



last **JASON WOOD** **words**
CONSIDERING
CONTEMPORARY CINEMA



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JASON WOOD



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Dedicated to the memory of Artificial Eye co-founder Andi Engel who understood that film is an industry, but also an art. And vice versa.

This book is also dedicated to the memory of Walter Wood.

FORE WORDS

by Andrew Kötting

*The more injured you are by time – the more you seek to escape it – to write a faultless page
– or only a sentence – it raises you above becoming and its corruptions – and you transcend
death by the pursuit of the indestructible in speech – in the very symbol of nullity.*

E.M. CIORAN – *THE TROUBLE WITH BEING BORN*

In This World

The Old Kent Road had a hold of me – motorbike on top of me – someone had driven into me
– the blood spilled out from the femoral artery – I felt a warm oilglow piss all over me –
hadn't long in this world – me and my biography – *Lookatme* and *Woeisme* – I was awash and
still it came gushing out – then a policewoman tiptoed through the mire to help me – she
pushed hard into me – a gore-soaked poultice – 63 stitches – picture that – picture this
picture the puss – pictures – the story begins thus

My grandfather Albert (Gladys's husband) took me to the pictures – *Enter the Dragon*
Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia – He told me that pictures could be dangerous – (he
once found a photograph of somebody with their legs blown off up a tree) – but he didn't
frighten me – *Hold the whole world up in front of a mirror for us all to see* – this was my
philosophy – but real life had fallen into the cracks between myself and my work and caused
much misery – deliriously – *The trouble with being born*

So

Ever onwards – forewards – an introduction as opposed to an outroduction – a reflection and
pontification upon the main **stream (of consciousness)** – and all this from *the moon the
dreamed like an elephant's piss* – (post-accident morphine haze) – and into the uncharted
pondwater of befuddled misremembrances – McQueen with his falling house and epic eye for
detail – McQueen and the sexy train scene now followed by TS Eliot's agonies:

*Or as, when an underground train, in the tube
Stops too long between stations
And the conversation rises and slowly fades to silence
And you see behind every face the mental emptiness deepen
Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about.*

The *shoutingout* and melancholy of the nothing-but-the-body – Carol Ann Duffy with her mirror
in **I Remember Me** – *It must be dreams that make us different – must be the private ceiling
inside a common skull* – The same but different – The shoutingout and melancholy of the
nothingbutthebody – the same but different – **Main Stream** as the common current through
which thoughts of the masses might easily flow – clones and echo chambers – pale imitation
of themselves and real life – compromised committees – bandwagoneering not pioneering

universal not personal – the production of film not the medium of film – long-in-the-tooth and
ever-tired – straight from the board's mouth – devolved to the lowest common denominator
– vanilla not rum and raisin

Sad

One can be sad anywhere but sadness grows in intensity within the confines of closed space
– within the confines of a cinema that keeps showing the same faces – again and again and
again – melancholy flourishes in open spaces – melancholy is fire-in-the-belly – is Nick Cave
and Ned Kelly – Get out there and look for it – Not as business interest or capital venture but
more an attempt at *punctum* – more an attempt at trying to make meaningful that which is
meaningless – Gideon Koppel and his sheep – Clio Barnard and her ability to make you weep
– the world closing in as real outburst and controlled angst – it can get lonely – Not Octavio
Paz *Labyrinth of Solitude* lonely – more a really out there lonely – wind in the face tears in the
eyes lonely – isolation and outsiderdom fuels and inspires – allows for a reflection – distance
causes desire

The Industry

Of Film filling the horizon – fetid stream of settled-down – gulag and fish farm – the major
studios drying their nets in the Nissan huts of comic-book ambition – (another issue being the
risk of algal blooms from overcrowding) Big Fish in One-Big-Pond – oxygen depletion and ide
starvation – blocking out the sun and polluting the head – Who would ever want to penetrate
the perimeter fence in order to swim in such fishy waters? Why dine at the table of plentitude
when there are plenty of berries in the forest? Genre is a minimum-security prison in which
the guards are reading *Hello* magazine – contingent or specialised is elsewhere – A
Edgeland where it might be possible to dive headlong into the *notknowing* – Christine Mollen
and Joe Lawlor have been there – Harmony Korine lives there

Outside In

Really out there – Not In and pretending to be Out – *Contingency Solidarity and Irony* – The
struggle between pragmatism and poetry – between philosophy and high energy – This
what Richard Rorty and Tarkovsky have taught me – Or De Montaigne – (Prophet of the
Enlightenment) A mind unable to sit still – Explorer of the great themes of existence
humanist skeptic and acute observer – Georges Perec – *A Void* and *Life a User's Manual*
Lives seen through the prism of one's own self-consciousness – intrigue me astound me – c
more than entertain me – disrupt the very fabric of the life that surrounds me – cut holes in
and let the light shine in

Maybe I should start again?

*When people talk about Modern Art they usually think of a type of art which has completely
broken with the traditions of the past and tries to do things no artist would have dreamed
before. Some like the idea of progress and believe that art too must keep in step with the
times. Others prefer the slogan the-good-old-days and think that modern art is all wrong.*

E.H. GOMBRICH – *THE HISTORY OF ART*

Why do you have to be a non-conformist like everybody else?

Beyond the turmoil and effervescence of the busy life a quieter existence enjoys the
surrounding splendor – in all its exquisite detail – Ben Rivers has supped from this forest floor

and regurgitated atop the veneer banqueting table of superficial pop – Calm through the absence of cacophony and CGI – an essential antidote to the business of mediocrity and commerciality – James Marsh and Anton Corbijn – mirrors of the mainstream but with more spit and less furniture polish

And you are not paying for art. You are paying for assurance, for social confirmation of your investment, and the consequent mitigation of risk. You are paying to be sure, and your assurance is very expensive, because risk is everything, for everybody, in the domain of art.

DAVID HICKEY – AIR GUITAR

The peloton of commercial success

And all those films that you hear far too much about – shining examples of perfected advertising – propaganda and manipulating – riding roughshod over embryonic Jarmar Framptons and Potters – old school breakaway groups – pockets fairly full to overflowing with the not-knowing and the questing – we are enriched only by frequenting disciplines removed from our own

Risk

So all risks are modeled on those that have gone before – the cakes might look different but the ingredients are the same – the butchers the bakers and the candlestick makers all setting up stall in the matching market square – where is the precarious instability and awkward vulnerability? Tilda Swinton, Peter Strickland and Ben Wheatley – come show me

Alternative

Error as a celebration and distortion of truth – and these works are erroneous because they drink from the trough of marginal truth – they re-present themselves as regurgitated half-truths – exhilarating and roughly hewn stabs of new happinesses

It is important to acknowledge the instability of truth when making a film based on fact

CLIO BARNARD

You can't leave your brain at home on the sofa; you need to bring it with you to this cinema

LIAM CUNNINGHAM – FATHER DOMINIC MORAN – HUNGER

The sometimes

Sometimes lost – sometimes beached – sometimes abandoned – sometimes felt
sometimes known – sometimes wrong – sometimes lacking – sometimes needful
sometimes stunning – always questioning

There are no answers and there are not even any proper questions

IAIN SINCLAIR – SWIMMING TO HEAVEN

So

I leave you optimistic – the eternal quest – voyage without End – kicking against the pricks

needful of something to fight against but never alone – ongoing

PS

I happened upon this implied narrative yesterday on the way home from work. Culled from the side of the road in the form of a tumbledown neon sign: **COURTYARD AVAILABLE FOR SMOKERS AND NATURISTS**

Meaning through free association

Because of David Shields, Iain Sinclair and Jason Wood

ANDREW KÖTTING, HASTINGS OLD TOWN, JULY 20

Andrew Köttling was born in Elmstead Woods, England and went on to become a lumberjack in Scandinavia. Later, as an artist he trained at the Slade School of Fine Art in London specialising in performance and film. He directed several experimental shorts that were awarded prizes at numerous international film festivals. *Gallivant* (1996), his debut feature film, is a seminal travelogue about his three-month journey around the coast of Britain with his grandmother Gladys and his daughter Eden.

In 2001 he directed the first of his Landworks trilogy, *This Filthy Earth*, for Film 4 and in 2009 Ivul for Artificial Eye. He continues to work on multi-media art projects including *Mapping Perception*, *In The Wake of a Deadad* and *Louyre*. *This Our Still Life* premiered at the Venice International Film Festival in 2011.

His most recent work, *Swandown*, was made in collaboration with the writer Iain Sinclair and shown extensively in cinemas across the UK and as an installation at Dilston Grove in London. The film had its French premiere at the Cannes Film Festival and will be distributed in France by E. D. Distribution.

Most recently Andrew was commissioned to work with the photographer Anonymou Bosch on a series of pinhole photographs inside a cave on top of the Mountain of Fear in the French Pyrenees.

Introduction

Published interviews with filmmakers are increasingly becoming a thing of the past. In a media enthralled by the notion of stardom and dictated to by commerce it has become rare to read an extended interview with a filmmaker, unless that filmmaker has made a film featuring a star that is likely to go on and make a considerable amount of money at the box office. The world of film PR is now so rigorously patrolled that even many A-list filmmakers rarely grant one-on-one interviews and when they do they are shoehorned into a twenty- or thirty-minute window, a time constraint that hardly allows for a detailed consideration of the work.

Every now and again a British filmmaker will appear and deliver a film that generates both critical and commercial heat and will thus earn themselves and their film column inches. Tom Hooper was everywhere after the success of *The King's Speech* (2010) as was Sam Mendes after breathing yet more life into the bloated, anachronistic corpse of the James Bond franchise with *Skyfall* (2012). Veteran British auteur types such as Ken Loach and Mike Leigh are also figures whose films and histories can be considered to reasonably justify interview time. If there is a story attached to the production, a couple of plucky first timers may break through. Peter Strickland's *Katalin Varga* (2009) became the story of a film made on a small inheritance cheque whilst Clio Barnard's exceptional *The Arbor* (2010) had a journalistic angle in its tactic of having actors sync the words of actual people. Both films were deserving of the attention they were given.

The majority of the interviews in this collection are with British filmmakers who may otherwise have their work and their sensibilities go under the radar. British directors also frequently find themselves corralled together in a kind of catch-all piece designed to give the impression of editorial support. The *Observer* recently ran a series of short interview pieces with directors including Richard Ayoade, Clio Barnard, Amma Asante and Joanna Hogg ('British Film on the Crest of a Wave', Tom Lamont, *The Observer*, 15 September 2013) on the back of recent festivals at Toronto and Venice. Despite the fact that each of these filmmakers operate in a very different style they were all placed together in a 'the British are coming'-type piece in which it was clear that the writer of the article had seen few if any of the actual films in question.

The move towards the mainstream has become unstoppable. Recent franchise and other unashamedly populist titles such as *Kick-Ass* (2010), *Avengers Assemble* (2012), *Iron Man 3* (2013), *Star Trek Into Darkness* (2013) and *This is 40* (2013) were all given four- and five-star 'lead review' treatment even in broadsheet publications such as the *Guardian*, the nation's favoured critical barometer. The traditional art-house releases, which over the last decade have increased in number to saturation point, are forced to take their place amongst the pack with even a well-reviewed title relegated to fourth or fifth billing and a review, no matter how positive, that may run to little more than a paragraph.

Periodically, most commonly on a quiet week for Hollywood, a specialised or foreign language film such as *I Wish* (2011), *Our Children* (2012), *Amour* (2012) or *In The Fog* (2012) may enjoy top billing but these instances must now be considered anomalies. In reality these specialised titles rely on reviews to attract audiences as they simply don't have the benefit of

considerable marketing and advertising budget to increase their profile and broaden their reach. Without editorial support, and critics invariably blame editorial policy for the recent downsizing of attention to 'niche' titles, they have little chance of finding an audience and could conceivably disappear from our screens and our collective psyches.

With diminished review space, non-mainstream and foreign-language directors have become all but invisible and it is rare indeed to read an interview with a filmmaker who could be considered in some way specialised, a generic term that could be taken to mean foreign language or aesthetically or financially independent in some way. There are, of course, a number of directors who can command press attention by virtue of the fact that their films regularly win international prizes, achieve a certain amount of box office and generally enjoy wide release outside of their native domestic territories. Figures such as Pedro Almodóvar, Michael Haneke and more recent additions to the ranks including Michel Hazanavicius and Asghar Farhadi are, however, firmly in the minority.

With the exception of *Sight and Sound*, which at the time of writing carries an interview with Abbas Kiarostami, there is little space given over either to more niche or unheralded auteurs or newly emerging voices whose work displays quality or distinction. The publication cannot carry the torch alone and for reasons related to space or economy – though subsidised it also has to generate income and shift copies – often has to prune back the word count for a piece on a specialised title in favour of a more headline-grabbing act. The aforementioned July 2013 issue places an interview with Richard Linklater for *Before Midnight* (2013) front and centre whilst Kiarostami's *Like Someone In Love* (2012) has a more backseat view. Jonathan Romney, a regular contributor to the magazine and one of the most high-profile supporters of specialised film has just been let go by *The Independent on Sunday* a move which follows Robbie Collin replacing Sukhdev Sandu at *The Telegraph*. It is utterly conceivable that in an age when everyone has a digital voice that many national newspapers will stop covering film entirely. More critic casualties are certain to follow.

The demise of *Vertigo* was a considerable blow to both artists' cinema and world art European filmmakers and there has been nothing in the UK to replace it. There is also, as far as I can see, little evidence to suggest that online publications are filling the chasm created by the problems facing the printed press. There is more a sense digital déjà-vu, a repetition of pieces that we have already consumed elsewhere.

All of which is, of course, an attempt to justify the existence of *Last Words*. A follow-up to my earlier collection, *Talking Movies: Contemporary World Filmmakers in Interview* (2007) and thus possibly the least anticipated film publication ever. This book collects together interviews with filmmakers and are all culled from conversations that have been conducted without interference over numerous years as a film programmer and occasional journalist. Many of these pieces have not appeared elsewhere and many were conducted as on-stage or post-screening discussions, perhaps the last refuge of the in-depth film director interview. My preference has always been for film interviews to be published as transcripts to allow the filmmaker to communicate their ideas in an unfiltered form. The transcript is also a tactic for discounting the often-colossal ego of the interviewer and the supposition that readers are desperate to learn of the extent to which the interrogated and the interrogator got along. It is in transcript form that the interviews are presented to you here, with anything other than comments relating to the work itself judiciously removed.

The short introduction to each individual interview will hopefully indicate why I felt it was

worth including (Christopher Nolan sticks out like a sore thumb but the interview was conducted *pre-Batman*), but in general this book is intended as a tool for people interested in cinema that occupies new or different territories. It also seeks to provide first-hand accounts of the filmmaking process from figures who could be considered to have a unique, challenging or non-conformist aesthetic vision. You may not have read these figures discussing their films in depth before and if the residual eradication of film culture continues in our press and on our screens there is a genuine danger that you may not hear their voices or opinions in the future.

Lenny Abrahamson

Lenny Abrahamson started shooting shorts while studying Philosophy at Trinity College Dublin. After a period of post-graduate study in Philosophy at Stanford University in California, he returned home to concentrate on filmmaking.

Abrahamson's first two features were fruitful collaborations with writer Mark O'Halloran. The first, *Adam & Paul* (2004), was included in the Official Selection at the 2005 Berlin Film Festival. *Garage* (2007) was the recipient of the CICA Art Cinema Prize in the Directors' Fortnight at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival.

Featuring a truly remarkable performance from comic Pat Shortt as a mentally retarded attendant at a rural Irish petrol station, the *Garage* looks at the ultimately tragic turn his life takes when he tries to interact more decisively with society. It is characteristic of Abrahamson's work in its attentiveness to character and observations on the fragility of relationships.

Abrahamson's third feature is the recently released *What Richard Did* (2013), a quiet and devastating tale set amongst a privileged set of South Dublin teenagers, through the summer between the end of school and the beginning of university.

The director is currently completing *Frank*, very loosely based on Frank Sidebottom and featuring Michael Fassbender.

The interview below took place on the eve of the release of *Garage*.

JASON WOOD: *Following the warmly received Adam & Paul, Garage marks your second consecutive feature collaboration with writer Mark O'Halloran. Could you talk about the working partnership and some of the sensibilities you share?*

LENNY ABRAHAMSON: Mark says that we plucked each other from obscurity and that's not far from the truth. There is a great connection between us artistically and a natural territory we inhabit when we work together. Looking at our films it's hard to disentangle his traces from mine. They are the result of real collaboration. Having said this, in terms of the way we work it's all quite traditional. We talk, he writes and I direct. Certainly this was true with *Garage*. On *Adam & Paul* everything was new and it took us a while to discover our method.

I think one of the big things that we share, which makes our collaboration possible, is that we don't like characters to be fully captured in a film. And we favour story over plot. What do we mean by this? Well, at the level of the characters, even though we create them, they are not reducible to a set of psychological traits or a list of motivations. And nor is it always easy for an audience to extract conventional plot points from the flow of events. Mark's writing is always open: the scenes feel true and are full of possible meanings; the voices are absolute and authentic. The scenes are somehow compelling but it would often be hard to say just what they mean. That's the way life is: meaning is always there but there is no clearly given way of decoding it. Conventional cinema obscures this with an easy reduction of meaning to plot and schemata.

characters. Cinema at it's best can express something of the pure irreducible fact of things.

JW: What advances do you see between Adam & Paul and your second feature, and what were the main lessons you learned?

LA: I probably wouldn't use the word 'advances'. *Adam & Paul* is true to itself and complete and so for me is a fully realised piece of work. *Garage* is probably a deeper film, quieter, sparer, and more resonant. But that emerged through dealing with its content, not because we sat down after *Adam & Paul* and consciously decided to move in that direction. That's not to say I didn't learn from the first film. Shooting *Adam & Paul* was very tough. There was barely enough time and the budget was tiny. On top of that we shot in dangerous locations where we had little or no control or security. I was aware on *Garage* of defending a schedule that would give me space to work with more freedom. We also shot the film in a very beautiful, quiet place in the middle of the countryside. So the experience of making the two films was very different. Shooting *Garage* I felt relaxed, but at the same time intensely concentrated. I don't think I achieved the same purity of focus on the first film.

JW: You have described Garage as 'slapstick tragedy' in that it brings together two genres that shouldn't necessarily match. What is it about marrying these two distinct genres that interests you as a filmmaker and were there specific pitfalls that you wished to avoid?

LA: Probably this description better applies to the first film. *Adam & Paul* is more obviously Vaudevillian – it has lots more physical comedy as well as some out and out slapstick routines in the 'who's-on-first' or Laurel and Hardy tradition. But there is still something of this in *Garage* in the way that elements of clowning are used. Josie is a kind of clown who's had most of his gags taken away from him and is left standing in the centre of the stage feeling dislocated and gormless. I find something moving about that style, without it ever being crudely emotive.

JW: The perception of Josie changes as the film progresses. We begin with how he is perceived by others and journey towards a more internal and retrospective portrait. Apart from the performance of Pat Shortt, what tactics did you employ to achieve this?

LA: The film is always with Josie – it's a chronicle of his life over a number of months – and Pat's performance is so subtle and deep, and the film is open and quiet enough to let you watch him closely, that after a time it becomes impossible to sustain your first impression of the character. The beginning, which is deliberately straightforward and unremarkable presentation, encourages the viewer to see Josie as harmless, idiotic, absurd and, above all, a slight – but as the story develops this view of him becomes harder to hold on to.

There are scenes of him in nature, on his own at home, scenes with the horse, which open the film out and give it a denser texture and it becomes harder to think of Josie in easy social categories. Eventually as the film approaches the end sequence there is, I hope, a feeling that there is something unfathomable about him.

The important thing for me was to achieve this development without marking the change

in any obvious way. Josie could never describe his feelings – perhaps he is not even conscious that he has them. Actually, in a real sense, there is no change in Josie; not ‘character development’ to use that horrible phrase. The change is in us as we watch him. At his depth, all his capacity is there from the beginning – we just don’t see it. The film works by becoming quieter, more concentrated as it moves forward, which draws the audience in and intensifies its awareness. In a way, everything points towards the few seconds of silent black screen after the last image and before the credits.

JW: One of the things I most enjoyed about Garage is its willingness to communicate as much through what is left unsaid and suggested as that which is made explicit. For example, the scene where Josie makes tea for Mr. Gallagher and we are left in no doubt that Josie is about to lose his home and his livelihood. Was this approach a major decision for you?

LA: We knew the scene you describe would end where it does, before anything significant was said. As shot it was longer, though – with all the dialogue you would expect – so that the actors could play the complete encounter and would not be anticipating the cut. Generally there is an attempt in Garage not to load the dialogue with explicit meaning. I’m interested in the spaces between the significant moments in life, the parts that are usually discarded from memory and also – almost as a matter of principle – in conventional cinematic storytelling.

JW: In terms of its visual characteristics, you employ a spare minimalist style. Is this partly informed by the natural beauty of your locations, and what other factors came into play when deciding the tact that you take?

LA: The process of shooting or choosing shots is intuitive for me and I just feel my way towards what seems right. In fact, though the filmmaking is always quiet, there are places where the images are expressive as well as places where the shots are deliberately functional. It’s hard for me to define a single visual style that describes the film. Garage is minimal, I suppose, in the sense of being as simple as I could possibly make it. When there really is something authentic in a scene, and when you remove everything that feels inflected in the storytelling, anything unnecessary, then the scene can acquire an extraordinary intensity. Lots of this business of taking things away happens in the edit. I try to take bricks out of the building, and as long as it doesn’t fall down they stay out. The danger in making something like Garage where the events are mostly ‘ordinary’ – at least on the surface – this very simple way is that if there is any kind of false note, then the powerfully prosaic becomes just prosaic. There is none of the bluster and effect of conventional drama to hide behind.

JW: The minimalism is also reflected in the sparing use of music. Why did you decide to use so little?

LA: I work with the same composer, Stephen Rennicks, on everything I do. I have a similar tight relationship with him as I do with Mark. He’s extremely talented and absolute

concentrated on his music as part of the film – never for its own sake. He composed beautiful and interesting music for many parts of the film and we would try pieces out, often keeping them in the cut for quite a while. But nearly always we came to feel that the sequence was stronger and purer, without the music. In the end there are three music cues left in the film; the titles and credits and one piece over picture. The music over titles is very dense, orchestrated and dramatic. It creates a kind of expectation that is undercut by the first, prosaic images of the film, but by the time a version of it recurs over the credits I think the expectation is met. The middle piece occurs at a very particular point in the film. It marks the end of something. Neither Stephen nor myself has ever worked as hard, or thought as much about film music as we did on *Garage*. There is so little of it but it is a hugely important part of the film.

JW: There is a sense of timelessness with regards to the environment where the film is set. Given the ravages of modernity how difficult was it to find your location and what key elements – a garage presumably – were high on your list of priorities?

LA: With the garage itself we were very lucky. The building that we ended up using – and using with almost no alteration – was due to be knocked down to make way for new apartment blocks just like in the story of the film. Generally though, and all breathless news reports about the Celtic Tiger notwithstanding, most of Ireland looks a lot like it always has. There were many many towns we could have used. Strangely, one or two Irish critics have said that places like this no longer exist. I think they're watching too much TV.

JW: Were there also certain images you were keen to avoid regarding the depiction of rural Ireland and smalltown life? In many ways you are not afraid to reveal that despite the beauty there is a sense of frustration, boredom and even cruelty associated with this way of living.

*LA: I was concerned that while the film definitely had to show the insularity and occasional cruelty of smalltown life, it couldn't become about those things. There is a history of stage and film drama in Ireland – some of it wonderful – about the psychology of the depressed place and for me there is not much to be said that's new. *Garage* is really a film about the significance of a small, unremarkable life and I wanted it to be a celebration of that life. It was often a difficult balance – to show it truthfully in all its sadness and at the same time to make it about something deeper than that sadness.*

JW: The relationship between Josie and David is beautifully realised before, of course, being tragically destroyed. How natural was the initially uneasy but then finally warm camaraderie we see between Pat and Conor?

LA: Pat and Conor are easy going, open people and they liked each other from the beginning of rehearsals. Like David, Conor is self-possessed, gentle, and has a very developed, dry sense of humour. And he is as natural in front of the camera as any actor I've ever seen. Working with the two of them together was a great pleasure for me.

JW: In a film of quietly remarkable performances – Anne-Marie Duff is especially striking – it's impossible not to come back to Pat Shortt as Josie. I know that in Ireland he is a very popular comedian so did you have any reservations about casting him and how did you work together to achieve Josie's physical and mental appearance?

LA: Once I thought about Pat as Josie it was impossible for me to imagine anyone else playing the part. We'd worked together briefly before and I knew that underneath his broad comedy style there was a great sensitivity as well as a profound understanding and familiarity with the kind of place Josie is from. If he had turned the part down – and I thought he probably would – I really don't know what we would have done. Pat is a performer, a character comedian who is used to working from the outside in and that's a way that I like to work too. We didn't start with long conversations about Josie's feelings, or his history or his psychology. We started with how he walked, spoke, his bearing around other people, and we built him up that way, always with the script as our touchstone.

Certainly casting Pat in a straight role caused quite a stir in Ireland and at one point I remember I did worry the Irish audience would see only Pat and not Josie. But his performance is so extraordinary people very quickly forget they are watching Pat Shortt and become absorbed in the character.

Pat's performance still amazes me when I watch the film. I shaped the performance with him and I've seen it hundreds of times through the edit and at many screenings but I am still struck by how Pat, without any obvious 'acting', is able to give glimpses of Josie's deep inner life. It is also striking how he can move seamlessly between almost high farce and very dark, truthful, realistic performance.

JW: The film, like Adam & Paul, was very warmly received and was relatively successful on its theatrical outing. Are you emboldened by its reception and has this in any way affected the scope with which you view your next project?

LA: Yes, I am happy with how *Garage* has been received. It was by far the most successful Irish film of the year, which is saying something given the kind of piece it is. Its reception critically in other countries, particularly France and the UK, has also been extremely warm. This helps in getting the next projects funded and probably does open up possibilities for me to make bigger films. Having said that, I don't have any particular urge to make a bigger film for the sake of it. I like working on small films over which I have complete control. I'd hate to give up that freedom. There is one project I've been thinking about, though, which would have to be funded at a significantly higher level. Maybe it's now a real possibility that I could make that on my own terms. We'll see how it goes.

Clio Barnard

Clio Barnard's work deals with the relationship between documentary and fiction, and in particular the subjectivity of recollection. In 2006 Film and Video Umbrella commissioned Barnard to make *Dark Glass* as part of the *Single Shot* touring programme. A psychological micro-drama that moves from the sanctuary of a domestic garden to the half-remembered shadows of a house, the piece peers back into a semi-veiled interior world of fraught and ambivalent memories.

The tactic of constructing fictional images around verbatim audio (and vice versa) was brilliantly utilised in *The Arbor* (2010), Barnard's remarkable debut feature. Playwright Andrea Dunbar wrote unflinchingly about her upbringing on Bradford's Buttershaw Estate and was hailed as 'a genius straight from the slums' by playwright Shelagh Delaney. Dunbar's first play, *The Arbor*, originally written as part of a school assignment, described the experiences of a pregnant teenager with an abusive drunken father. Its success at the Royal Court Theatre led to Dunbar's commission to write *Rita Sue and Bob Too* in 1982. The play, and subsequent film by Alan Clark, was described as a portrait of 'Thatcher's Britain with its knickers down'.

Dunbar died tragically at the age of 29 in 1990, leaving her ten-year-old daughter Lorraine with bitter childhood memories. Having also grown up in the Bradford region, Barnard revisited the Buttershaw Estate to see how it had changed in the two decades since Dunbar's death and also catches up with Lorraine in the present day. Now aged 29, Lorraine is ostracised from her mother's family and in prison undergoing rehab. Re-introduced to her mother's plays and letters, the film follows Lorraine's personal journey as she reflects on her own life and begins to understand the struggles her mother faced. Through interviews with other members of the Dunbar family, we see a contrasting view of Andrea, in particular from Lorraine's younger sister Lisa, who idolises Andrea to this day.

Barnard recorded audio interviews with Lorraine Dunbar, other members of the Dunbar family and residents from the Buttershaw Estate over a period of two years. These interviews were edited to form an audio 'screenplay', which forms the basis of the film as actors lip-synch to the voices of the interviewees. This footage was intercut with extensive archive clips, as well as extracts from Andrea's stage play, filmed as a live outdoor performance on the Buttershaw Estate to an audience of its residents.

Transcending genre and defying categorisation, *The Arbor* emerges as a truly unique work, a celebration of Dunbar's triumphs and a dissection her legacy, both from a wider society perspective and on a personal level as we witness the pain of her short and tragic life.

Barnard has since completed *The Selfish Giant*, which premiered at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival to ecstatic notices.

JASON WOOD: *Your work has repeatedly demonstrated a concern with the relationship between fictional film language and documentary. How did you wish to engage with the subject of your previous representations of the Buttershaw Estate on stage and screen and what was it about*

CLIO BARNARD: Andrea's fiction was based on what she observed around her. She reminded the audience they were watching a play by her use of direct address when *The Girl in The Arbor* introduces each scene. I see the use of actors lip-synching as performing the same function, reminding the audience they are watching the re-telling of a true story.

My work is concerned with the relationship between fiction-film language and documentary. I often dislocate sound and image by constructing fictional images around verbatim audio. In this sense, my working methods have some similarity to the methods of verbatim theatre. Verbatim theatre by its very nature (being performed in a theatre by actors) acknowledges that it is constructed. Housing estates and the people who live there are usually represented on film in the tradition of Social Realism, a working method that aims to deconstruct, aiming for naturalistic performances, an invisible crew and camera, adopting the aesthetic of Direct Cinema (a documentary movement) as a short hand for authenticity. I wanted to confront expectations about how a particular group of people are represented by subverting the form.

I used the technique in which actors lip-synch to the voices of interviewees to draw attention to the fact that documentary narratives are as constructed as fictional ones. I wanted the audience to think about the fact that the film has been shaped and edited by the filmmakers. Through these formal techniques I hoped the film would achieve a fine balance so that, perhaps paradoxically, the distancing techniques might create closeness, allowing a push/pull, so an audience might be aware of the shaping of the story but simultaneously able to engage emotionally.

Above all my hope is that the film will provoke compassionate thought and reflection.

JW: *You recorded audio interviews with Lorraine Dunbar and other members of the Dunbar family over a two-year period to create an audio screenplay. To what extent did you allow the audio screenplay to form the basis of the film and was it during this process that you decided to make Lorraine one of the central voices of the film, thus opening up the project into consideration of inter-generational neglect as well as a dissection of Andrea's legacy?*

CB: The audio screenplay is the basis of the film and it was always the intention to do it the way round. I knew Lorraine was important because of her words at the end of *A State Affair* that linked back to Andrea's play *Rita Sue and Bob Too*.

At the point the film was commissioned I knew I wanted to speak to Lorraine because of these words but I didn't know what had happened to her in the ten years since. Neither did I know how autobiographical Andrea's play *The Arbor* was until I met her sister Pamela. Realising that the character of Yousaf in Andrea's play was Lorraine's father was key. Her play, combined with the interviews with her family, means that the film can look across three generations of a family and three decades of a particular place. I hope that this allows some understanding of the destructive effects of poverty, racism and addiction to emerge.

JW: *The lip-synching technique you employ in which your actors have to not only learn words but also master pauses and speech rhythms must have been very challenging. What casting*

process did you employ and how did you help the selected actors to cope with the rigors of the production?

CB: I worked with a brilliant casting director called Amy Hubbard who brought in lots of actors who were up for the challenge. We asked them to try out the technique during the casting process. I have huge respect for the actors. It was very, very demanding on them. Manjinder Virk described it as being like learning a piece of music, and being like circular breathing. It meant that they had to be very present – never thinking ahead or they would trip up. The actors were incredible I think, and I'm indebted to them, not only for their remarkable technical skill but also for their ability to give true performances.

JW: The approach that you take with the material and your concern over the boundaries between fact and fiction make for an incredibly immersive experience for the spectator. Do you wish to encourage an interpretative approach from the audience to what is on screen?

CB: I wasn't totally certain what the effect of the lip-synching would be so it has been fascinating to learn about that from people who have seen it. People say that paradoxically the distancing technique draws them closer. I think it may be because all the people on screen look you in the eye. Perhaps you actively listen as a result.

JW: I understand that The Arbor was not originally intended for cinema release. How did the positive critical reaction and the numerous prizes it has steadily accrued contribute to the film being allowed to find a wider audience than you perhaps originally intended?

CB: It was commissioned by Artangel as a feature-length film for TV. The UK Film Council became involved during development and that was when it became intended for cinema release. Tracy O'Riordan, who is a brilliant producer, made certain that UK distributors saw the film as soon as it was finished. We were lucky that Verve picked it up. They have been great at getting the film out there, working alongside Rabbit PR; lovely, committed publicists and people who made sure the critics saw the film. The response has been amazing and unexpected. I don't think you ever know how people are going to respond. I'm grateful to all the critics who were very open to and excited about the challenges of the film and audiences for going to see the film and for their feedback.

JW: Alongside recent works by Steve McQueen, Andrew Köttling, Joe Lawlor and Christine Molloy and Gillian Wearing, The Arbor highlights the continuing strength of artists' film in British cinema. Does this feel like an incredibly fertile period in which to be working?

CB: I'm a great admirer of all these filmmakers. It is great that there has recently been this strong strand of recent risk-taking British film, wonderful that these films are getting made and fantastic that they have found an audience. It's exciting to think that *The Arbor* is part of that.

Marco Bellocchio

Marco Bellocchio was born in Piacenza in 1939. In 1959 he left his Philosophy studies at the Cattolica University in Milan and enrolled at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome. During 1961/62 he made the short films *Abbasso Lo Zio*, *La Colpa e La Pena* and *Ginepro Fatto Uomo* before moving to London to attend the Slade School of Fine Art. Exploding onto the international film scene in 1965 with his fiery debut, *Fists in the Pocket*, Bellocchio is rightfully considered one of Italy's cinematic masters.

Vincere (2009) was the first Bellocchio film for some time to receive international distribution. The film tells a story airbrushed from many official biographies of Benito Mussolini; his relationship with Ida Dalser. A supporter of Mussolini from the time he was the ardent socialist editor of *Avanti!*, Dalser sells everything she owns to finance Mussolini's attempts to form the nucleus of what would become the Italian Fascist Party.

When the First World War erupts, Benito Mussolini enrolls in the Army and disappears. When Dalser finds him again in a military hospital, he is tended to by another woman, who has just become his wife. Dalser lashes out at her rival, demanding her rights as Mussolini's true wife and the mother of his first-born son. She is led away by force. For more than eleven years, she is locked away in an insane asylum – and her son in an institute – where she is physically restrained and tortured, never seeing her son again.

JASON WOOD: *What initially led you to the story of Ida Dalser?*

MARCO BELLOCCHIO: As an Italian I am familiar with the history of Fascism but the story of Ida Dalser was unknown to me. I discovered it through a documentary for Italian television. The documentary revealed that prior to becoming *Il Duce* in Milan before the war Mussolini had a love affair with a woman and they had a son. There is doubt over whether he actually married Ida but not that he recognised his son, Benito Albino. No official documentation of the marriage exists. What struck me following the broadcast of the documentary was the fact that everybody seemed to attribute a great deal of importance to the question of this marriage, although the great tragedy of Ida lay in the fact that she had gone into a suicidal and self-destructive mode as a result of her abandonment. The fact of the marriage seemed to be of tremendous import to everybody. Even on the set of *Vincere* people would approach me and say 'Did they really get married?' That seemed to be of central importance, as opposed to the fact that Ida had abandoned herself to Mussolini and that she never relinquished that attachment. She refused to accept compromise, to the point of ending up in a mental asylum and the whole fate that then befell her.

JW: *The film reveals a great deal about Dalser's strength, her search to assert her own identity and her refusal to disappear despite the rejection and cruelty she suffers.*

MB: This wasn't necessarily my objective but it is nonetheless a clear characteristic of the woman. She was extremely tenacious and would not give even a millimetre on her iron will to re-conquer the man she had set her sights on. As Mussolini progressed in his political career, Ida found herself in an astonishing battle with him and by extension with the whole of Italy. Pitted against everybody; she had absolutely no support. Consequently this desperate fight Ida's assumed a historic dimension. It also assumed a suicidal dimension. When the psychiatrist sees her at the hospital at San Clemente he suggests that Fascism will not last forever and therefore her absolute position of ferocious rebellion is self-destructive and self-defeating.

JW: *Although you have stated previously that you didn't wish for the film to serve as an exposition of the vileness of the Fascist regime, did you wish to interrogate the methods by which history represents, remembers and obscures?*

MB: It's a complex question. What the film does through private events and through the characters is offer a series of comments on historic memory. At a certain point Ida says to the psychiatrist, that if I don't do this, that is rebel, nobody will remember me. She wasn't wrong when she said this. In fact, it was by her extreme tenacity that she distinguished herself. Otherwise, had she not done that, she simply would have become one of the many women and there were a great many in Mussolini's past – that were accepting of whatever position they were accorded.



Vincere, Marco Bellocchio, 2009 (Artificial Eye)

I was interested in the events of a private person who was then completely squeezed out of historic memory. This person was denied the possibility of having any influence at all on Fascism or any other aspect of Italian history. My intention was not to tell the story of Italy

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