981)

In the history of British cinema *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* was not the last film to include *Jerusalem*. Actually, it appears next in a film that in its subject matter is dedicated to athletics. As an introductory note we can say that *Chariots Of Fire* (directed by Hugh Hudson) is a film very much in the spirit of the "official" interpretation of Blake's poem. Not only does it borrow its title from Blake's poem, but expresses strong belief in the divine grace of pastoral England and a strong community fighting for traditions and national pride. This belief was exceptionally strong at the end of the seventies and undoubtedly reflected the reality of the upper middle class. Keeping in mind that heritage films can be understood as the politically-ideologically conservative audience's cinematically expressed sense of realism.

As a showcase of heritage films *Chariots of Fire* represents a national past which – according to Andrew Higson – is "displayed as visually spectacular pastiche, inviting a nostalgic gaze that resists the ironies and social critiques so often suggested narratively" (109). He adds that this stylistic field turns away "from the high-tech aesthetics of mainstream popular cinema", nevertheless, "visual splendor lends them an extravagant epic style" (113). It is this spectacular vision of the historical past that John Hill comprehends as the main reason why *Chariots of Fire* "offers an image of Britain which generally conforms to the expectations of an international, and especially American, audience" (245). Based on these insights, I describe the running sequences of the film as over-emphasised, self-conscious representations in which the stylistic field is ideologically saturated.

Nostalgia is always glorifying, just as glory tends to be nostalgic. When famous athletes call forth their memories of fame, as in this film, glory and nostalgia become all the more powerful. Whereas in Richardson's film running was a means of escape from community standards, here it is just the opposite: a Jew of Lithuanian origin (Harold Abrahams) and a Catholic Scotsman born in China (Eric Riddell) become national heroes from the position of the outcast and make their ways into the upper class through their achievements. They win races, defeat other competitors for Britain. If we look closer, *Chariots of Fire* turns out to be more ideological, even explicitly stereotypical in its representation of English athletes and their greatest rivals, the Americans. The scene introducing their warming up for the Olympic Games is a telltale example of deliberate misrepresentation. Being portrayed – partly by the dark, industrial mood of the music – as invulnerable, fearful and inhuman machines with coaches shouting and swearing into their ears with megaphones, the cinemagoer develops a feeling of discomfort and tends to associate images of this kind to

brainwashing, a technique highly vauled in prison or the army but not on the athletic field. In short, we get an antithesis to the sporting spirit. Opposed to the ominous and artificial-looking Americans, the British athletes look more human, spiritual and natural. Identification with them is also promoted by the mesmerisingly beautiful music of Vangelis' main theme.

The competitions are not only between individuals, but values and value systems which are represented hierarchically and can be labelled – on the one hand – as patriotic (British) and – on the other hand – militant (Americans). Through visual-aural means of characterisation the filmmaker enforces moral choice: on moral grounds the viewer can only justify the victory of the English athletes.

Each sequence of running in *Chariots of Fire* is dominated by the slow-motion camera, clearly a means of aestheticizing movement. Furthermore, it leaves enough time to ponder upon the agony and determination on the faces, the distress and willpower of the body. The static camera favours long takes, establishing and medium long shots and also strengthens the spectator's position as observer. Cinematographer David Watkin applies deep focus photography a lot and owing to compositions that reveal stands packed with fans in the background, we are made aware not only of our spectatorial position, but are also reminded that ours is the best seat in the house (as the camera is often placed on the end of the home-stretch, facing the athletes). A complex stylistic set-up ensures that the viewer receives the most exotic angle on the events and motivates an emotional identification with the glorious victories of team Britain. In my understanding this is the point where ideology infiltrates the stylistic field. We are not only offered a view of the tremendous victories of the racers and the glory of a nation, but as an observer of its making, we symbolically become part of this history. History is comprehended by *Chariots of Fire* as a group-memory made up of finest hours and magic moments. Such notion of a past made communal could not have crystallised at a better moment, just before the Falklands War, another victorious reassertion of the British political-military *status quo* and national pride.

Naked (1993)

Whereas the heritage film cycle (initiated by *Chariots of Fire*) – for its renewed interest in the past and communal values – was considered by the conservative voters and the Thatcher-government as an angelic voice, to others it seemed as if the devil himself had spoken. Cinematic realism, ideologically to the left, has always been a staunch critic of class society (or rather of classes without a society), but the 80's and early 90's saw their most desperate battles. Mike Leigh's *Naked* marks an advanced stage of filmmaking that he and fellow filmmaker Ken Loach undertook from the start of their careers, often labelled as socially conscious cinema.

As opposed to the legacy of heritage films, *Naked* takes an anti-nostalgic and uncompromising look at the remains of human ties in post-Thatcher Britain.

The film covers approximately 4 days in the life of Johnny, a philosophically trained ironic nihilist, running away from a Manchester of high unemployment and low public safety after having raped a girl. Like a mature Colin Smith, Johnny is a man living defiantly outside the system, refusing to live according to other people's values or opinion and finding enjoyment in blasting away at hypocrisy whenever he encounters it. His anti-social behaviour, similarly to Smith's, is a reflection of contemporary Britain, his "angry, frustrated intelligence which also prevents him from committing himself to anything or anyone" (Street 108) reflects a society, the members of which – Leigh suggests – lack compassion, consideration and tolerance towards one another, moreover, glorify self-interest and materialism.

Naked is a realistic, yet stylised film, which may sound just as paradoxical as saying that for a radical pessimist Johnny earns our sympathy. The film is realist because it lacks the techniques of forced identification characteristic of melodrama and he can be sympathetic because he does not want to be sympathetic, only genuinely honest: naked. In my understanding a symbolic nakedness characterises the style of Leigh's film as it lacks both the ornamentalism and the spectacular action of heritage films. Yet *Naked* is not without a style. An eye-catching example would be the idiosyncratic blue-grey lightning that reveals everything to be bleak and lifeless. The same applies to the sound, to the flat and toneless voices without any background/ambient noise. The simple and to-the-point editing with straightforward compositions also contribute to the feeling that style and content in this film achieve a special harmony. As if the symbolic nakedness of the characters (who are deprived and deprive themselves of love, hope or joy) and the nakedness of words (deprived of compassion, feelings, and even a belief in them) could only be expressed through a similar nakedness of style (that deprives itself of emotional means of identification, plot and even action).

By suggesting that there is certain nakedness to the dialogues, I mean that they are stripped of pleasantries and equivocation. He may well confront others with hate and apocalyptic visions of his mind, which gives him no pleasure: it is a form of self-torture and self-despise. Images and words "function" alike, this similarity however does not mean that images are relegated to the role of illustration, but that they come to possess "wordly" features. The strained and tense atmosphere of the dialogues is captured by the shot-reaction shot editing scheme, a narrative technique that makes legible the underlying principles and strategies of character interaction. Johnny's strategy is a calculated one: he sets out with an insult of some kind and independent of the reaction comes to dominate the conversation with verbal wits. This dominance is also revealed stylistically, as for most of the shots he occupies the middle of the frame. Just as he confronts others he is confronted by the frame that – at times – literally imprisons him. In the scene when he decides to leave Lousie and Sophie and "conquer" the streets, he walks tensely between the kitchen and the living room of the house followed by Sophie at whom he finally shouts the following words: "D'you ever get the feelin' that you're bein' followed? Look, will you just leave

me alone – give me a bit of room or somethin'?" (00:28:14–00:24:20). Evidently it is not only Sophie's impendence, but the assertiveness of the camera that angers him, panning from left to right then back, never "letting go" of his evident frustration. The feeling of entrapment is made even more emphatic by the main musical theme, a tense string-tune repeated over and over again. I also see a parallel between the oppressive presence of the cinematic frame and Johnny's long argumentations, pieces of reasoning, which despite their moments of brilliance do not lead anywhere, are dead ends, forms of enclosure. Nakedness after all is a lack of protection against the forces of nihilism, disillusionment, chaos coming from all angles and directions.

I have somewhat wandered off my topic, the description of running sequences. There are two scenes of this kind, one at the very beginning and one at the very end of the movie, not only embracing the whole of the narration, but foregrounding a central and all symbolic motif: the impossibility of escape. The first scene narrates a hasty and troubled escape, photographed by handheld camera with the shots linked together by jumpy editing. The deranged movements reflect an emotional disorder and overpowering panic, even self-disgust. The last scene literally does not contain running, although Johnny should-be running and is trying to, but is too exhausted to do so. Instead he trudges down the staircase from Lousie's house and drags himself along the road with the camera dollying in front of him. The direct explanation of his crippled movement is a twisted ankle, but his lameness is more complex, symbolic, and closely related to what I have mentioned above. In both of the scenes he can be viewed as an allegory of a wasted generation, crippled by social injustice, false values, of a youth deprived of future, ideals and goals. Johnny and practically all the other characters are on the run from something, but since they would have to rid themselves of an utter physical, emotional and intellectual exhaustion, their escapes are destined to failure. What Leigh manages to frame is the permanence and irresolvable nature of this exhaustion; he uses stylistic devices to fully explore a nakedness of the characters that is just as much a result of self-imposed alienation as external dehumanisation.

Trainspotting (1996)

Johnny's crippled running may have been intended as Leigh's quite straightforward allegory of a society in stasis and a state of exhaustion. In *Trainspotting* (directed by Danny Boyle) hopes to address similar concerns with a plot that in its initial and final stages shows a strong resemblance to *Naked*. The opening shots show the result of a disastrous shoplifting attempt: Renton and Spud are on the run. Meanwhile Renton, sounding pretty much like Johnny, delivers a lengthy preaching against the evils of materialism and consumer society. The tone and atmosphere of the two works is, nevertheless, two worlds apart. After all Boyle's film heavily relies on a style most suitable for the young generation "whose natural film language is American, not British and whose God is Quentin Tarantino" (Brown 196). The very first shot – a low-angle

framing – emphasises spectacle in *Transpotting* as opposed to the eye-level shot of *Naked*: a marker of identification. Furthermore, the inclusion of a first-person narrator, Iggy Pop's rhythmic song *Lust for Life* and point-of-view shots marks a significantly different kind of narrative-stylistic strategy. Johnny's flight takes place in the deserted streets of suburban Manchester and the feeling of mayhem is fully absorbed by the cinematic image. Renton and Spud are chased along in the busy town-centre of Edinburgh at daylight and the initial tension (if any) is soon resolved. In the latter, spectacle is of central importance and signs of irony reveal themselves when Renton gets hit by a car only to get up smile at the driver and then into the camera. The characters in this film can get up when they are knocked down, they possess a strong vigour for life, change attitudes and make plans for the future.

Although the film is a story of drug users and their addiction, it does not "moralise" over the events (does not offer a moral perspective on character behaviour), nor does it study closely the sociological-psychological dimensions of addictive personalities, or the cause-effect relations of behaviour under narcotics. In *Trainspotting* the narrative accelerates to such a speed that it leaves no place to mull over such things as moral values, choice, conscience or responsibility. The world Boyle depicts is ruled by relativism and in this respect can be opposed to the world of Loach, Leigh or their most recent disciple Shane Meadows. Boyle's characters are ghostly, drifting like in an infinite dream, one that has replaced reality altogether. The characters avoid judgement and being judged or compared to any model, but this overwhelming relativism leaves a weak narrative foundation for Renton's decision to reform his life, just as ghostly as his character is. Yet it is the desire for a future that motivates Renton when at the dramatic climax of the story he decides to steal from his friends. A similar event appears in *Naked*, yet the similarity is superficial. Renton's self-confident words and smiling face is the very antithesis of Johnny's silence and gloom, the former's overwhelming optimism (part of his new metropolitan image) could not be more different from the latter's cathartic nihilism. Actually, images express his self-assuredness much more efficiently than words. Boyle's final (ironic?) comment on Renton's transformation is also a visual one: as the camera goes out of focus and the contours of his face blur we see the hero as a new member of the league of faceless millions. This is not aesthetics in the likes of traditional social documentary, it does not involve itself with the social issues of internal migration and urban alienation in depth. Nevertheless, it would be orthodoxy to demand from *Trainspotting* and films alike a fidelity to realist representation models, just because tradition taught so. Such criticism would also leave aside a more general teaching according to which social criticism should develop along with society.

Conclusion

Trainspotting and the films that follow in its footsteps borrow much of their stylistic diversity from Hollywood. The main representatives and commercial

successes of the British film industry of the eighties and nineties – amongst others Terry Gilliam, Stephen Frears, Stephen Daldry and Christopher Nolan – have acquired an international style and often work on the other side of the Atlantic. Although their cinema is not exclusively dedicated to social realism, they do express concern for social issues, even if they fail to subordinate style to content.

On one level my paper outlined the transformation that led from a cinema of words illustrated by images to a visual cinema. I believe this change was unimaginable without a more refined understanding of the connection between content and style. The appearance of figurative representation – as my example testifies – steered filmmakers' awareness towards the emblematic nature of film language. The historical approach I undertook pointed out that sequences of running are an ever present icon with complex thematic bearings, the articulation of individualism and collectivism, revolutionism and patriotism, exhaustion and vigour.

On a more general level and in a less direct manner I argued that the hope of British cinema to explore the potentials of realism is closely linked to its willingness to capture social issues through allegories. If my argument holds ground and it is legitimate to suggest that scenes depicting running characters (dominated by visual-aural sets of signifiers) are used as social allegories, then realism by the incorporation of formalism does not contradict, but enriches its very foundation. Nevertheless, such an argument raises further questions and presupposes supplementary inquiries. It requires the study of the theories of realism and needs to prove – through historical evidence – that the cinematic paradigm of realism remains unfaithful to itself until it maintains the blind faith that reality reveals itself undistorted in front of the camera. As long as it believes that facts are there to be taken (reproduced and documented mechanically), the shift from the study of facts to the study of attitudes creating facts is blocked. Further research into post-war British cinema needs to be carried out to give a more perceptive account on how realism received self-reflexivity and advanced as a paradigm towards a state where the documentation of attitudes to reality would become the 'real' facts. This would surely have to understand style as a document of the filmmaker's sensitivity for contemporary sociocultural reality. I believe this paper did so and analysed the cinematic representation of the 'running man' as a document of visual imagination comprehending social concern.

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