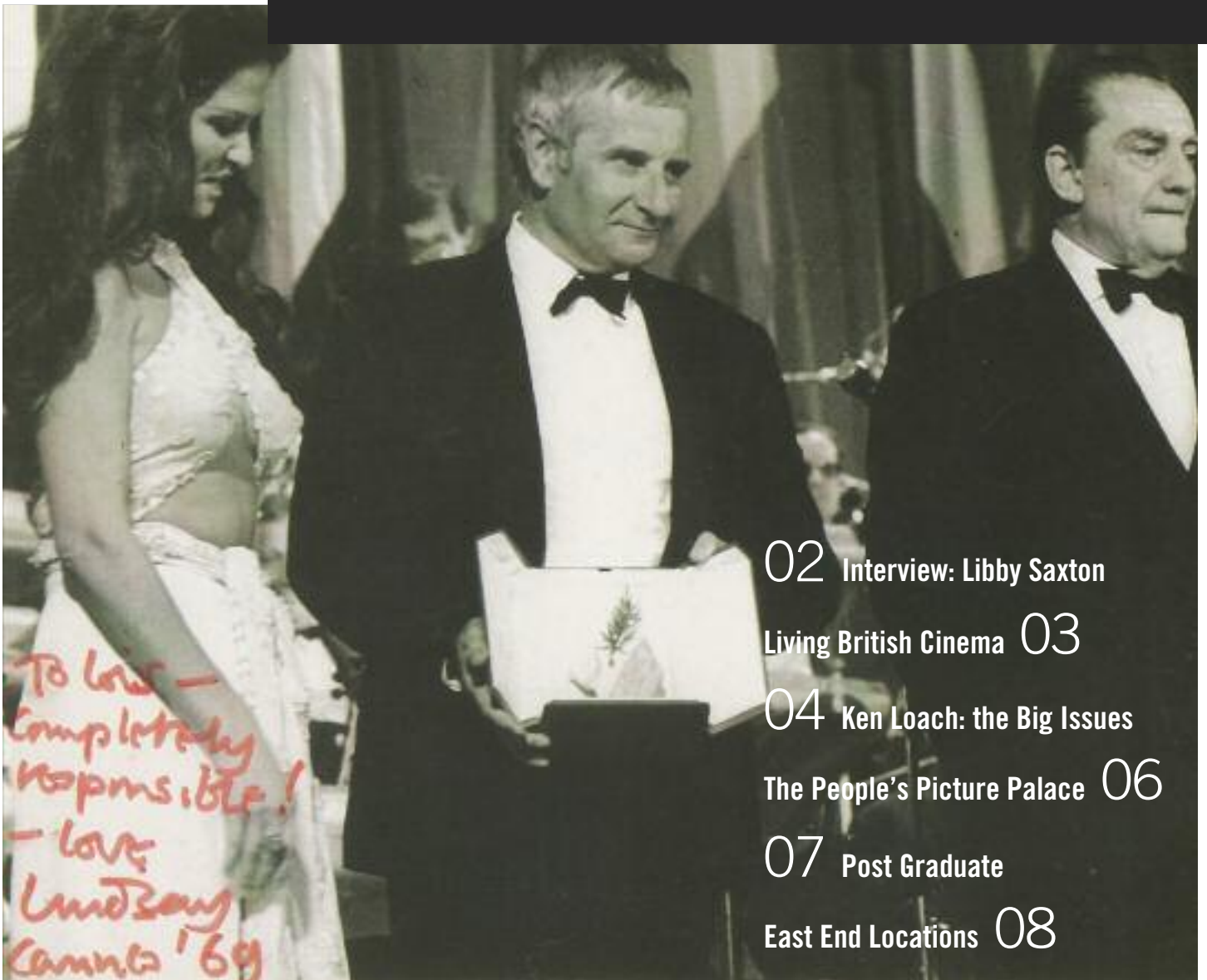


FILM STUDIES NEWSLETTER  
QUEEN MARY,  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON  
ISSUE 2 • SPRING 2012

# CUTAWAY



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# Interview: Libby Saxton



As of January 2012 Libby Saxton, Senior Lecturer in Film Studies, is head of the department of Film Studies at Queen Mary. Cutaway took the opportunity to chat with the avid franco-cinephile about the art of cinema, future plans for Film Studies at Queen Mary, and illuminated manuscripts.

**CUTAWAY:** What was the first film that made you aware of film as an art and got you interested in cinema?

**Libby Saxton:** During my undergraduate degree I was studying French and German literature, and became interested in a certain set of French films that were dealing with history, memory, trauma, and so on. So, I guess the first film I really tried to engage with seriously was [Claude Lanzmann's] *Shoah*, which is nine-and-a-half hours [long].

Like many people I have moments--perhaps what one might call cinephilic epiphanies or something like that--where you have a particular... It's always a moment, as opposed to a narrative; part of a film that you remember: certain moments in *Jaws*, as a twelve-year-old; certain moments in the Disney *Fantasia* as a much younger child.

**Cutaway:** *Shoah* would seem to be the furthest from escapism that you can possibly get in cinema.

**Libby Saxton:** Yes, and it's a very obvious place for a student of French and German literature and philosophy to start in terms of engaging with film. I have since realised that a film does not have to be serious for it to merit serious study, and also that there are things other than trauma and horror that are worth studying.

**Cutaway:** Do you find your students think in a similar way, trying to come across as serious by emphasizing serious films rather than giving credit to more lighthearted ones?

**Libby Saxton:** They seem intrinsically aware that a film like *Shoah* might require a different type of critical engagement from a film by Tarantino, for example. However, I'm not sure we shouldn't analyse both types of film in the same ways. I think it's not helpful or wise to sacralise films like *Shoah*.

**Cutaway:** On a more personal note, do you feel that you have enough space and time to get on with research as well as fulfilling your teaching commitments?

**Libby Saxton:** The solution in my mind is to think very carefully about how research and teaching can be brought together. I'm sure you've had the experience where you've been worrying away at a research problem, and then manage to solve that problem through the experience of teaching. A senior colleague once told me that you should never write a book about anything until you've taught it for at least ten years. Her view, with the benefit of many years of experience, was that in order to thoroughly understand something you need to teach it for a long time, and I increasingly [agree with her].

**Cutaway:** Looking ahead, what's your vision for the department?

**Libby Saxton:** The things I want to see are a closer integration of teaching and research, but also bringing together theory and practice. We've got a new MA in Documentary Practice coming online from September, and that's going to have theoretical and practical components. The other thing I'm excited about are developments in film-philosophy.

Film-philosophy relates to my personal interests, but is also an area where we as a department seem to be blossoming.

We've got a new MA module in film-philosophy, and the MA in Film Studies core course has been rethought from a more philosophical perspective.

**Cutaway:** Isn't it ironic that film-philosophy courses are blossoming, while actual philosophy courses are being stripped?

**Libby Saxton:** It is ironic, and utterly disturbing in my view.

**Cutaway:** Your original post was in French and Film Studies; and Film Studies at Queen Mary emerged out of Modern Languages. What, in your opinion, is the future of the relationship between the two disciplines?

**Libby Saxton:** I think there's some extremely exciting and innovative research being conducted at the intersection between the two disciplines in the fields of film history, film theory and philosophy, and I'm sure this will continue. I see this strong relationship as of benefit to both disciplines.

**Cutaway:** As the new head of department, do you still have time to pursue your hobbies?

**Libby Saxton:** At the moment I look out of my window at my new gorgeous, tiny little garden, and wish I had time to cultivate it. That's the plan for the summer.

One thing I did want to get back to was something I used to do as a teenager, which was manuscript illumination -- I always really enjoyed the filigree designs that are designed around calligraphic texts, that sort of thing.

## LAMF burns

The Lindsay Anderson Memorial Foundation (LAMF) was founded ten years ago at the suggestion of Lindsay's friend Lois Smith. Fifty years earlier, she had encouraged Lindsay, who had then just graduated from Oxford and was considering a career as a teacher, to make a film instead. *Meet the Pioneers* (1948) was a documentary about a factory in Wakefield that made conveyor belts for the mining industry, and was the first step in a career that would culminate in Lindsay's winning the Palme d'Or for *If...* at Cannes twenty-one years later.

When Lindsay made *Meet the Pioneers*, he knew nothing about practical filmmaking. But he did have an attitude and, as he would later put it in the Free Cinema Manifesto of 1956, 'An attitude means a style.' From that, all else followed. Implicit in Lindsay's work -- to quote from the Manifesto again -- was 'a belief in freedom, in the importance of people, and in the significance of the

everyday.' The purpose of LAMF, which includes many people who had collaborated with Lindsay as well as his friends and admirers, is of course to celebrate Lindsay's work, whether as filmmaker, theatre director or writer, but much more importantly to foster the nonconformist and egalitarian spirit he represented.

The true measure of Lindsay's achievement will be the degree to which he can be an inspiration for generations that follow. It was with this in mind that the members of the Foundation -- who often marvel at how old they have become -- embarked on a collaboration with Living British Cinema. Among the projects we hope will follow are a new website for the Foundation, the online publication of *Sequence*, the legendary film magazine Lindsay edited between 1947 and 1952 and, in partnership with Mile End Films, interviews with Lindsay's friends and collaborators.

## SP-ARK flies

SP-ARK is an interactive digital archive based upon the work of the British film director Sally Potter, and is rooted in her independent audience-focused filmmaking practice. Potter was the first filmmaker to blog (with YES in 2004), and SP-ARK extends Potter's web presence for both her previous and her subsequent work. Currently focused mainly on *Orlando* (1993), it includes documentation of the film's pre-production, production and post-production phases. Users can search the material, tag items that interest them and create their own research pathways through the archive's assets. The site has recently been updated to cover the full range of production roles on the film, and over 4000 assets are now available online. Interviews are being recorded with crew members on Potter's new film, *Bomb*, currently in production, with the intention of making these available online as well, and linking them to other archive materials relating to production.

Over the past few years, the Film Studies department at Queen Mary has been collaborating with SP-ARK in a number of ways. The archive is used as a teaching

resource on both the undergraduate and the MA programmes, and the department has hosted events at QM and at BFI Southbank exploring the potential of SP-ARK as a resource for researchers, lecturers and students. Several QM students have become involved with SP-ARK and Adventure Pictures, Potter's production company. Final year undergraduate Rosamund Attwood is currently working as an intern, for example; and Stella Coradi, who graduated with an MA in Film Studies in 2009, is working as Sally Potter's assistant on *Bomb*.

This summer, Adventure Pictures will be at the Living British Cinema Film Festival, showing footage from, and talking about the making of, *Bomb*. Other mooted future collaborations include internships for MA students working on developing SP-ARK, further explorations and development of the site as a teaching and learning resource, and various joint research projects.

Visit SP-ARK at <http://www.sp-ark.org/index.php>

# Living British Cinema

Some recent and forthcoming events

**June 2011** Inside Film visit Queen Mary to talk about their work making films with serving prisoners, and show some of the films.

**January 2012** LBC hosts a Lindsay Anderson Memorial Foundation (LAMF) meeting and screens footage from Mile End Films of interviews with LAMF members.

**March 2012** In an event run jointly by LBC and the QM Film Society, Sue Harper and Justin Smith, authors of *British Film Culture in the 1970s*, introduce *Tommy* (Ken Russell, 1975). Sue and Justin had suggested three films, and students had voted for their choice.

**January-March 2012** Third-year film studies student Leanne Furnaux runs a season of British horror films, with introductions and discussions, called 'I Wake Up Screaming'

**March 2012** Meeting with SP-ARK to discuss ongoing projects and future collaborations.

**June 2012** The LBC Film Festival takes place on 12, 13 and 14 June, with events and screenings at QM and the Genesis cinema, Mile End Road.

Follow @LBCinema on Twitter.

# The Big Issues

## Daniel Chan talks to Ken Loach.

Last summer, with David Chan, a film critic at *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, and Hoi-Lun Law, a third-year Film Studies student at the University of Sussex, I founded a Hong Kong-based online film journal called *Cinema in Prints*. Our intention is to treat film as an art form and engage seriously with the aesthetics of the medium, challenging the culturally and semiotically oriented approach prevalent in film criticism in Hong Kong.

Last September, the British Film Institute held a retrospective of Ken Loach's work to celebrate his 75th birthday. I felt this would offer a good opportunity to interview the director and hear his thoughts on filmmaking, and also perhaps his reflections on his career till now. And so on behalf of *Cinema in Prints* I approached him before his introduction to the National Film Theatre screening of *Land and Freedom* to request an interview. He kindly agreed and gave me the email address of his assistant, Ann. An interview at his office was accordingly arranged.

On 27 September, Hoi-Lun and I arrived at the Soho premises of Sixteen Films, the production company co-founded by Ken Loach and Rebecca O'Brien. Ann showed us into the conference room, where a large poster of *Kes* graced the wall. Ken was busy editing his new film, and we waited in high anticipation. Ten minutes later, Ken came in, sporting a bandage on his right hand. I was profoundly moved that a veteran director with an injured hand was willing to give up his precious time to talk to two young foreigners.

Ken Loach began his career in television in the 1960s, directing *Up the Junction* (1965), *Cathy Come Home* (1966) and *The Golden Vision* (1968). His first film for cinema, *Poor Cow*, was released in 1967. The IMDb currently credits 46 works to Loach as director; awards for his films include the Palme d'Or for *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival; and many younger

filmmakers, the acclaimed Polish director Krzysztof Kieślowski among them, acknowledge Loach's influence on their work.

Our conversation ranged over the directing of actors, the social and political purposes of cinema, the role of film criticism, and advice to young filmmakers. Among the films we talk about are *Kes* (1969), *Ladybird, Ladybird* (1994), *Raining Stones* (1993) and *Riff Raff* (1991). Ken Loach is modest about his achievements, refusing to regard himself as an auteur. In our brief encounter, he displays the same generosity, insight, integrity and intelligence as is evident in his films.

We start by telling him about an incident at a recent screening of *Kes* in Hong Kong. A friend of ours, sitting next to a seven-year-old boy, noticed that the child was identifying so deeply with the film's main character, 14-year-old Billy, that he burst into tears on the tragic death of Billy's kestrel, *Kes*. It is pleasing to hear that the film can make such a connection with the audience, Loach says, because he wanted people to see the world from Billy's point of view. But, he adds, *Kes* was not intended as a film for children, but as a film about children for adults; because it is about seeing Billy in the context of his world, seeing the society that surrounds Billy, the society Billy is part of. 'It is a story about the boy and the bird; but the boy will never be able to reach his ambitions the way the bird can fly.'



Ken Loach

In *Art in the Service of the People*, Jacob Leigh quotes Loach as saying he wants the camera to be a sympathetic observer. Does he want audiences to share this sympathy, we ask; or even, like the boy in the Hong Kong cinema, to empathise? 'I think you need to be able to do both', Loach replies.

**You want the audience to respond to the characters with understanding and humanity and recognize the common humanity shared by the audience and the characters, but then see the totality of their world and see them in the context of their society. So I think you need to do both, we want them to do both: to be touched by the characters and by the story, but also to see the wider social issues and pressures that surround them.**

What his films aim to do, he adds, is put on the screen both the characters as individuals and what happens to them in the world they live in: a film should offer some indication of the structure of the society that produces those people and those conflicts, and the choices open to people. In the films Loach wants to make, the characters are rooted in their economic circumstances, their political circumstances, their family relationships—in other words, in the wider conditions that determine their lives and then determine who they become, the characteristics they develop and the kinds of personal relationships they have. 'So I suppose what we want to see is like a series of consequences [of living] in a society based on class struggle, based on exploitation that is damaging to everybody. It is damaging to personal relationships as much as it is damaging to people's economic circumstances.'



Characters in Loach's films do not always adhere to conventional morality and sometimes even break the law. For example, the father in *Raining Stones* (1993) tells Bob, the male protagonist, not to confess to the police; and at the end of *Riff-Raff* (1991) Stevie, a young construction worker, burns down a half-finished middle-class apartment. And yet these characters are sympathetically portrayed and their actions seem almost justifiable under the circumstances; so although they seem to be amoral and on the edge of the law, their actions are actually a struggle for dignity and integrity. Pressed on his attitude towards justice, Loach says that the law is not always moral, in that it upholds property relationships in society.

**It keeps the rich rich and the poor poor. So sometimes you have to struggle against the law. The classic situation is this; 'should you rob to feed your family?' The end lines of those circumstances, morality says you must feed your family; the law might say you can't rob. It is an obvious case where there's conflict between the law and what is right. So I think there are times when you can understand why people break the law. The law isn't perfect, but of course we would all want to uphold it. You know you should not commit murder. You shouldn't be violent to each other. You should respect your neighbours' rights, and so on. But when it comes to matters of class conflict, then the law will generally stand behind the ruling class. In particular when people go on strike, the law is now used to uphold the rich against the poor. So I think it's complicated and adhering to the law doesn't always give justice.**

We have been struck by the dramatic moments in Loach's films, especially the abrupt emotional outbursts of certain characters-- Simon in *Ladybird, Ladybird* and Sandy and her father in *Family Life*,



for instance. These characters are often quiet and laconic until pushed beyond their limits. We ask the director how he achieves such subtle changes in emotional register and elicits these polarized performances from his actors. There is no simple answer, he says. It has to do with how he prepares the actors, and how the scene is shot. 'It's very much in how you use their instinct', drawing on what is in the script and also giving the actor space, directing them 'in an indirect way' through other people in the film, and preparing the ground so that the actor is receptive to the emotion. For instance, in *Ladybird, Ladybird*, Crissy Rock (who plays Maggie) was unaware that the babies were going to be taken away until they were actually taken in the film. 'It was in the script but she didn't have the script. So when the social workers come in and take them, she was completely taken by surprise. So what you see is her true reaction to it.' But, Loach adds, he will never trick actors into an emotional response.

**They know that things will happen that will surprise them, and we keep it as part of the film. I mean that's part of the process that everybody knows and everybody is part of. They know in the course of the film that they will be surprised and that's part of the film. So they respond as part of the film. That was certainly the case with Crissy in *Ladybird, Ladybird* [...] If I had told her what was going to happen, I don't know that it would have worked so well.**

As young film critics, we were interested in hearing Loach's thoughts on critics and the purposes of film criticism. He professes scepticism, referring to the adage about the relationship between the critic and the filmmaker being like that between a dog and a lamppost: the dog needs the lamppost more than the lamppost needs the dog—and the

lamppost gets urinated on. The problem with film criticism, he believes, is that it often fails to deal with the substance of a film and the validity of the ideas it is trying to express. Criticism, he adds, should address what is in the film's story. Is it true? Is it worth telling? Are characters valid? Do they ring true? What is the significance of the story? If a film is merely a commodity and is only there in order to make money, he asks, is it even worth writing about?

But he is keen to offer helpful advice and encouragement to young filmmakers, suggesting they try their hand at everything they can.

**I think everyone benefits from doing documentaries: observational documentaries or documentaries where you have something to explore. That's always useful. Also, if you want to make fiction, then you should work in the theatre because that's where you have to deal with actors and work with actors. Without anything in between, you can't hide behind the camera there [because] you have to work with the actors all the time. So try to make a documentary and try to work in a theatre. Try to be an actor for a bit and you will realize how difficult it is and how vulnerable you feel and [that] it's not easy and how nervous you can get. And then you think 'What can I say to the actors that will make it easier?' or 'What can I say to make it more difficult?' and then you learn what to say.**

Loach is currently completing *Angel's Share*, a comedy set in Scotland. Despite the considerable changes in contemporary filmmaking technology (Loach will make use of digital methods where they offer additional possibilities), he regards the most important issues for the filmmaker as unchanging: Are the characters important? Is the story worth telling? What does it show us? 'These are the big issues and it is the same whether you shoot it on a 35mm camera or on a mobile phone.' And he has no plans for retirement. Making films, he says, becomes addictive. 'I am very lucky to be able to still do it. It is a hard drug to give up.'

**Daniel (LikHang) Chan is a first-year student on the BA in Film Studies at Queen Mary.**

# The People's Picture Palace

On 13 February 1937, the *Daily Sketch* reported that 'Six years of waiting and hoping will be over for London's East End to-day when the King and Queen, driving from Buckingham Palace to Mile End-road, will share (and so complete) the people's happiness in the rebirth of the famous People's Palace.'

This was the first major public engagement by the new King and Queen following the abdication of Edward VIII. Though cinema did not play a part in the official opening—this took the form of an organ recital, a recitation and a performance by the 250-strong People's Palace Choral and Orchestral Society—the new building was fully equipped for showing films, as well as for theatrical and musical performances.

There were deeper historical roots. The new theatre was a direct replacement for the original People's Palace which had opened in 1887, and was destroyed by fire in 1931. This was a grand Victorian philanthropic enterprise to which the present Queen Mary, University of London directly owes its origins. There survive from the original building both the present Queens' Building and the magnificent Octagon Library. This original nineteenth-century complex was designed both to bring technical education to East London and to provide a rich source of entertainment and recreation for the local population. This included films: in 1911, the People's Palace could claim that it had the largest cinema screen in London and was so up-to-the-minute that 'animated pictures' of the Cambridge and Harvard boat race, rowed late one afternoon, were screened on that same evening.

The new building, co-designed by George Coles, a pre-eminent architect of picture palaces in the then-favoured art deco 'moderne' style, had actually opened its doors to the public some two months ahead of the royal visit. The varied array of entertainments on offer in its first week included *Rhodes of Africa*, a British-made

film starring Walter Huston as Cecil Rhodes (certificate 'U', seats from 4d to 1/6). Among the films shown over the following months were the Shirley Temple vehicle *Bright Eyes*; *Charlie Chan in Shanghai*, featuring Warner Oland in the role he made famous; and *The Three Musketeers*. In early February 1937 *The Ghost Goes West*, starring Robert Donat and directed by René Clair, was screened; it proved a hit with thinking film lovers, and won the *Picturegoer* Award for the year's best British film. Children were catered for with Saturday matinees (entrance 2d), as was the local Jewish population with screenings of the Eddie Cantor comedy musical *Whoopie!* and of a French-made sound version of *The Golem*.

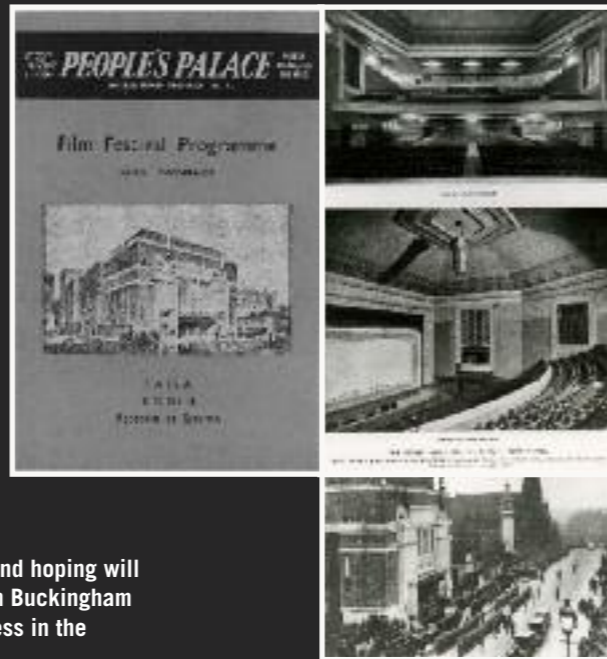
After the war, the People's Palace launched a regular Sunday evening film series under the title 'Famous Films from Many Nations'. The emphasis was on European cinema, with films from France, Italy, Germany and Britain, including *The Blue Angel* and *Les enfants du paradis* in 1948; and *Un carnet de bal* and *Paisà* in 1949. Queen Mary alumnus Len Finegold (BSc Physics, 1956) grew up locally, and remembers as a teenager being 'dragged by my father to People's Palace films on Sunday night, and so, knowing no better I was brought up on the Nouvelle Vague and the Italian equivalent [Neorealism]'. It is agreeable to think that Len might have seen *Paisà*, Roberto Rossellini's Oscar-nominated contribution to Neorealism, on one of his Sunday trips to the People's Palace.

This period in the history of the People's Palace coincides with a blossoming of interest in cinema as art and social

document: new types of films were being made by a rising generation of socially-conscious artists (Neorealism) and Hollywood aficionados (the Nouvelle Vague); and there was a worldwide surge in membership of film societies alongside a growing appetite for serious interest in cinema. The People's Palace programme leaflet for the *Paisà* screening carries an advertisement for evening classes at nearby Toynbee Hall, with 'film appreciation' among the offerings. Many commentators regard this budding 'appreciation' of what today would be called cultural cinema as the beginnings of a thoughtful engagement with the medium that would culminate in the 1960s in the 'invention' of Film Studies.

The People's Palace, now Grade 2 listed, is currently being refurbished. The new People's Palace, scheduled to open this year, will provide a 750-seat auditorium with a re-creation of the exuberant original colour scheme and restoration and reproduction of some of the art deco light fittings. New raked seating will be installed and the original balcony seating reinstated. The theatre will be fully equipped with the latest audiovisual equipment, including a 12-metre wide screen. We can look forward to the day when films will once again be regularly screened at the People's Palace, for the enjoyment and edification of all.

**Cutaway thanks Professor Philip Ogden, Eoin Maolalai and Gil Toffell for information and images; and would be delighted to hear from anyone who remembers seeing films at the People's Palace.**



## Post Politics

Maren Thom

What is the defining genre of German cinema? The *Heimat* film? New German Cinema? Another contender for the most enduring myth-making machine of German *Selbstverständnis* (self-conceptualisation) must be the Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF) film. Since the 1970s the RAF (perhaps better known as the Baader-Meinhof group) has served as a vehicle for the political fears and concerns of a particular German mindset; and this extends to films – from *Germany in Autumn* (1978) to *The Baader Meinhof Complex* (2008).

With *The Coming Days* (2010), however, the RAF film has entered a new phase. This film is not interested in exploring RAF myths, but takes them as given truths from the outset. Its fictional terrorist group, *Die Schwarzen Stürme*, is a superficial reincarnation of the RAF and of the aims and rhetoric of the radical politics of the past. But the group's agenda actually expresses contemporary German fears – of modern capitalism's disregard for social cohesion and ecological sustainability.

The politics of *Die Schwarzen Stürme* are a fictional expression of a real-life desire: the radical implementation of a politics of sustainability, using the *bien-pensant* perception of a disequilibrium between man and nature as a basis for social reorganization, and so to avoid what is felt to be the inevitable outcome of uncontrolled capitalism—wars, ecological disasters and a collapse in living standards.

*The Coming Days* is built on anti-humanist tropes common in post-political Germany, and a general retreat into conservatism. This mainstream trend finds its extremes in such phenomena as the reactionary views on immigration held by the politician Thilo Sarrazin, or the rhetoric of the anti-nuclear movement. The evocation of a RAF-like organization as a possible saviour shows how the RAF mythos can morph and transform itself as it retains its foothold in a nation's imagination.

**Maren Thom is a PhD candidate at Queen Mary, researching terrorism and the post-political in German, British and Hollywood cinema.**

## Post Production

Jo Stephenson and Hollie Price

In February, the Queen Mary Department of Film Studies hosted the first meeting of Post Production, a forum for MA students, PhD candidates and lecturers in the department, run by postgraduate students and meeting once a month during term time to share and discuss research. It was set up with the aim of bringing staff and students together – and of staving off the prospective madness induced by spending three years sitting alone at a computer. For new postgraduate students like ourselves, the forum is also an opportunity to get to know students who have survived their first year of doctoral research and can pass on the benefits of their wisdom. Meetings consist of a key paper followed by drinks, snacks and general chat; the aim being to create an informal platform for researchers to test out ideas, practice talking about their work, and build up a support network within the department. We may even see unexpected academic collaborations (wine-fuelled or otherwise) along the way.

At the forum's first meeting – a lovely evening and a great chance to meet fellow researchers – Lucy Bolton gave a talk on Living British Cinema's exciting plans. At the March meeting, Nick Jones discussed his doctoral research on 3-D film, giving a fascinating paper complete with 3-D glasses. This was followed by an animated informal discussion.

Up-to-date information (including details of forthcoming meetings and abstracts of papers) can be found on the Post Production blog:

[postproductionqmul.wordpress.com/](http://postproductionqmul.wordpress.com/).

We would be delighted to receive details of links to other appropriate groups or personal blogs, general enquiries about Post Production or offers to present work at a future meetings.

**Jo Stephenson (j.p.stephenson@qmul.ac.uk) and Hollie Price (h.price@qmul.ac.uk) are PhD candidates at Queen Mary. Jo is researching the use of British film to promote the branding of Britain and the British fashion industry; and Hollie is researching domestic interiors in British films released between 1941 and 1951.**

## Post '68

Jim Morrissey

I only faced one real difficulty over the course of my PhD – finishing the thing. Something I found surprisingly straightforward, on the other hand, was taking my project beyond the boundaries of a single discipline. The thesis (supervised by Dr Sue Harris and Dr Will McMorran) draws on my background in French and English literature and film, taking an interdisciplinary approach to investigating 'Political Engagement in the French Fiction Film 1968-2008'. In it I explore the recurrent contradiction whereby films that invest in the idea of more egalitarian social arrangements often adopt aesthetic strategies that seem to confirm social divisions among their implied audiences.

I engage extensively with the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, setting his insights alongside competing accounts of political agency and cultural production put forward by thinkers such as Sartre, Brecht, Fredric Jameson and Lyotard. My aim was to propose new perspectives on aspects of recent French cinema that are not normally compared (le cinéma du look and post 1995 'New Realism', for example), while drawing on critical perspectives underused in film studies (such as Bourdieu's). In this way, the thesis offers an anti-canonical and innovative account of French cinema culture since 1968.

It took the ultimate award of the degree to enable me to view the PhD process less as an end in itself and more as the beginning of something greater. I am currently putting together funding proposals for another interdisciplinary project, this one looking at the city of Marseilles as it figures in French and international documentary and fiction film. Starting the project is undoubtedly the easy part, but the skills and experience gained over the course of my PhD at Queen Mary mean that I can confidently face the challenges that will certainly arise along the path to its conclusion.

**Jim Morrissey's PhD was awarded in September 2011 and he now holds the post of Teaching Associate in French Film Studies at Newcastle University**

# On Location in the East End

Following our examination of filmmaking in London's East End in Issue 1, *Cutaway* takes a look at how Film Studies students at Queen Mary tackle location filming.



The area around the Queen Mary campus in the East End is diverse, with a wide array of communities and neighbourhoods within a short walk: the new developments and yachts of Limehouse, the colour and the buzz of Brick Lane, the grittiness of Hackney, the chic of Shoreditch.... This assortment of environments is a marvellous resource for filmmakers; and it is not just professionals who can take advantage of it. Students in QM's Department of Film Studies also make use of their surroundings by frequently shooting in local locations.

Alongside the critical, historical and theoretical study of cinema, the Film Studies programme at Queen Mary contains a strong focus on practical work: students can, if they wish, get involved in making short films and other production-related study and projects through courses on scriptwriting, filmmaking practice and production skills. Assistant Technical Director of Film Athena Mandis regards this as crucial to the distinctive makeup of undergraduate film studies at QM, providing a 'layering of meaning' in which theory and practice reinforce each other. It also equips students with awareness of the challenges of filmmaking, allowing them to see, particularly during location shooting, how external forces and unexpected events can affect a film.

Describing the process of preparing for location shooting, third-year undergraduate (and assistant director on the short film *Entropy*) Alice Bellini states that it is necessary to 'map out' all the kinds of places called for in the script: 'You try to pick an area that could encompass all needed locations. At that point, once you've got areas and specific places, you schedule a couple of days when you comb through every possible option.' At this point, the production team will make informal inquiries about the availability of the location on the required

dates. If all is well, says Alice, 'that's the moment when you formally and bureaucratically start asking for permits.'

This process can be surprisingly painless. Students are responsible for organising location permits themselves, and this provides them with valuable experience in an unglamorous, but vital, area of filmmaking. Even for a location like Mile End tube station, permission is usually granted: it used to be free of charge, but now (possibly related to heightened security following the 7/7 bombings) comes at a modest £50 fee. Shooting permits from local councils usually come at no cost, and are often issued promptly provided the request has been correctly prepared (including details of the number of people involved in the production and the equipment being used, a health and safety check and public liability insurance).

Alice thinks that the production she is involved in benefited from canny choices of locations: 'We would have never asked [for] permits to shoot on the Southwark riverside, in front of Big Ben, in the City, in Chelsea, or in Mayfair. They would have never said yes.' In any event, she adds, avoiding obviously touristy images of London landmarks adds to a film's realism. Abi Stevens, another third-year Film Studies undergraduate, says that filming on location in the QM area has practical advantages in terms of transporting equipment, while stressing that a production must be flexible: 'We obviously have an idea of the type of location we are looking for, though this does alter depending on what locations



we find and how easy or practical they are for us to use.'

Shooting on location presents its own challenges. Rain can

prevent shooting and force some creative rescheduling. Human factors can hold up a shoot, too: from road works and earsplitting pneumatic drills to inquisitive pedestrians interrupting a shot to ask what the film is about. Abi describes an occasion when someone wandered into a shot and then threatened to 'bash heads' if any footage of him was used. Mostly, though, people are accommodating: during Abi's production a café owner allowed the crew inside in exchange for prominently featuring the name of his establishment in the film. She comments that Brick Lane is a good place to film because, since filming is such a regular occurrence there, residents mostly ignore crews and just go about their business.

Other places frequently in front of the camera include Victoria Park, whose size and beauty make it an ideal stand-in for parks and green spaces in general, and Dalston Market. Then there is the Queen Mary campus itself, the new building developments and picturesque canal providing potentially striking backdrops. However, other aspects of the East End, like being beneath the flight path of City Airport, can prove problematic, at least from a sound recording perspective.

For Alice, the appeal of East End locations for student and other low-budget filmmaking is the ease of obtaining permits compared with other London boroughs, the strong London feel of the area and the ambiance of places like Shoreditch, Mile End and Hoxton, home to many people involved in the media and artistic industries--and therefore accommodating to artistic projects. This welcoming atmosphere makes life relatively easy for students undertaking location filming.

## Editorial team:

Annette Kuhn  
a.f.kuhn@qmul.ac.uk

Nick Jones  
n.jones@qmul.ac.uk

Maren Thom  
m.thom@qmul.ac.uk

## School of Languages, Linguistics and Film CUTAWAY

Queen Mary, University of London  
Mile End Road  
London E1 4NS

[www.sllf.qmul.ac.uk/filmstudies/](http://www.sllf.qmul.ac.uk/filmstudies/)