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The British War Film, 1939-1980: Culture, History, and Genre

by

Kevin M. Flanagan

B.A., College of William and Mary, 2006

M.A., North Carolina State University, 2009

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This dissertation was presented

by

Kevin M. Flanagan

It was defended on

April 15, 2015

and approved by

Colin MacCabe, Distinguished Professor, Department of English

Adam Lowenstein, Associate Professor, Department of English

David Pettersen, Assistant Professor, Department of French and Italian

Dissertation Advisor: Lucy Fischer, Distinguished Professor, Department of English

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THE BRITISH WAR FILM, 1939-1980: CULTURE, HISTORY, AND GENRE

Kevin M. Flanagan, Ph.D.

University of Pittsburgh, 2015

This dissertation argues that discussions of war representation that privilege the nationalistic, heroic, and redemptively sacrificial strand of storytelling that dominate popular memory in Britain ignore a whole counter-history of movies that view war as an occasion to critique through devices like humor, irony, and existential alienation. Instead of selling audiences on what Graham Dawson has called "the pleasure culture of war" (a nationally self-serving mode of talking about and profiting from war memory), many texts about war are motivated by other intellectual and ideological factors. Each chapter includes historical context and periodizing arguments about different moments in British cultural history, explores genre trends, and ends with a comparative analysis of representative examples.

Chapter One traces competing representational modes between 1939 and 1945, arguing that films about war and wartime during this period trouble the traditional binarism in British film historiography between realism and fantasy. Chapter Two looks at historical intersections of comedy and war, arguing that the embrace of irony as a argumentative position allows war comedies to engage with the idea of failure, a notion all but missing from dominant strands of war representation. Chapter Three describes a post-1956 brand of war tragedy that embraces cynicism, tonal bleakness, and the cultural vogue for existentialism as another affront to triumphalist war narratives. Chapter Four shifts from bigger conceptual categories to a specific, historically embedded interest in technology and strategy that intensifies after 1945. This chapter argues that many films turn away from war as historically grounded fact, and towards a

conception of war that is overtly simulated and virtual. Chapter Five examines the representational challenge of the nuclear bomb for British cinema, arguing that beyond similarities to international trends that align these weapons with panic and horror, the specter of atomic energy encapsulates a larger geopolitical visioning of the nation's loss of control. A Conclusion examines the reception of many of the films analyzed and acknowledges the influence and legacy of these alternative approaches to war.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements……………………………………………………………………………vii

Introduction…………………………………………………………………………………..1

Chapter 1
Britain's Finest Hour?: Troubling War Discourse through Film Propaganda…………………...35

Chapter 2
Traditions of War Comedy: Comic Alternatives to the "Pleasure Culture of War"……………..88

Chapter 3
"For Christ's Sake, We're Surrounded!": Tragedy, Bleakness, Cynicism and Existentialism in British War Cinema, 1957-1977……………………………………………………………..158

Chapter 4:
On Screen and at Arm's Length: Social Class and the Simulation of Combat…………………207

Chapter 5:
The Bomb and After: Britain's Cold War, Apocalypse, and Fantasies of Lost Control……….277

Conclusion:
The Legacy of Failure and Obscurity……………………………………………………..…327

Bibliography…………………………………………………………………...………….349

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Introduction

1. War and Britain: The Mainstream Inheritance

In the one hundred years between the late Victorian era and the election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister—the decades that saw the meteoric rise of cinema around the world, as well as its gradual decline as a publicly exhibited entertainment in the West—Great Britain was in a state of continuous transition. During this time, the British Empire went from the most powerful supranational entity in the world to a junior player in a standoff between two colossal, ideologically opposed superpowers; went from being a geographically massive group of allied nations, one of the biggest Empires the world had ever seen, to wheezing into the 1980s as a lean parliamentary democracy under an economic pinch (a powerful nation, still, but with less direct influence on the world at large); and went from boasting a modern army and an unsurpassed navy in the 19th century to a small, all-volunteer army by 1980.

These sweeping generalizations only give a broad outline of British military and political exploits during this century. From Queen Victoria's "little wars" of Imperial maintenance (campaigns in India, Russia, and China) in the 19th century, Britain eventually found itself on the front line of The Great War (1914-1918), a stalemated struggle that brought previously unimagined loss of life to the public eye.[1] After a period of worldwide economic depression and gradual arms accumulation, a Second World War followed, this time as a response to the conquering antagonisms of fascism (although David Edgerton has recently

[1] See Byron Farwell, *Queen Victoria's Little Wars* (New York: Norton, 1985).

argued that, despite the threat of Nazi aggression, Britain entered the war having spent the previous years enjoying material and mechanical strength relative to the rest of the world).[2] Britain and her allies won a hard-fought victory in 1945, emerging from the war temporarily broke and under the auspices of strict material austerity, but with what Kenneth O. Morgan calls "a new kind of consensus," under Labour Prime Minister Clement Atlee, "a social democracy based on a mixed economy and welfare state which took Britain well enough through the difficult post-war transformation and endured in its essence for another generation or more."[3] While a general economic consensus held until the "reforms" of Thatcher (the bullying rise of free markets, privatization, and so on), Britain's boom and bust decades—the mid-1950s through the late 1970s—saw plenty of argument, discontent, protest, and outrage, a social revolution greeted by attenuate aesthetic experimentation.

Although Britain would never again fight a war to compare with the scale and desperation of what it saw from 1939 until 1945, war and military culture persisted in the national imaginary. From Britain's emergence from austerity in the 1950s until Thatcher's orchestrated revival of old school patriotic militarism with the Falkland Islands War in the early 1980s, the culture of war provided a set of remembrances, memorializations, wish-fulfillments, exploitations, marketing ploys, exercises in nostalgia, and genuine historical investigations that formed an important narrative niche about national self-imaging.[4] This recourse to war was both genuine social expression and, peripherally, an on-going facet of what Theodor Adorno

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[2] David Edgerton, *Britain's War Machine: Weapons, Resources, and Experts in the Second World War* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), 10-14.
[3] Kenneth O. Morgan, "The Twentieth Century (1914-2000)," *The Oxford History of Britain*, ed. Kenneth O. Morgan (New York: Oxford UP, 2010), 633-634.
[4] Stuart Hall has commented that "The Falklands War allowed Thatcherism to play, when required, from two different ideological repertoires, with resonance in apparently opposing reservoirs of public sentiment: marching towards the future clad in the armour of the past." Hall, "The Neoliberal Revolution: Thatcher, Blair, Cameron—The Long March of Neo-Liberalism Continues," *Soundings* 48 (May 2011): 18.

and Max Horkheimer famously called "the culture industry," the reification and commodification of expression sold to the public in pre-digested packets.[5] How Britain's conflicts and military history got presented to the nation (and the world at large) often fell into predictable themes and clusters, some more sweeping and normalized than others, such that the business of showing war came to be as much about genre codes as about the unfettered creativity provided by personal ideas and experiences.

War representation in Britain is often tied to commodity culture and to notions of citizenship and sovereignty. Graham Dawson has identified the primary ideological trend in war representation, especially in the post-WWII period, as the "pleasure culture of war," a set of texts across media in which the figure of the soldier-hero provides a site of identification for young men (the rhetoric explicitly targets constructions of masculine action) that builds on nostalgic notions of the stability of Britain and its empire.[6] Michael Paris reads this favored cultural relationship to war as "teaching that war was moral, legitimate, and above all, exciting and romantic[7]." How war gets talked about, circulated, framed, and (most importantly) visualized determines its pedagogical function as a locus for notions of duty, deference, and self-sacrifice. The values of "the pleasure culture of war" interface with the dominant values of citizenship, with lessons applicable even to those who do not follow martial careers.

The dominant consensus of framing war as ethically necessary, dutiful, and politically justified is especially strong in film and television. As relatively expensive and labor-intensive enterprises, film and television works made for commercial purposes and popular audiences

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[5] See Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1997), 120-167.

[6] Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), 3-4; 282.

[7] Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of Britain at War in Popular Culture, 1850-2000* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 9.

often hew especially close to longstanding agreements of good taste, genre decorum, and narrative intelligibility. In cinema and television texts (in this dissertation, I consider fictional features, documentaries and everything in between), the positions of heroism and the righteousness of war frequently accompany a set of similarly codified types of style and construction, including a broad recourse to the conceits of the Classical Hollywood Style (editing and narrative geared toward motivated clarity, unity, harmony, continuity); narratives motivated by clear goals of individuals that do not dwell too extensively on abstraction or collectivities; and narratives punctuated by scenes of violence that feature attempts at recreating the excitement of combat, usually through a mixture of physical effects, convincing equipment, and legible and unobtrusive framing and lighting.[8] Most importantly of all, war is almost uniformly presented in narrative terms, as a coherent story with an inevitable end, rather than as a random, chaotic sequence of loosely aligned events and counter-events. In other words, film and television texts that express the history and culture of war or military life through the common values of "pleasure culture" notions are often (erroneously) granted equivalent status to the genre itself. In this formation, scholars, critics, and everyday viewers make the rhetorical move of categorizing British representations of war in film and television with dominant, loudly expressed cultural values that mask more essential features of genre organization like iconography, historical themes, and subtle formal/stylistic choices.

This imagined ideological and national consensus about war appears across subgenres and decades. Despite visible social change across periods, this dominant approach to war representation retains stable features that form an organizational through line. For instance *The First of the Few* (1942), a biopic of Spitfire inventor R.J. Mitchell directed by and starring

[8] See David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985) for an expanded set of recurrent formal elements.

Leslie Howard, is presented both as a war film that shows the professionalism of fighter pilot crews in the present and as a retrospective re-reading of the life of a noted expert. The most popular film of 1942, it (to use David Edgerton's phase) "is a vindication of the armament firm Vickers," Mitchell's employer, and couches his workaholic attitude as a symptom of his total dedication to British defense (whatever his individual genius, all is sacrificed for the good of the nation).[9] *Malta Story* (1953, Brian Desmond Hurst), a melodramatic dramatization of the defense of the island nation of Malta (a strategically key target located between North Africa and Italy), makes a similar appeal, offering the eccentric Peter Ross (Alec Guinness), a reconnaissance pilot, as the redeemer of this area of the war.[10] His personal loss—as a patriot, and as a man engaged to be married to Maltese woman Maria (Muriel Pavlow)—personalizes the war, yet stands in as a proxy for a wider set of tales about redemptive selflessness. Even something like *Where Eagles Dare* (1968, Brian G. Hutton), despite its use of spy and thriller tropes like betrayal and double-crosses, ultimately tells the story of elite professional soldiers who execute a daring mission against a Nazi Alpine redoubt, showing a set of actions that become equivalent to the enacted moral superiority of the allied troops. In each of these three films, war is justified, it is "won" in a way that gels with an audience's preconceived ideas about the virtues of the fairly-fought "good war," and a stress is put on a relatively uncomplicated representation of the world, a slightly heightened form of bourgeois realism that naturalizes the actions of those it depicts.

[9] Edgerton 154.
[10] Malta was more-or-less bombed continuously from summer 1940 until summer 1943. See James Holland, *Fortress Malta: An Island Under Siege, 1940-1943* (New York: Miramax Books), 417.

2. War Representation: Expanded Theatres

This construction only tells part of the story of the history of British war representation. What about films that show war as a failed or unjustified enterprise? What about television programs that downplay the adventure of war in favor of its basic monotony and all-encompassing boredom? What about texts that belittle, deflate, or satirize war and war mongering? What about allegorical or symbolic treatments of war? Instead of war as triumphant and life affirming, how about films that construct it as tragic and emotionally stultifying? Instead of war representation as expressed through widespread narrative and visual modalities like melodrama and realism, how about war as imagined as fantastic, or even surrealistic?

This project argues that seemingly outlier and anomalous trends in war representation are actually central to understanding the range of attitudes toward Britain's military past that competed during the postwar period, especially as relates to the history of film and television, but also generally, as pertains to cultural trends *writ large*. As with the general historical narrative in the history of British cinema (from stability during and immediately after the Second World War to a disrupted, unsettled production base, a changing audience, and the loss or modification of old genre traditions by the 1970s), war representation is best understood as a fracturing, diversifying phenomenon.[11] Even as dominant representational registers persist—tales of heroism, patriotism, national heritage, the inherent necessity of war—a staggering range of oppositional voices arise. A once relatively homogenous film culture becomes, in the span of only a quarter century, one of the most eccentric and experimental. This dissertation

[11] See Paul Newland, "Introduction: Don't Look Now," *Don't Look Now: British Cinema in the 1970s*, ed. Paul Newland (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2010), 12-13.

repositions the comparatively unpopular, obscure, and offbeat. These neglected films from one of Britain's most long-lived genre modalities bring a remarkable polysemy to what is often considered to be a monotonous and intellectually rote type of filmmaking. In general, this project privileges decidedly "impure" films: films about war that do not fit any neat generic definitions; films by expatriate filmmakers operating in Britain (and bringing to bear outsider sensibilities on an insular culture); films that question every aspect of the military and war, in the process scrutinizing traditional class roles, deference, hierarchies, and the stiff upper lip.

In *War and Film*, James Chapman writes about the arbitrariness of the "war film" genre, and instead organizes his investigation of war in film not as a matter of delineating the precise boundaries of the genre, so much as mapping representational trends across many different (but allied and overlapping) genres.[12] This contrasts, for instance, with Ivan Butler's approach in *The War Film* (1974: a foundational work of scholarship, to be sure), which differentiates the "war film" ("concerned either directly with the actual fighting, or very closely with the effects and aftermath of a conflict") from "fringe films" (cold war spy movies).[13] The tendency to break down the genre into groupings that create a hierarchy of relevance, or a generic centrality, is best explored in Jeanine Basinger's work. In *World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (1986, revised in 2003), Basinger constructs a dominant version of what a war "combat film" looks like, even as she problematizes the very concept of genre (which she refers to as an "alive," "fickle and inconstant" way or organizing).[14] The kind of war film that looms largest in the popular imaginary of the Anglophone world is the squad-based combat film in which an ethnically diverse group overcomes its own internal obstacles and succeeds against a

[12] James Chapman, *War and Film* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 8-9.
[13] Ivan Butler, *The War Film* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Co, 1974), 11.
[14] Jeanine Basinger, *World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (Wesleyan, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2003), 252.

largely faceless, abstract enemy in a struggle that confirms the opposing ideological nature of the different sides and affirms the preconceived political notions of its established audience.[15] That World War II has become the most re-created war in human history, and that its favored genre template has been so successful a guide to films about other conflicts, suggest that the conflation of "war film" with "combat film" likewise invites a comparison between the ideological work of this type of war film and the very *raison d'etre* of the genre itself.

With this in mind, my own approach to war is closer to Chapman's in that my interest is in mapping this mode of conflict across several other genre clusters. Throughout, I have selected film and television examples of British responses to war over several decades that follow Robert Eberwin's "inclusive" definition of the "war film": "I think that a film belongs to the genre if it focuses, with varying emphases, (1) directly on war itself (battles— preparation, actual, aftermath/damage); (2) on the activities of the participants off the battlefield (recruitment, training, leisure, recovery from wounds); and (3) the effects of war on human relationships (home front, impact on family and lovers). While some films easily meet all three criteria, others are notable for qualifying on the basis of one in particular."[16] In order to trace changing cultural attitudes to war, as well as organize new subgenres or types of genre hybridity, I have conceived war as a "total" enterprise, as something like Raymond Williams's influential definition of culture (itself the product of a mindset enabled by the political and economic climate of postwar Britain) as a "whole way of life" whose effects reverberate over diverse, often conflicting aspects of being and experience.[17] In calling for this comprehensive and inclusive definition of culture, Williams acknowledges that the enormity of the undertaking could overwhelm the whole prospect of such analysis. His solution, a kind of organizational

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[15] *Ibid*. 56-57.
[16] Robert Eberwin, *The Hollywood War Film* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 45.
[17] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview, 2001 [1961]),63.

sleight of hand, provides the basic template for how I have organized the sections of this project:

> Analysis of particular works or institutions is, in this context, analysis of their essential kind of organization, the relationships which works or institutions embody as parts of the organization as a whole. A key-word, in such analysis, is *pattern*: *it is with the discovery of patterns of a characteristic kind that any useful cultural analysis begins, and it is with the relationships between these patterns, which sometimes reveal unexpected identities and correspondences in hitherto separately considered activities, sometimes again reveal discontinuities of an unexpected kind, that general cultural analysis is concerned.*[18]

In looking at war representation in British culture from the beginning of the Second World War to the election of Thatcher, I am producing a new organizational history of an idea, a thematic reading of explicitly concerned with providing a revised place for war in the 20th century British visual culture.

I deliberately push back against overly generalized accounts of the genre, and of the visual legacies of war in general. Many writers, like Alan Burton and Steve Chibnall, recognize the equivalence between British war representation and the preferred national narrative of World War II, in which other conflicts (the Anglo-Boer war, even World War I) and other points of view (political dissent, women's experience) are less central to the national mythology than contemporary accounts of the underdog successes of the "good war," or, in later decades, the nostalgic re-imagination of war as a privileged type of masculine adventure.[19] Robert Murphy characterizes British wartime cinema—and, by extension, a large body of films about war made after this period—as inordinately associated with realism, a received wisdom that downplays other equally important aesthetic options that have had equally extensive

[18] *Ibid*. Emphasis added.
[19] Alan Burton and Steve Chibnall, "War Film," *Historical Dictionary of British Cinema*, eds. Alan Burton and Steve Chibnall (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 425-427.

impacts on the imagination of war.[20] In line with *The First of the Few*, *Malta Story*, and *Where Eagles Dare*, the stresses of Britain at war correspond to a favored, usually seriously inclined, mode of action-melodrama that purports to honestly show the tasks, technologies, and trials of the war, in the process legitimizing such conflict in the name of national righteousness. What many accounts of British war representation on screen miss is the fantasy, the out-there humor, the abstraction, the irreverence, and the inconsolable desolation that does not quite fit into the genre's dominant tendencies.

3. Surveying an Alternative Tradition

From beginning of the Second World War through the Thatcher's tenure as Prime Minister, a deeper and more associative analysis uncovers a startling diversity of representations of war, nationalism (and internationalism), the experience of military life, and Britain's legacy of armed conflict, many of which run counter to supposedly foundational tendencies of the genre at large. Despite the evident propaganda function of nearly all films made during the war (1939-1945), even this period boasts films that are hard to account for in typical histories of war on screen.

In *Let George Do It* (1940, Marcel Varnel), a vehicle for Wigan-born George Formby, dreams about war find an extended, raucous expression. Formby often played "a shy young man with an irrepressible grin and ever-ready ukulele to accompany his risqué songs," combining a relatably unassuming persona with moments of non-verbal slapstick and double

[20] Robert Murphy, "The Heart of Britain: British Cinema at War," *The British Cinema Book*, 3rd Edition, ed. Robert Murphy (London: BFI/Palgrave, 2009), 224.

entendre laden dialog.[21] Along with Gracie Fields, he was the highest paid English entertainer of his time and was "one of the few regional entertainers to become nationally famous in Britain."[22] Jeffrey Richards describes Formby's (and Field's) appeal in the 1930s and 1940s as having to do with their "optimism, cheerfulness, and indomitability," with Formby especially "the little man who wins through against all odds, as Chaplin had been on the silent screen and as Norman Wisdom was to be in the 1950s."[23] Audiences at the time recognized the metonymic link between themselves, Formby, and the nation as a whole. As a representative of Northern working class identity (the area of Britain most intimately associated with the material production that fueled British manufacture, especially during the war), Formby's stardom established the centrality of that regional affiliation to a more expansive national identity. That his films during the war years made him the nation's premiere comic hero created a connection between the working class and the ultimate fate of the nation.

On one level, *Let George Do It!* is intelligible as a film about war: Formby (playing George Hepplewhite), gets involved in intrigue in Norway, and eventually helps break a Nazi naval code that had been used to sink British ships. On another, it is a strange thing indeed, a musical comedy about war in which the hero is a sympathetic working class clown who exists outside of traditional notions of authority and expertise.

But it is in the space of fantasy that *Let George Do It* truly flirts with the collective wishes of its audience. At one point in the film, Hipplewhite is duped into drinking poison, which causes him to have a fever dream. This sequence is clearly demarcated from the rest of

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[21] "Formby, George," *Chambers Biographical Dictionary*, accessed 12 Dec 2012, http://www.credoreference.com/entry/chambbd/formby_george.

[22] "George Formby," *The Faber Companion to 20th Century Music*, accessed 12 Dec 2012, http://www.credoreference.com/entry/ffcpop/george_formby.

[23] Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to Dad's Army* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1997), 259; 261.

the causal narrative thanks to bookending dissolves that segue from Hipplewhite's prostrate body to the space of his dream. In his dream, Hipplewhite rescues love interest Mary (Phyllis Calvert) from captivity, visits heaven, and later returns to England in order to mount a one-man mission to Germany. Hipplewhite's dream is to end the war early, on personal terms. He flies a dirigible over Nuremberg, lands during a Nazi rally, charges the stage, and begins pummeling Hitler as other Nazi soldiers scramble. For Jeffrey Richards, this is a key visual image of the war years (he notes that the sociological survey Mass Observation ranked it as a demonstrable "morale booster"): "It was the visual encapsulation of the People's War with the English Everyman flooring the Nazi Superman."[24] Yet, this contingent hope—this wishful means of ending the war during its most dire time—has to be bracketed off from the rest of the movie. The slapstick brutality of the sequence is thematically uncharacteristic for Formby's star persona. Rather than stand as a typical or pedestrian comic moment, it emerges as a disruptive, eruptive wish.

Aesthetic inconsistency, or the blending of seemingly incongruous forms, remains an under discussed aspect of war representation. There is an obvious homologous reason: the dominant view of war films is that they express unity (whether at the level of the squad or the nation), a fact doubled by their consistency of presentational style. A justifiably celebrated film in this vein, though one more often couched in *auteur* discussion than those of genre, is *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger), a film about the afterlife of a war pilot (David Niven) who stands trial in heaven to determine if he can be sent back to the land of the living to be with his love (Kim Hunter). Mixing three-strip Technicolor and black and white (to differentiate earth, seen in color, and heaven, rendered in

[24] *Ibid*. 261.

monochrome), the film explicitly connects wartime sacrifice to the legacy of the nation—and in this way, it is conventional—but does so by plunging headlong into a fantastic world where transit between life and the afterlife is only the matter of walking up a big stairway. Although very different in look, another hybrid film made for propaganda purposes is the earlier *The Big Blockade* (1942, Charles Frend), a curious mixture of didactic documentary about economic strategy and sketch comedy, one that combines a nominal plot, comic bits, and intermittent actuality footage, all explained through on-screen narration. This is a film about the importance of supply chains and economics on a macro-scale. It is wholly the stuff of a technocratic war dominated by logistics, but is precisely the kind of strange and unclassifiable movie about war that hardly rates in larger discussions.[25]

Although there is a longstanding history of combining comedy and war on the British screen, some kinds of comedy work to normalize dominant experience. The massively popular television series *The Army Game* (ITV, 1957-1961) and the phenomenally successful *Dad's Army* (BBC, 1968-1977), about National Service and the Home Guard respectively, are occasionally critical of the institutions they depict, yet often retain the sense of duty, belief in the virtues of military service, and sense of patriotism below the funny veneer of bungling slapstick and endearing incompetence. Increasingly self-reflexive and politically critical comedy about war and Britain's military culture offers key insights on changing social attitudes.

In the Beyond the Fringe revue (the 1960 comedy stage show that launched the careers of Jonathan Miller, Dudley Moore, Alan Bennett and Peter Cook), the "Aftermyth of War" sketch lampooned the clichéd social types used most frequently in film and television versions of World War II (effeminate Germans, clueless upper class ladies, inarticulate working class

[25] Edgerton 158-159.

gardeners), in the process using the chronology of the war to frame a series of sketches that exaggerate and deflate aspects of wartime experience (the blackout, shelters). The most sustained engagement with war of any comedy team probably belongs to Monty Python's Flying Circus (Katarzyna Malecka finds that their work constantly grapples with "the army, soldiers, war, violence, and horror"), whose television show (1969-1974) and films invert and deconstruct typical aspects of war remembrance and visualization.[26] In "The Funniest Joke in the World/Killer Joke," an extended sketch from the first episode of the television series, writer Ernest Scribbler (Michael Palin) concocts a joke that is so funny that he dies upon reading it. This is treated as a weaponizable invention, and the British establishment soon takes it upon itself to isolate and translate the joke into German, to test it, and to put it into the field. The sketch brilliantly mimics the public discourse of technology and weaponry of the Second World War (a race of innovation in arms), in the process demonstrating the arbitrariness of propaganda rhetoric. The sketch is a strange combination of television news reportage (the interviews with the police who discover and attempt to recover the dangerous joke), documentary, action-thriller (the Gestapo interrogation scene), and combat picture (in which soldiers run around reciting the joke in lieu of firing bullets). Elsewhere, Monty Python delights in exposing military characters to disruptive forces from the world at large. In the "Army Protection Racket" sketch, Dino and Luigi Vercotti (Terry Jones and Michael Palin, playing a pair of East End gangsters vaguely modeled after the Kray twins) threaten an army officer with vandalism of tanks and equipment unless he pays them a protection fee. The inversion of masculine power makes the premise work: the army, traditionally the protector of the nation, is

[26] Katarzyna Malecka,"'It's Mr. Death or Something. He Has Come About the Reaping. I Don't Think We Need Any at the Moment': Death and Denial in the Works of Monty Python," *Nobody Expects the Spanish Inquisition: Cultural Contexts of Monty Python*, ed. Tomasz Dobrogoszcz (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 6.

now so hobbled that it has to bow to two bit thugs. Moreover, in line with the group's general dissatisfaction with the formal constraints of short-form comedy, the sketch ends with the officer breaking character and drawing attention to how he is ending the sketch because he has not had any good lines. The reversal of authority and masculine surety crops up elsewhere, as in the "Camp Square Bashing" sketch, in which the Second Armored Division, a seemingly tough group, in fact delights in enacting stereotypically homosexual behavior in their drill display. Beyond the Fringe and Monty Python, perhaps the most iconic and influential sources of intellectual comedy of the day, revisit the war and regard the military with a previously unprecedented sense of subversive playfulness.

Another trend in war representation during the postwar period is a noticeable move toward overtly tragic, existential and cynical stories. Whereas a hopeful consensus underpins dominant accounts of war in British cinema, a sense of despair, defeatism, atomization, and distrust is quite new. A good example of this tendency is *The Hill* (1965, Sidney Lumet), a Warner Brothers distributed film about a British army prison located in North Africa in charge of insubordinate or A.W.O.L. soldiers during World War II.[27] The camp, ostensibly overseen by old-school disciplinarian R.S.M. Bert Wilson (Harry Andrews) is undergoing a crisis caused by the sadistic Sergeant Williams (Ian Hendry), who taunts, beats, and overworks to the point of death the men under his command. Prisoner Joe Roberts (Sean Connery), a "good" soldier who winds up in jail for refusing the misguided orders of a superior officer, stands up to Williams. The film is entirely concerned with the dark underbelly of the British military: racism, classism, outdated ethics, blackmail, and cronyism. Lumet imagines the proceedings with a startling clarity. Filmed in crisp black and white, much of the action takes place in the

[27] "The Hill," *AFI Catalog of Feature Films*, accessed 15 Jan 2015, http://www.afi.com/members/catalog/DetailView.aspx?s=&Movie=22836.

prison yard, which is invariably shot in deep focus with a strong awareness of the bustling spaces beyond (the camera, which is frequently mobile and often on a crane, dwells on the pain of the prisoners under Williams even as it picks up the exercises, punishments, and re-education of the other prisoners in the background). In the interior scenes, Lumet's camera eschews conventional medium shots and instead often isolates bodies in uncomfortably tight close-ups. Like his film of holocaust remembrance *The Pawnbroker* (1964), this is an ostensibly realist story that breaks rank with stylistic conventions to accentuate the psychological instability of the world it depicts. The film ends tragically, with Roberts beaten out of submission, Roberts humiliated into relinquishing his power, and Williams, who seems to be about to face justice, beaten by prisoners (hard man McGrath [Jack Watson] and Jacko King [Ossie Davis]) while Roberts implores them to stop. This is an attitude toward war that did not exist publically during wartime: a cynic's view of a broken institution that will not change with the times and is doomed to fail.

Beginning in the late 1950s, British film and television representations of war focus increasingly on occluded, abstracted, simulated, or historically counterfactual (speculative "what if") stories.[28] These films do not even attempt to show war *as it happened in history*, but instead speculate on the symbolic build-up around war, offering insight into the rituals around its waging (or around the possible outcomes of imagined courses for war). A good example of this trend is Peter Whitehead's *Benefit of the Doubt* (1967), a documentary about theatrical director Peter Brook's anti-Vietnam play *US*. In *US*, Brook uses confrontational, anti-naturalistic theatrical techniques (chanting, actors formed into expressive tableaux, gesture and dance instead of direct actions) to de-naturalize the necessity of America's involvement in

[28] For a general overview of the historian's recourse to the game of counterfactual narratives, see Niall Ferguson, ed, *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (London: Macmillan, 1998).

Vietnam. The play makes no attempt to depict war in anything approaching a true-to-life way, instead making it seem an alien and abhorrent enterprise. Whitehead's film interviews cast and crew about their commitment to critiquing U.S. imperialism, and employs an inquisitive camera that brings the spectator right into the performance space of the play.[29] This is a distanciated re-creation of war that reads loud and clear as critical commentary while using only the minimal iconographic or behavioral attitudes normally found in war representation.

Another film, this one an explicit exercise in war as an imagined historical launchpad, is *It Happened Here* (1965, Kevin Brownlow), the remarkable counterfactual feature that imagines what would happen if Britain had been invaded by Nazi Germany in 1940, and had subsequently occupied the island nation. Set in 1944 in an alternate timeline for the war, the film concerns Pauline (Pauline Murray), an Irish nurse who reluctantly joins with the British fascist collaborators in order to be allowed to practice her trade. *It Happened Here* displays, often through implied offscreen hints like radio broadcasts, propaganda posters, and snippets of conversation, how the Nazi hold on Britain is fraying in the face of a new resistance movement aided by U.S. entry into the war (in the world of this film, this does not happened until 1943). The film demonstrates Pauline's "education" into fascism and her subsequent disgust. Director Kevin Brownlow used some actual fascists in the making of the film, and turned the camera and microphone to them. David Robinson suggests that in giving these people a place to publicize their views, "Fascism would condemn itself out of its own mouth."[30] *It Happened Here* uses an aspiringly realist style—hand-held camerawork from Peter Suschitzky, with lots of lingering close-ups on faces, drab lighting schemes that reflect destitute surroundings, and

[29] The anonymous Variety reviewer of the film found this deliberate attempt at rendering the play cinematic to be largely unsuccessful. See "*Benefit of the Doubt Review, Variety, 1967*," *Framework* 52.1 (Spring 2011): 341-342.
[30] David Robinson, "Introduction," to Kevin Brownlow, *How it Happened Here* (London: UKA Press, 2007), 16.

authentic locations—but dwells on moments of terrible fantasy. The centerpiece to the film is contained in a newsreel projected in the film's diegesis called *The Mirror of the World*, a work of propaganda that shows footage of uniformed Nazis marching around Whitehall and Westminster and, in the most shocking moment, holding a rally in the middle of Trafalgar Square. According to John C. Tibbetts, the film contains no "B" roll or "found" World War II footage, but instead features a dazzling array of 16mm and 35mm shots of combat, military uniforms, period correct vehicles and assorted paraphernalia, all staged specifically for Brownlow.[31] Military advisor Andrew Mollo brought reenactors and collectors together to outfit this otherwise low budget film.

On the whole, *It Happened Here* is very downbeat: as Pauline sees more and more of the evils of fascism, she is sent to a rural hospital that (beneath a surface of politeness and cleanliness) actually euthanizes patients on a mass scale. Upon leaving (the film implies that she escapes), she is "captured" by resistance forces and begins to treat their wounded. The film ends with untold death and destruction engulfing the country.

In line with British cinema's turn to distanced and simulated representations of war is the inevitable move toward charting the culture and projected effects of the atomic bomb. The atomic bomb was everywhere in British life of the postwar period: in literature, on the news (especially in response to widespread disarmament rallies), on radio, and especially on film and television screens. From big-budgeted films by major studios like *Dr. Strangelove* (1964, Stanley Kubrick) to television documentaries like *Advice to Householders* (1964, Nicolas Alwyn: a series of programs explaining civil defense procedures in the event of an imminent attack), the bomb was discussed at many levels. For instance, *A Short Vision* (1956, Joan and

[31] John C. Tibbetts, "Kevin Brownlow's Historical Films: *It Happened Here* (1965) and *Winstanley* (1975)," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 20.2 (2000): 231.

Peter Foldes), a poetic, animated film about the bomb, was funded by the BFI Experimental Film Fund, one of the most prolific incubators for short films by young filmmakers of the 20th century.[32] Their evocative warning about the effects of nuclear inferno on the environment would be taught in schools for years to come.

A Short Vision is a series of sequentially ordered paintings animated through languid editing, accompanied by spoken text from James McKechnie and music by Mátyás Seiber. The film depicts how animals react to the far-away coming of a bomb which, to the slumbering population of humans, "came unnoticed, uninvited." The somewhat peaceful, idyllic beginning is supplanted by an extended sequence of unflinching horror: the bomb hits, and a man melts, his eyes popping and then exploding, leaving only empty sockets that soon fill with blood. Within seconds, his skull cracks from the heat, collapsing in on itself. According to the reviewer in the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, who uses characteristic British understatement, "the horror of the subject is presented quite unflinchingly."[33]

In place of a hopeful, justified, winnable, and supportive narrative of war, these films (features, shorts, documentaries, public information films, pieces of animation) signal a whole neglected tradition of thinking about war and the military, a challenge to a genre and its attenuate rhetoric long considered the preserve of masculine certainty and honor. In the postwar period, war and a glorious military are not just something recollected in tranquility or mobilized to recruit a new generation of men to serve national goals. They are a contentious aspect of Britain's culture that participate in wider discussions about the functions of film and television in society, the stakes of historical remembrance, and the limits of new discourses of socialist consensus, egalitarianism, and the Empire's function in the postwar world.

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[32] See Christophe Dupin, "Early Days of Film Production at the British Film Institute: Origins and Evolution of the BFI Experimental Film Fund (1952-1966)," *Journal of Media Practice* 4.2 (2003): 77-91.
[33] "A Short Vision," *Monthly Film Bulletin* 23.270 (1956): 96.

4. Methodologies and Interventions

In this project, I use “British” to refer to cultural expression that comment on aspects of the life and society of the British Isles (namely, England, Wales, Scotland, and the Channel Islands). I also use the term “British” in relation to influence on parts of the Commonwealth or Empire. By calling a film or T.V. work “British,” I am referring to one (or more) of the following: a production base in the United Kingdom; funding or principal distribution supplied by a company based in the United Kingdom; the nationality, or fictional nationality, of actors on screen; the stated location or cultural context of a film as expressed in that work’s diegesis; the national background or residence of a film’s director or other creative talent. For instance, a film like *49th Parallel* (1941, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger)—about Canadian men fighting a small invading Nazi force—was created by an Englishman and a Hungarian, stars Laurence Olivier (who is English) as a French-Canadian trapper, and was made as anti-isolationist propaganda to sway American opinion into joining World War II. Still, for the purposes of this project, it is a British film (its funding came from Britain, and it was made out of a British production context). Some of the films I discuss were wholly funded by American money. Others are directed by expatriate Americans, or by English directors working in other nations. In a strict sense, then, this project considers national questions in a transnational context. To borrow Tim Bergfelder’s phrase, many of these films are emphatically about Britain, yet couch such Britishness in terms of (sometimes latent, sometimes manifest) “cultural hybridization,” sometime even approaching a uniquely trans-Atlantic or trans-European point

of view.[34] No matter what, each of the films has something to say about Britain's relationship to war and its military. In each chapter, I justify how or why a particular film fits into the somewhat nebulous terrain of "British Cinema and Television."[35]

This is a project that works within a national cinema framework. Of course, "national" is a somewhat fraught term that is, itself, tied to the conquering and colonizing impulse that accompanies war. Benedict Anderson has famously argued that the idea of nationalism is tied to conceptions of power and statehood that date to the 18th century (precisely the time when Britain expanded across the world).[36] The "imagined community" of a nation is more an idea than a hard-and-fast demarcation of physical boundaries.[37] As Sarah Street reminds, there may well be a dominant conception of what the nation means—and, until 1960s, this meant a British cinema with "a limited, often privileged experience of the class system, starring actors and actresses with BBC English accents"—but that conception does have exceptions, and can always be read against the grain by audiences.[38] British films necessarily include a range: "National cinema is inflected with a multitude of different connotations, often implying a jingoistic nationalistic imperative, while at other times challenging this view by giving a voice to those who have had very different experiences of living in Britain."[39] For the purposes of this project, films or television programs that question the conception of national belonging are

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[34] Tim Bergfelder, "National, Transnational, or Supranational Cinema? Rethinking European Film Studies," *Media, Culture, Society* 27.3 (May 2005): 321

[35] John Hill has addressed the difficulty of how to describe and draw boundaries around British cinema, especially in a period of relative decline. He finds "that while British cinema may depend upon international finance and audiences for its viability, this may actually strengthen its ability to probe national questions; that while cinema has apparently lost its 'national' audience in the cinemas, it may have gained a more fully 'national' audience via television; and that while the British cinema may no longer assert myths of 'nation' with its earlier confidence, it may nonetheless be a cinema which is more fully representative of national complexities than ever before." See John Hill, "British Cinema as National Cinema: Production, Audience and Representation," *The British Cinema Book*, 13-20.

[36] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 4.

[37] *Ibid.* 6.

[38] Sarah Street, *British National Cinema*, 2nd Edition (London: Routledge, 2009), 1-2.

[39] *Ibid.* 2.

just as important to the cultural conversation as those that define it with surety.

My arguments about the diverse and expanded quality of war representation in British film and television are grounded in a longstanding debate in British film historiography, one that dates at least to the early 1970s (when many of the films I discuss were made and first exhibited). In "The Unknown Cinema of Britain," Alan Lovell writes about the lack of a discourse on British cinema, a problem with several explanations (ranging from the imagined equivalence between British documentary and art cinema to the loss of many British directors to the U.S. film industry).[40] While work in subsequent years would create a formidable body of scholarship on this national cinema, the notion that British cinema lagged behind (artistically, ideologically) on the world stage persisted. Cinephiles and academics have long grappled with Francois Truffaut's remarks (made in relation to his interviews with Alfred Hitchcock) on the incompatibility between Britain and the cinema.[41]

The longstanding tension in the study of British cinema—that is, once scholars began to study Britain as a place with a tradition for film that superseded the works of a few specific, treasured artist-directors—is between realism and fantasy. For David Forrest, there is a definite through-line from the British documentary movement of the 1930s and persistence modes of post-millennial realism (even if there are many bumps and digressions along the way): the development of social realism in the 1950s, peaking with the youthful films of the British New Wave in the late 1950s and 1960s (itself a movement born out of Free Cinema, a more independently spirited response to state-sponsored documentary filmmaking); the gritty dramas, especially as broadcast in television in the mid-1960s, of Ken Loach, whose

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[40] See Alan Lovell, "The Unknown Cinema of Britain," *Cinema Journal* 11.2 (Spring 1972): 1-8.
[41] For an explanation of how Truffaut's words have resonated, see Robert Murphy, "Truffaut in London," *Je t'aime...moi non plus: Franco-British Cinematic Relations*, eds. Lucy Mazdon and Catherine Wheatley (London: Berghahn Books, 2010), 205-206.

commitment to regional social problems and marginalized identities carries into feature filmmaking; the rise of Mike Leigh's more broad, comedic, and group-improvisatory work, beginning with television plays in the 1970s and cresting with films in the 1990s; and the refinements and a new generation of filmmakers synthesizing previous approaches like Shane Meadows.[42]

Discourses of realism in British film and television are informed, on the one hand, by a literary tradition that fixes meaning to a knowable external reality and, on the other, to a tradition of socially motivated stories that look, unflinchingly, at poor and marginalized citizens. Dominant conceptions of realism, as Colin MacCabe famously argued, tends to work as constructed in the 19th century bourgeois novel, which assigns a knowable place in the world and the illusion of deep psychology onto the subjects its represents.[43] For MacCabe, a text corresponds to classical realism if it cannot reconcile contradictory notions of the real (that is, if its aesthetic eliminates or minimalizes problems of representation rather than raising, exploring or revelling in them).[44] Christopher Williams reads MacCabe (and others, especially Brecht) as locating the power of realist discourse in the "impression" that it gives those who watch it: for realism, what you "see on screen is 'natural' rather than the product of particular social practices."[45] In a critique of MacCabe, Williams elsewhere writes that film is too multiply sourced to be reduced to 19th century realist novel, and that realism can be "emotional, pragmatic, philosophical, and scientific" in addition to aesthetic (in other words, a

[42] For an outline of this development, see David Forrest, *Social Realism: Art, Nationhood, and Politics* (London: Palgrave, 2013), 1-38.
[43] This is a necessarily reductive sketch of Colin MacCabe, "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses," *Screen* 15.2 (1974): 7-27.
[44] *Ibid*. 12.
[45] Christopher Williams, *Realism and the Cinema: A Reader*, ed. Christopher Williams (London: Routledge, 1980), 185-186.

series of different realisms for different contexts, audiences, and intended effects).[46]

Samantha Lay and others have discussed "social realism" as the most widespread mode of realist filmmaking on British screens, a kind of overtly anti-artificial stripping away of representational convention, usually invoked "in order to explore some aspect of contemporary life in a similar way to naturalism."[47] British social realism as done by Loach's *Poor Cow* (1967), for instance, clearly emerges by using aspects of the documentary tradition (a commitment to actuality, even if constructed), but whose creative presentation is notable precisely for its non-intervention, the degree to which it appears natural and unconstructed (even though it still makes use of naturalized film techniques of framing and editing that keep it codified to some extent).

Realism, then, can cover quite a lot of ground. For MacCabe, most literary adaptations and even a thriller like *Klute* (1971, Alan J. Pakula) seem to work with the term. Throughout this dissertation, I have used "realism" in a similar spirit, pointing out ways in which war representation has favored the stability and surety of realist discourse. As Alan Lovell reminds in "The British Cinema: The Known Cinema?," his update to his earlier article on that same cinema's marginalization, realism changes its function and uses different techniques at different moments: for instance, in the 1950s and 1960s, Brechtian techniques like direct address are used on screen and stage to unravel the social reality of the world.[48] The case of Brecht presents a situation in which (to borrow Christopher Williams's phrase) the debate productively links "the two concepts of realism and antirealism," seemingly incongruous styles whose political

[46] Christopher Williams, "After the Classic, the Classical and Ideology: The Differences of Realism," *Screen* 35.3 (Autumn 1993): 277.
[47] Samantha Lay, *British Social Realism: From Documentary to Brit Grit* (London: Wallflower, 2002), 8-9.
[48] Alan Lovell, "The British Cinema: The Known Cinema?," *The British Cinema Book*, 7. MacCabe likewise stresses the Brechtian tradition of realism as a challenge to the classical realist text.

and cultural lineages (Marxism, avant-garde theatre) would seem to push back against realism as conceived as duplicitously illusionistic.[49]

That said, the conventional face-off in British cinema is between realism (understood mostly as social realism, or at least as coherent adult entertainment grounded in the presumed social reality of the time of production) and the fantastic. Julian Petley has quite successfully grouped this other type of cinema around the compelling spatial figure of the "lost continent." For Petley, (writing in the mid-1980s), realism so dominates discussions of British cinema that "the result is that films come to be perceived 'naturally' and 'commonsensically' within this realist framework, and that the realist pantheon dominates most writing about British cinema and thence goes on to determine what is thought 'worth' circulating in distribution on 16mm and video, what films are preserved in the National Film Archive, and so on."[50] The "lost continent" is everything that commonsensical realism is not: horror, science fiction, sexploitation, *films noir*, movies by aesthetically outré filmmakers like Powell and Pressburger. Recently, scholars have begun to use Petley's "lost continent" as a way to identify non-realist, disunified, and sometimes just plainly critically disreputable or initially unpopular modes of filmmaking. James Chapman has noted that "the exploration of the lost continent has become one of the main intellectual projects of British film studies in recent decades as once-despised traditions of popular cinema have been accorded their place in the sun."[51] Thus, the last two decades have seen work on everything from British disaster films that merge horror and sci-fi

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[49] Williams "After the Classic, the Classical and Ideology" 289.
[50] Julian Petley, "The Lost Continent," *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema*, ed. Charles Barr (London: BFI, 1986), 100.
[51] James Chapman, "From Amicus to Atlantis: The Lost Worlds of 1970s British Cinema," *Seventies British Cinema*, ed. Robert Shail (London: Palgrave/BFI, 2008), 56.

to hardcore pornography.[52] When scholars evoke the "lost continent," they are deliberately addressing modes of filmmaking, fandom, and affective spectatorship that run counter to the dominant narrative of British cinema.

My project, therefore, complicates war's relationship to realism by stressing the many ways (across many formats, from the public information short to the fictional feature) in which filmmakers depict war as something fantastic, strange, unknowable, unstable, and resistant to common sense. More precisely, this project looks at the productive tension between expectations towards realism and recourse to the fantastic. Most representations of war that I discuss make use of techniques familiar to both (for instance, realism as articulated through attention to historically accurate military uniforms on the one hand, and fantasy as suggested by moments of surrealist dislocation or dream logic on the other).

The war film as a genre—the conventionally understood combat film as mentioned above, which Barry Langford describes through its concern with "the direct experience of battle of the small military unit with clearly defined membership and boundaries (paradigmatically the infantry platoon, gunship, or bomber crew)"—is inordinately tied to a realist conception of the world (something like "the world as it really is, depicting events as they really were," even if its actions read as historically artificial or melodramatic).[53] That is, war representation is seldom discussed in terms of the "lost continent," since the war film (like the American western) is often grounded in the lived experience of the actual past, even if mythologized and partially invented. That said, this project argues that, especially in the post-1945 period, the British war film expands to become something bigger and more unruly than during its wartime

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[52] Peter Hutchings, "The Power to Create Catastrophe: The Idea of Apocalypse in 1970s British Cinema," *Don't Look Now* 107-117; I.Q. Hunter, "Naughty Realism: The Britishness of British Hardcore R18s," *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 11.2-3 (2014): 152-171.
[53] Barry Langford, *Film Genre: Hollywood and Beyond* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2005), 107.

heyday. One reason for this is internal to the history of war representation on British screens. Following Thomas Schatz, I would like to suggest that what happens to the British war film, especially from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, is true of the general accounts of genre evolution: "a genre's progression from transparency to opacity—from straightforward storytelling to self-conscious formalism—involves its concerted effort to explain itself, to address and evaluate its very status as a popular form."[54] While I certainly do not think that the changes in war representation that I track lead to some final form or inevitable ending, this move to a baroque self-awareness suggests an internalization of many of the tropes of how war is viewed, meaning that one explanation for the splintering profusion of different approaches to war during this period has to do with the shattering of the stability of the genre itself. Thus one explanation as to why war representation looks and feels so different (on the whole) in the 1970s as compared to the 1940s is that the impulse to look back at historical war stories has reached a point of creative saturation. In the following passage, what Schatz identifies as the "late style" of a genre hews very closely to the "lost continent" of British war representation:

> Generally speaking, it seems that those features most often associated with narrative artistry—ambiguity, thematic complexity, irony, formal self-consciousness—rarely are evident in films produced earlier in a genre's development. They tend to work themselves into the formula as it evolves. We are dealing here with the inherent artistry of the formula itself as it grows and develops. A newborn genre's status as social ritual generally resists any ironic, ambiguous, or overly complex treatment of its narrative message.[55]

As more and more films and television shows about war are produced, creative individuals will obviously differentiate their work by deliberately challenging previously established trends.

The other way that this project accounts for a profusion of new attitudes and approaches to war is through contextualizing film and television works into specific historical junctures.

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[54] Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), 38.
[55] *Ibid*. 41.

On a basic level, this is a matter of acknowledging attitudinal changes amongst different generations of audiences, historians and storytellers. Writing in 1998, John Keegan remarks upon the extraordinarily varied responses to chronicling the Second World War, a range of books, papers, and arguments that have trouble agreeing on things like when the war really began, when the war really ended, and whether or not recalling the events that transpired during the conflict are a matter of victorious triumphalism or ad hoc damage limitation.[56]

Periodization, or the selection of cohesive units of time around which particular historical and social developments take place, is another way to map these patterns of change. According to Fredric Jameson, the labeling of an historical period does not signal a desire to homogenize all cultural artifacts from a period, but rather establishes "a common objective situation, to which a whole range of varied responses and creative innovations is then possible, but always within that situation's structural limits."[57] For the study of a film genre, this means recognizing some of the conceptual incoherence of the range of responses to social and cultural events, while at the same time noticing sets of family resemblances that organize seemingly disparate and unfashionable movies into conceptual categories with established commercial potential. As David Blackbourn notes, historians continuously construct new time periods and subdivisions, such that each century and many decades have "long" and "short" versions.[58] This study concerns the period that roughly spans the loss of the Suez Canal to Egyptian forces in 1956 (a military action that was heavily protested in Britain and is often earmarked as a symbolic milestone in Britain's imperial decline) until the various economic crises of the mid-

[56] John Keegan, *The Battle for History: Re-Fighting World War II* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 32-35.
[57] Fredric Jameson, "Periodizing the 60s," *Social Text* 9/10 (1984): 178.
[58] David Blackbourn, "'The Horologe of Time': Periodization in History," *PMLA* 127.2 (March 2012): 302; 304.

1970s that eventually lead to the possibility for the rise-to-power of Margaret Thatcher.[59] Put another way, a large part of what accounts for changing cultural attitudes towards war has to do with what is going on in the world. Despite the fact that this project focuses on a period of relative political consensus (a time of modernizing socialist reforms and expansions of state power that are reversed with the election of Thatcher), this is also a period of extreme volatility. In the 1950s and 1960s, huge, generation-defining struggles like the youthful response to American imperialism in Vietnam, public discussion of the atom bomb, new dialogues on race thanks to increased immigration from Britain's de-colonized nations, and the intellectual and academic rise of second-wave feminism cause necessary culture shocks to a nation that told itself stories of unity throughout the war.

Changing representational and ideological approaches to war are as much about a genre mutating itself as a culture modifying and nuancing its beliefs on a large scale, combined with personal creative choices specific to individual projects, or an individual's sustained body of work. This dissertation addresses how attitudes to war change over time by adapting Raymond Williams's model for cultural relationships. In *Marxism and Literature* (1977), Williams proposed three political positions that relate to larger cultural forces.[60] Here, I assign them to different types of texts in order to explain their relationships to the longer history of war representation in Britain. "Dominant" cultural forms are commonly circulating and uphold established social centrality or positions of privileged power. Throughout this project, I refer to many of the most well established war films in British cinema history as "dominant" in both their political position (for instance, if they uphold an uncomplicated adulation of militarism) and in their aesthetic construction (broadly realist squad-based combat films that tell a

[59] A gripping account of the Suez crisis is in Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to The Beatles, 1956-1963* (London: Abacus, 2005), 1-31, esp. 28-29.
[60] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 1977), 121-127.

triumphalist narrative of war from a British perspective). When a film articulating these positions is made during a period in which other counter-positions are vying for recognition, then that film is a "residual" expression: it is aesthetically or ideologically tied to something formerly dominant, to an older cultural moment. While these texts may still showcase a dominant position, their moment of historical centrality is past (in this sense, even though I refer to a dominant attitude toward war throughout this project, strictly speaking, films made after the 1940s that articulate the mode of filmmaking that was popular during the war are residual by Williams's definition). Finally, Williams highlights "emergent" cultural forms, which are new, frequently subversive, and often contrarian, texts that seem to be deliberate responses to cultural dominants. In this project, I refer to "lost continent" responses to the conventions of British war representation in this manner. "Emergent" war films (often the examples I discuss at length in the second half of each chapter) challenge established codes, and often look and feel entirely different from what came before. Rhetorically, the "emergent" view of war is what Williams elsewhere refers to as the "structure of feeling" of cultural experience at a given particular moment. Alan O'Connor has usefully described this term as referring to "the emergence of new relations, institutions, and cultural forms," an often unconsciously willed explanation of the ideas of the present, especially as expressed through art and literature (and, for our purposes, cinema).[61]

Practically speaking, I have planned this project as a series of explorations of particularly emergent themes, production cycles, or attitudes, presented in a roughly chronological unraveling that begins with war representation during the Second World War and ends with various trends that get started before the Falkland Islands War. Each chapter—all of which are based on a modality, genre tendency, or representational trope—situates a trend into

[61] Alan O'Connor, *Raymond Williams* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 79.

an historical context, provides copious examples, and is further nuanced through in-depth comparative case studies. As mentioned earlier in this Introduction, I adopt Raymond Williams's preference for reading cultural tendencies through patterns. Throughout, I am also mindful of the legacy of Williams and his colleague Stuart Hall, both of whose penchant for entwining aesthetic, formal, and ideological modes of analysis are crucial for understanding how movies function in the world.

More directly, the way that I discuss and present the patterns I uncover is in at least partial homage to what I can only call the "associative" tradition of British film criticism. Raymond Durgnat often writes in this mode, dwelling on comparisons and unlikely juxtapositions, weaving in and out of established genre conventions.[62] In working through the many films about war (if only tangentially) made in Britain during the period in question, I have consciously adopted organizational techniques from Kim Newman, whose expanded version of *Nightmare Movies: Horror on Screen Since the 1960s* (2011) productively clusters movies of kindred subgenre, message, or style.[63] The case studies at the end of each chapter (and, indeed, the impulse to argue for new organizational registers in the history of British cinema) relates to John Orr's *Romantics and Modernists in British Cinema* (2010), in which the late scholar looks at film and filmmakers that blur the distinction between romance and modernity (another productive tension in the history of British cinema), using comparative case studies to assess marginalized forms of expression.[64] Finally, this project corresponds to what I.Q. Hunter has recently called "the New British Revisionism," in which Hunter, myself and

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[62] This style is especially important to Raymond Durgnat, *Films and Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971) and Raymond Durgnat, *A Mirror for England: British Movies from Austerity to Affluence*, Second Edition (London: BFI 2011).
[63] See Kim Newman, *Nightmare Movies: Horror on Screen Since the 1960s* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011).
[64] John Orr, *Romantics and Modernists in British Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2010).

numerous others work backwards to "redeem" whole lost, undiscovered, disdained, or deliberately ignored aspects of British cinema history, a still on-going (and now even accelerated) project that has symbiotically benefitted from a vocal fandom, enterprising distribution labels that put once obscure films back into circulation, and like-minded enthusiasts.[65]

5. Summary and Chapter Breakdown

In summary, this project argues that accounts of war representation on the British screen that privilege the nationalistic (sometimes propagandistic), heroic, and redemptively sacrificial strand of storytelling and visualization that dominate popular memory misses a whole counter tradition of movies that take war as an occasion to critique through devices like humor, irony, and existential alienation. Especially from the late 1960s through the 1970s, approaches to war representation—in narrative/socio-cultural terms, as well aesthetic/stylistic ones—shift and proliferate. This project does not reductively claim that British attitudes toward war and the military fall evenly into "pro" or "anti" camps, or straightforwardly Left and Right on the political spectrum. This project argues throughout that complex, sometimes politically incoherent films are as much a part of new attitudes toward war as ones whose politics are blatant (for instance, Michael Winner's proto-Thatcherite critique of the British military in *You Must be Joking!* [1965] and *Hannibal Brooks* [1969] manage to privilege entrepreneurial individualism over the collectivity of the army, and thus amounts to a young Tory snub of the legacy of Britain's armed forces). This dissertation argues that not all expressions of war correspond to the notion of a "pleasure culture" primarily concerned with providing

[65] I.Q. Hunter, *British Trash Cinema* (London: BFI, 2013), 7-10.

entertainment and instruction to the next generation of warriors; rather, the counter-history (to borrow Marcia Landy's conceptualization for oppositional readings of the past in the present that break with accepted boundaries of genre and decorum) of British war cinema is surprisingly full of accounts of war that focus on civilians, women, and men who turn their backs on service.[66]

Chapter One traces competing representational modes between 1939 and 1945, arguing that films about war and wartime during this period trouble the traditional binarism in British film historiography between realism and fantasy. These distinctions are challenged through a comparative assessment of two invasion narratives: *Went the Day Well?* (1942, Alberto Cavalcanti, based on a short story by Graham Greene) and *The Silent Village* (1943, Humphrey Jennings), whose subject provides an opportunity to study the imagined behavior of Britons under siege. Chapter Two looks at historical intersections of comedy and war, arguing that the embrace of irony as a governing tonal and argumentative position allows certain war comedies to engage with the idea of failure, a notion all but missing from the dominant strand of war cinema. In addition to supplying a sense of the evolving relationship between war and comedy during and after World War II, this chapter analyzes *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1968, Tony Richardson) and *How I Won the War* (1967, Richard Lester), both war films from adapted screenplays by Charles Wood that use irony and humor as historiographical critique. In Chapter Three, I describe a post-1956 brand of war tragedy that embraces cynicism, tonal bleakness, and the cultural vogue for existentialism as yet another affront to triumphalist war narratives. These trends most profitably intersect in two films directed by Joseph Losey, *King & Country* (1964) and *Figures in a Landscape* (1970). Chapter Four shifts from bigger

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[66] See Marcia Landy, "Comedy and Counter-History," *Historical Comedy on Screen*, ed. Hannu Salmi (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2011), 175-198.

conceptual categories to a specific, historically embedded interest in technology and strategy that emerges during the post-war years. This chapter argues that many films turn away from war as historically grounded fact, and towards a conception of war that is overtly simulated and virtual (film and television examples in this chapter obsessively track war games, military education in the public school system, technological simulations, the idea of training). The chapter concludes with a comparative assessment of two films about war simulation and absence: the film version of the Joan Littlewood Theatre Workshop's *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1969, Richard Attenborough) and Peter Watkins's *The Gladiators* (1970). Chapter Five examines the representational challenge of the nuclear bomb for British cinema, arguing that above and beyond similarities to international trends that align these weapons with panic and horror, the specter of atomic energy encapsulates a larger geopolitical visioning of the nation's loss of control, a sense of decline in material, military, and world-historical importance. This chapter concludes by comparing two different British apocalypse narratives, Peter Watkins's controversial *The War Game (*1965) and the film version of *The Bed Sitting Room* (1969, Richard Lester). The dissertation ends with a Conclusion chapter that looks at the reception, impact, and afterlife of the "emergent" counter-tradition to the "dominant" conception of war. In general, my dissertation looks at the tension between the war film's bigger historical function as a patriotic and legitimizing force, and the historical realities of Britain's loss of Empire, shrinking military, and unstable economy.

Chapter 1

Britain's Finest Hour?: Troubling War Discourse through Film Propaganda

Film production in 1930s and 1940s Britain included a great degree of government oversight. Independent production bodies like Ealing Studios and the Rank Organization thrived (both in Britain and on the world stage) and many of their productions fit wartime parameters for content, in some cases serving as overt pieces of nationalistic propaganda. According to Nicolaus Reeves, propaganda produced during World War II was exceptional both for the resources involved and for the totality of its cultural sweep: "Where the First World War had seen governments taking their first, tentative initiatives in this field, the Second World War saw the resources of entire film industries made available to wartime governments as the struggle for the hearts and minds of belligerent societies intensified."[1] In Britain, the industry made films about longevity, heroism, and cooperation, both for the benefit of a native population and for export to allies (and hopeful sympathizers) around the world. During this period, British cinema took initial steps—however patronizing, didactic, and occasionally misguided—at venerating the common man, all without turning to systemic, radical gestures, such as the overt condemnation of the monarchy or an obviously faltering view of capitalism.[2] Beginning in the late 1920s, the Empire Marketing Board (largely overseen by Stephen Tallents, who later funded other public filmmaking bodies) jumpstarted a tradition of making films about regional, colonial and

[1] Nicolaus Reeves, *The Power of Film Propaganda: Myth or Reality?* (London: Cassell, 1999), 6.
[2] David Cannadine notes that there was an almost total lack of public criticism of the monarchy during the 1930s and 1940s. See Cannadine, "The Context, Performance, and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c. 1820-1977," *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012 [1983]), 141-142.

transnational subjects as a means of integrating their lives into the mainstream of the national imaginary.[3] Films about war, made for wartime audiences, kept this tradition alive. Such propaganda was both an extension of a larger Griersonian tradition of film documentaries and the logical expansion of a fictionalized tradition of war films that began with the early development of the medium, incubated for many years by Hollywood. For Angus Calder, "covert propaganda, the sugaring of the pill, was one motive force underlying the apotheosis of British documentary realism during the war."[4]

Such "documentary realism" included much of the work produced by the General Post Office and the Crown Film Units, yet also describes aspects of the aesthetics of contemporary war films that dramatized real characters, battles, or operations, such as Noel Coward's celebrated *In Which We Serve* (1942). At the same time, some films about Britain at war made during this period deliberately forego the general trend toward realism, instead focusing on physically and psychologically fantastic experiences. Despite their grounding in a wartime culture, films like Powell and Pressburger's *A Matter of Life and Death* transcend the world of everyday lived experience (in this instance, telling a love story that takes place both in the mortal world and in the afterlife). This chapter explores the various tensions that arise in charting trends in cinema's treatment of war, at once mapping a set of relationships that films have to available discourse of realism and the fantastic, and complicating such distinctions in anticipation of a later, more radical war cinema. In addition to exploring various representative films, this chapter focuses on a pair of invasion narratives, *Went the Day Well?* and *The Silent Village*, two thematically linked propaganda movies that trouble established distinctions between realism and the fantastic. Even during the 1930s and 1940s, when censorship and government control limited

[3] Scott Anthony and James G. Mansell, "Introduction: The Documentary Film Movement and the Spaces of British Identity," *Twentieth Century British History* 23.1 (2012): 8.
[4] Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain, 1939-1945* (London: Granada Publishing, 1971 [1969]), 425.

possible thematic elements in cinematic depictions of war, select films engaged critically with established traditions of propagandistic nationalism.

1. Film and Culture: The Wartime Context

Britain's experience of a Second World War precedes the official declaration against Germany on September 3, 1939. Tensions between the two nations had been fraught since Hitler's rise to power in the early 1930s, and had reached a divisive split by the time of Neville Chamberlain's rearguard attempts at appeasement. The possibility of renewed antagonisms was accounted for in official policies. Lucy Noakes writes of Britain's extensive investment in homeland defense programs, noting, "between 1924 and 1939 successive governments planned for a war that would involve the aerial bombardment of civilian populations."[5] The Home Guard, Auxiliary Fire Service, and Warden's Service, all established thanks to the Air Raid Precaution Precautions Bill of 1937, employed citizens (men and women, with women's labor becoming ever-more important as the war raged on) as essential safeguards against sudden attacks.[6] In addition to material preparations—the increased production of equipment and ammunition, more military funding, and so on—the nation embarked on an extensive public relations campaign. For example, as Nicholas Cull has shown, Britain's involvement in the 1939 New York World's Fair was explicitly regarded as a site of swaying opinion in favor of increased support of Britain in its war against Nazi Germany.[7] Even though the 1930s are retrospectively remembered as a decade

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[5] Lucy Noakes, "'Serve to Save': Gender, Citizenship and Civil Defence, 1937-1941," *Journal of Contemporary History* 47.4 (2012): 735.

[6] *Ibid*. 734, 736.

[7] Nicholas J. Cull, *Selling War: The British Propaganda Campaign against American "Neutrality" in World War II* (New York: Oxford UP, 1995), 26-27; I have argued that Humphrey Jennings' *Spare Time* (1939), which was shown at the British Pavilion of this fair, plays especially well to American audiences in this regard. See Kevin M. Flanagan, "Humphrey Jenningsat the Fair: *Spare Time*, *Family Portrait*, and the

during which Left intellectualism flourished, it also featured residual aspects of conservative Victorian masculinity in full-force. According to Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, an explicitly anti-fascist physical culture movement (in which fitness was upheld as a value important to the maintenance of British traditions and empire) cemented "the link between manliness, physical fitness and patriotism in Interwar Britain."[8] Despite the desperation and catch-up of the early war, the nation was not totally blindsided by their elevated importance on the world stage.

The story of Britain in World War II is inordinately tied to a single-nation orthodoxy, despite its obviously transnational character. As an imperial power with worldwide reach, Britain's World War II necessarily includes the Commonwealth nations, its armament arrangements with the United States (Britain relied on Lend-Lease munitions during the war, and extensive aid and trade before and after), and its numerous political allies. One reason for the widespread recognition of a singular British experience was, according to Mark Donnelly, its "standing alone" against Nazi Germany after the Fall of France in 1940, as well as a curiously nostalgic sense that the nation—despite its losses and hardships—had fought a "good war" that brought out the best in the national character.[9] Angus Calder describes 1940 and 1941 as the time when "a coalition government supported by every politician of consequence had presided over a concentration of national resources in which no vested interests were publicly spared, while the people had endured nightly aerial bombardment which had put civilians, as they saw it, on the `front line'."[10] Despite the actual end to the war coming thanks to a combined allied effort lead by the United States and the Soviet Union, Britain has its own mythology, its own shorthand for

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Rhetoric of National Identity," *Meet Me at the Fair: A World's Fair Reader*, ed. Celia Pierce et. al (Pittsburgh, PA: ETC Press, 2014), 363-370.

[8] Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, "Building a British Superman: Physical Culture in Interwar Britain," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41.4 (2006): 596.

[9] Mark Donnelly, *Britain in the Second World War* (London: Routledge, 1999), 1.

[10] Angus Calder, "Britain's Good War?," *History Today* 45.5 (1995): 55.

triumphs that are unique: Montgomery, the Blitz, the Beveridge Report. For Donnelly, these points of reference remained relatively consistent through the 1970s: "the heroism and self-sacrifice of Dunkirk and the 'finest hour'; the valour of the Eighth Army in north Africa; the liberation of western Europe after D-Day; the inspired leadership of Churchill; the new political consensus forged by the wartime coalition government; the triumph of communal values in Labour's election victory of 1945."[11] Post-Vietnam War historians began to revise this grand unified reading of Britain's good war. In rare instances, cultural artifacts made during the war show scattered blemishes. Most often, films produced about Wartime Britain made contemporaneous to the war present views in line with a national consensus.

Beyond the obvious markers of content—heroes, diligent workers, good spirits, self-sacrifice—how did wartime films accurately and honorably depict the war? What was intelligible to audiences as respectful? Given the prohibition of graphic violence, what counted as realism? The most useful exploration of the existing critical language available to British filmgoers in the 1940s is John Ellis' seminal essay "The Quality Film Adventure: British Cinema and the Critics, 1942-1948." Here, Ellis outlines what film critics regarded as a "quality" film that they hoped would appeal to native audiences, both as an affront to popular cinema imported from abroad (mainly Hollywood products) and as a statement against low quality, cheaply made films shot at home (the so-called "quota quickies" of the late 1920s and 1930s, as well as generally shoddy productions from the early war years). Ellis surveys publications by critics for major periodicals (including Jympson Harman, C.A. Lejeune, Joan Lester, Fred Majalany, Frank Mullally, Dilys Powell, E. Arnot Robertson), noting that their ideals are tentative, but, when taken together, give a relatively coherent picture of what represented the best in British film: "Nowadays, the terms they use to define this desired object are at once familiar and bizarre, charged with meaning and

[11] Donnelly 2.

strangely vacuous: ‘truth’, ‘reality’, ‘logic’, ‘beauty’.”[12] Although these same British critics noticed a decline in their native cinema around 1948 and began to champion films from abroad—the nascent international art cinema that dominated refined film going palates throughout the 1950s and 1960s—they nonetheless offered a vocabulary for explaining their imagined ideals of style and content.[13] Melanie Selfe notes that wartime restraints—reductions in available paper, the prioritizing of war-related commentary—caused critics to devote more column inches to British film and the development of their quality discourse, often to the detriment of major films from the US or to other possible commercial successes.[14] These critics both attempted to elevate public taste to meet their critical standards—something of a fool’s errand, given the wild popularity of working class performers in popular films like Frank Randle, Gracie Fields, and George Formby—and serve the war effort by highlighting desirable aspects of British culture and character.

Ellis excerpts a treasure trove of desirable characteristics for films, many of which are present in the most celebrated war films of the period. These critics “were held together, first, by a common belief in humanity, or, as even the women amongst them were accustomed to write: mankind.”[15] The critics favor universality of sentiments, discrimination (that is, good taste) and truth, and prefer a narrative logic that privileges unity.[16] A harmony of elements and clear flow of ideas and images is championed as a hallmark of quality. To this can be added an unassuming nature. The critic Richard Winnington, writing for the *New Statesman* after the end of the war in

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[12] John Ellis, “The Quality Film Adventure: British Cinema and the Critics, 1942-1948,” *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema,* ed. Andrew Higson (London: Cassell, 1996), 67-68.
[13] *Ibid*. 90.
[14] Melanie Selfe, “Circles, Columns and Screenings: Mapping the Institutional, Discursive, Physical and Gendered Spaces of Film Criticism in 1940s London,” *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 9.4 (2012): 596.
[15] Ellis 73.
[16] *Ibid*. 74, 76.

Europe, muses "Wherein lies the greatness of the British fictional war film? Maybe our native instinct for understatement is the only way to balance the savagery of war. Maybe it's just simple sincerity."[17] Middlebrow critics loved simplicity and restraint (the roots of the "stiff upper lip", where, according to Michael Boyce, "duty, determination, and obligation" determine value), often to a fault.[18] In his survey of reviews, Ellis notes that consistency of mood becomes a key determining factor: "The mood is described as though it were a voice: the voice of the film itself, speaking in warm tones, excitingly or dispassionately as the case may be."[19] Noble, righteous, and humble in the face of the common good, "quality films" retroactively defined a dominant tradition of "golden age" British cinema of the 1940s. This "golden age" designation also has to do with the material success of the industry. Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards note that "despite the increases in seat prices, the average weekly attendance rose from an estimated 19 million in 1939 to over 30 million in 1945, and gross box office receipts nearly trebled in that time."[20]

If favored films have a consistent mood, they also have a common aesthetic: a commitment, in a somewhat roundabout way, to a taken-for-granted external reality. The critics somewhat abstractly see the real as "an absolute, the correlative of mankind," that "exists outside films, beyond representation," such that the "moral imperative of the quality film is that of representing the world correctly."[21] Their consensus pronouncements on realism, like those of many of the filmmakers of the Griersonian school, is not a rigorously unobtrusive, de-stylized laying-bare of the world, so much as an alliance of form and content that merges to make a

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[17] Richard Winnington, *New Statesman* 9 June 1945, quoted in Ellis 78.
[18] Michael W. Boyce, *The Lasting Influence of War on Postwar British Film* (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 4.
[19] Ellis 78.
[20] Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Britain Can Take It: British Cinema in the Second World War, New Edition* (London: IB Tauris, 2007 [1987]), 3.
[21] Ellis 79.

vision of the world as (according to their tastes) it should be. This consists, on the one hand, of authenticity of feeling and look (a general example might be the fact of some post office employees recreating their jobs and speaking their minds in the strongly constructed film *Night Mail* [1936, Basil Wright and Harry Watt]), and, on the other, humanist pronouncements about life and living that approach "the very spirit of the real."[22] Many films produced by the General Post Office films unit and the Crown Film Unit reconcile these two types of realism, but Ellis unearths a paradox: "Though documentary carries a definite charge of reality, it seems as though it can only reach the spirit of the real if it adopts the procedures of the fictional narrative."[23] The ideal quality film, therefore, outdoes society as it is found operating in the world by constructing its best self through well-executed stories.

This aspirant, dominant tradition of quality and realism is best illustrated through a brief discussion a film championed by the 1940s critics and praised ever since, *In Which We Serve*. David Lean and Noel Coward's hymn to patriotism is a fictional film based on the exploits of Louis Mountbatten, a Naval Captain whose heroism (and sunk ship, the *Kelly*) provides inspiration and gravitas for Captain Kinross (played by Coward). Even though the film prominently features a naval defeat, it is, ultimately, an inspiring tale of military unity under pressure. Kinross expertly leads his men and keeps morale up after the destruction of their ship, and the film ends with Kinross' return to the seas in an even greater capacity. For a post-Dunkirk nation (and Dunkirk is represented prominently in the film, as their ship participates in the evacuation), the message is clear: one defeat does not mean total disaster, but rather a chance to bounce back with ever-greater determination. The mood of *In Which We Serve* is generally reassuring and positive. The military chain-of-command works perfectly, Kinross is a respected

[22] *Ibid*. 82-84.
[23] *Ibid*. 85.

leader to his men, and the film's flashback structure paints a similarly warm portrait of the man in his family life. *In Which We Serve* is almost explicitly constructed to gel with the favored idioms of the middle class film critics that Ellis surveys. The film opens with the line "this is the story of a ship," a follows with a montage of actuality footage of a ship being built. This frame of authenticity—images of the actual labor that goes into the construction of a ship—lends a residual realism to the rest of the film, despite its fictionalized, heightened, and largely melodramatic content that follows. The shipbuilding sequence solves the paradox about quality film offered by Ellis in that the bulk of the movie presents an idealized world acted and staged to perfection, yet one inextricably tied to wartime labor with equally strong resonances to audiences. For Robert Murphy, this is one of the primary visual legacies of the war: "The fusion of documentary and feature film techniques was celebrated as the foundation of a new, progressive and genuinely British school of cinema."[24]

But not all British films that relate to war from the 1930s and 1940s so clearly evoked the notions of "quality" and consensus realism of *In Which We Serve*. While there is a kind of general realism that can be afforded to films made during wartime (they were, after all, written and directed by people experiencing wartime conditions, using equipment designated for making films about war, and their ideas represent the creative mindset of people thinking about war on an hourly basis) there are possibilities outside of dramatization and unblinkingly patriotic propaganda. Instead, what follows is an alternative characterization of representations of war in British cinema from the wartime period, as illustrated through a series of contrasts. The proposed spectrum offers a series of clusters, from the dominant to the emergent, that complicate blanket pronouncements about a wartime cinema that is so strongly controlled both by the state and by cultural gatekeepers (writers, critics, administrators) who see film as a didactic place for moral

[24] Robert Murphy, *British Cinema and the Second World War* (London: Continuum, 2000), 125-126.

uplift and social instruction.[25] This is a discussion of the fate of war representation caught in the tension of realism and the fantastic.

Picking up where the critics surveyed in Ellis' essay leave off, I have deliberately grouped films based on their mood and their relation to the burgeoning discourse of realism. Even though many of the films I discuss have been covered in survey texts on British Cinema and World War II, my organizational claims differ in some key regards. In *Britain Can Take It: British Cinema in the Second World War,* Aldgate and Richards use archival material to contextualize a carefully curated set of films (each discussed in their own chapter) that "were chosen according to several criteria: for the light they shed on some of the issues at stake in the war, because they were popular and because they represent examples of good films emanating from directors of note in what was a particularly successful era for the British cinema."[26] This is similar to the "best of" approach in their survey of British cinema since the 1930s (appropriately titled *Best of British: Cinema and Society from 1930 to Present*). By contrast, Robert Murphy, in his *British Cinema and the Second World War*, uses a combination of chapters organized by historical time (movies made at the very beginning of the war, war films from the 1950s, etc.) and thematic groupings that construct coherent comparisons (war comedy, films about resistance, women and the war). In *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda 1939-1945*, James Chapman discusses films using two organizational strands, analyzing some based on their production base (MOI Films division, Crown Film Unit, etc.) and others in a thematic capacity (historical films with wartime resonance, films about the relationship between enlisted

[25] The Arnoldian and Leavisite traditions of culture as a buttress against indulgence and disreputable pop trash features strongly in the public relations initiatives of Stephen Tallents, his employee John Grierson, and the aspirant tastes of the middle class critics surveyed by Ellis. See Scott Anthony, *Public Relations and the Making of Modern Britain: Stephen Tallents and the Birth of a Progressive Media Profession* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2012), 14; Ellis 87.
[26] Aldgate and Richards 16.

men and officers). For Chapman, these clusters ultimately "locate British films of the war in the context of official propaganda policy."[27] My groupings move across product contexts and periods (though all the films discussed relate to Britain as a wartime nation, either in the lead-in of the late 1930s or during the war proper), yet are finally analyzed both in relation to the general tension between realism and fantasy that runs throughout the whole history of British cinema, and also as prefaces to a new, far more radical approach to war explored in the 1960s and 1970s.[28] This, then, is a proposed map for thinking about war in its historical context, with added emphasis on how such genre delineations look ahead to important subgenres twenty and thirty years on.[29]

2. Wartime Consensus and the Dominant Tradition

The dominant tradition of British wartime cinema is best thought of in relation to the financially and stylistically dominant cinematic output of the United States. The specificity of British wartime experience and the history and structure of its film industry necessarily tell much of the story, but a brief comparative detour to Hollywood provides a template that has influenced world audiences and critics for over 70 years. Thomas Schatz writes, "From 1942 to 1945, Hollywood created a parallel universe for a nation at war, an odd amalgam of information and entertainment, of fact and propaganda, of realism and collective national fantasy."[30] Like countless productions made in Britain, Hollywood films dressed actual events in shiny clothing.

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[27] James Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda, 1939-1945* (London: IB Tauris, 1998), 8.
[28] Murphy has a kind of coda in his book, a chapter dedicated to the legacy of WWII on screen, with specific emphasis on films from the 1960s and 1970. See Murphy, "Fallout: The Enduring Fascination of the Second World War," *British Cinema and the Second World War*, 239-268.
[29] On the turn to genre and historical periodization, see Langford 12.
[30] Thomas Schatz, "World War II and the 'War Film'," *Refiguring American Film Genres: Theory and History*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: U of CA Press, 1998), 124.

Their films offered widely relatable stories of heroism and collective struggle that were produced and distributed under tight monitoring from censorship bodies (in their case, the Production Code Administration and the Office of War Information).[31] With the exception of public information films and newsreels, Hollywood's war related films were largely commercial endeavors, on the whole designed as much for home front audiences as for consumption abroad (a profitable and beloved form of cultural imperialism).

The "collective national fantasy" mentioned by Schatz is not necessarily a use of fantastic experiences and styles, so much as a manufactured consensus designed to provide harmonious wish fulfillment. War movies (especially combat films, espionage/spy movies, and home front stories) in Britain and the United States ultimately desire the defeat the Axis powers. Yet, one differentiating factor between the two national cinemas is a varying emphasis on how the individual connects to collective causes. In the United States, nearly every fictional film participated in an industry-wide "consensus," which Robert B. Ray describes as converting "all political, sociological, and economic dilemmas into personal melodramas."[32] Even though war movies retained a generalized, blanket meaning, their particularities take individual dramas acted out by specified groups as the point of extrapolation for larger statements about the culture. A typical example—in ideological intention, but whose style and craft are extraordinary—is Howard Hawks' *Sergeant York* (1941). This biopic of sharpshooter Alvin York (Gary Cooper) personalizes the moral dilemmas of war (in this case, World War I as seen from the eve of America's entry into World War II) as framed by the individual beliefs of a man at once typical

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[31] For Jeanine Basinger, the typical World War II combat picture solicits a total alignment: "The audience is ennobled for having shared their combat experience, as they are ennobled for having undergone it. We are all comrades in arms." Basinger 75; on censorship and Hollywood cinema during the war, see Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen & The Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia UP, 2007), 155-165.

[32] Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1985), 57.

(humble, kind) and extraordinary (he finds religion after a bout of anger and becomes a pacifist). For Ray, this film displaces big questions in American civic and social life—how religion affects beliefs about war, the obligations of individual to the nation—onto a personal struggle, at once exceptional to this specific man, but potentially universal to the audience. Ray notes that "such displacement turned on Classic Hollywood's basic thematic procedure: repeatedly, these movies raised, then appeared to solve, problems associated with the troubling incompatibility of traditional American myths."[33] *York* magically solves its problems by having its main character justify his service and use his gifts as a sharpshooter on his own terms, by seeing the "render unto Caesar" verse and reconciling his personal faith with the goals and safety of the nation. York emerges a popular hero, but aspires more to quiet comfort—love, his farm, God—than to life-changing fame.

Immediately before and during the war, the British national consensus is best illustrated through the output of the General Post Office film unit (later known as the Crown Film Unit) who made factual films, dramatic-documentaries, and public information films, all with state sponsorship. While their output had the official job of educating and informing audiences (they highlighted goods, services, and the functions of institutions), their work was discussed as art, and is often formally challenging, surreal, or downright weird.[34] A strong prewar example of their general attitude toward nation and consensus is *BBC: The Voice of Britain* (1935), a collaboratively produced documentary whose overt message is of national unity (but whose production was filled with "trials and tribulations" that make the labor of its making a less than

[33] *Ibid*.
[34] Amy Sargeant, "GPO Films: American and European Models of Advertising in the Projection of Nation," *Twentieth Century British History* 23.1 (2012): 56.

harmonious experience).[35] Although Stuart Legg is credited as the director, the film features synch sound experiments by Alberto Cavalcanti, a montage of regional radio bulletins directed by Evelyn Spice, and helping hands from most GPO employees, including Grierson and Humphrey Jennings.[36] Over the course of its near 60 minute running time, the film introduces its audience to the remit, ingenuity, and sense of duty encapsulated by the BBC, at this stage primarily a radio broadcast service that was just about to launch its television programming. The sequences in the film focus on the popular (dancing girls and music hall entertainers) and the distinctly cultured (a production of *Macbeth*, Adrian Boult conducting Beethoven's Fifth Symphony). While the emphasis throughout is on naturalistic dialogue and the apparent chumminess of the employees, the film uses sophisticated techniques to make its message. For Ros Cranston, the editing follows John Grierson's *Drifters* (1929) in its indebtedness to Eisenstein, and the "highly varied" soundtrack is edited in a counterpoint style that suggests the apparent diversity of BBC programming through variation.[37] The primary textual message of *BBC: The Voice of Britain* is that a group of technicians, artists, and performers collaborate in a tireless effort to serve the people. Despite its moments of stylistic flourish, the film gels with the kind of realism suggested by John Ellis and the "quality" critics: the film is inclusive, ennobling, true to life, and mindful of the national character.

This basic premise repeats, albeit in a different stylistic register, with many British wartime features, some of which straddle documentary and fictitious modalities. *Target for Tonight* (1941), a Crown Film Unit production directed by GPO alum Harry Watt (with the editing assistance of frequent Humphrey Jennings collaborator Stewart McAllister), had the full

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[35] Elizabeth Sussex, *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary: The Story of the Film Movement Founded by John Grierson* (Berkeley, VA: U of California Press, 1975), 59.
[36] Ros Cranston, "BBC - The Voice of Britain (1935)," *BFI Screenonline*, accessed 4 Feb 2014, http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/580998/.
[37] *Ibid*.

cooperation of the RAF, whose expertise and equipment largely tell this story of what is upheld as a typical bombing raid of German targets. Like the later *In Which We Serve*, the film begins with a claim to authenticity, albeit this time stated quite baldly: "each part is played by the actual man or woman who does the job—from Commander in Chief to Aircrafthand." The use of real soldiers and technicians in this staged and planned film mirrors the conceit central to *Night Mail*, that was later used to equivalent acclaim in Humphrey Jennings' *Fires Were Started* (1943): achieve a documentary effect by having real people act plausibly in versions of situations they encounter everyday. In retrospectively discussing his career with the GPO, Cavalcanti describes this approach, which gels both with his sensibilities and the general line of the mid-1930s Griersonian school (with whom he otherwise often disagreed): "documentary should be scripted like a well-informed magazine article, and you can't improvise. I don't believe in cinema-verite at all. I think films must be thought out before you shoot them."[38] Cavalcanti prefers "realism," a concept to which *Target for Tonight* ambitiously aspires.

In its sub-60 minute running time, *Target for Tonight* takes its audience through the process of bombing German targets, equally emphasizing the necessary heroism required to do so and the immense infrastructural and bureaucratic work required to make it possible. Nearly as much screen time is given to the officers discussing strategy as to the working class men and US soldiers (American pilots formed "Eagle Squadrons" and helped the RAF before official US entry into the war) who are to engage in the physically dangerous parts of the job.[39] Even though the officers fraternize with the other men, adapting folksy sayings ("Hell's bells! Look at this muck!") and beaming reassurance, they retain an air of serious professionalism. The whole film exudes an utterly upbeat and positive tone, even though the film was produced and released

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[38] Cavalcanti quoted in Sussex *Rise and Fall* 52.

[39] Alex Kershaw, *The Few: The American "Knights of the Air" Who Risked Everything to Save Britain in the Summer of 1940* (New York: Da Capo, 2007).

during one of Britain's most difficult war years. This has as much to do with how the film was shot as it does with the statements and appearances of its participants. Watt reassuringly films conversations in medium shots, proudly displaying service personnel in impeccable uniforms. All the interiors were filmed on studio sets, with the impressive Bomber Command HQ filmed in Denham (its cavernous sprawl is a possible influence on other HQ sets to come, including the famed war room in *Dr. Strangelove*).[40] However, the film attempts to invite audiences to participate in the pleasurable spectacle of war by accentuating aspects of the inherent danger of combat. At one point, the film uses footage of a camera mounted to the bottom of a plane as it takes off. During the actual air raid on German oil fields, the danger of a German counterattack is provided through an obscured sensate, with shadowy figures operating AA guns, while snippets of nondiegetic German dialogue come through in short bursts. The clarity of British military operations, and the spirit of its togetherness are absolute; the Germans live in a somewhat more inscrutable world, where clandestine action trumps public accountability.

The Crown Film Unit made a number of films during the war that used documentary conventions and real soldiers within staged, thoroughly scripted frameworks. *Coastal Command* (1942, J.B. Holmes) focuses on the joint RAF and Royal Navy operations of the Battle of the Atlantic (the continuous struggle for sea superiority in the Atlantic that lasted throughout the war). This film celebrates the confidence of the British military against what were then daunting odds. Robert MacKay refers to *Target for Tonight* and *Coastal Command* as related not only in their form—fictionalized documentaries that approached feature length—but also in their attitude. These films "focused on the strength of the various services, all in their different ways

[40] Harry Watt quoted in Sussex *Rise and Fall* 130.

successfully meeting the challenge of the national crisis."[41] The collective triumph over adversity is further emphasized by *Western Approaches* (1944, Pat Jackson, with celebrated Technicolor cinematography by Jack Cardiff), a dramatization of the struggles of Merchant Seamen in which a group of nonprofessional actors heroically do their everyday jobs. Such plots—collective display of professional cool in the face of adversity—were also employed, albeit with professional actors, by the commercial film industry. *We Dive at Dawn* (1943, Anthony Asquith) details the successful sinking of a German battleship by a small, resourceful British submarine. The film was given Naval support, filmed extensively in outdoor locations, and, in the words of Ian Dalrymple, was nearly a "dramatic-documentary" that preempted some aspects of the Crown Film Unit submarine film *Close Quarters* (1943).[42] The contrasts in scale and symbolic value are intentional and would not have been lost on audiences. *The Way Ahead* (1944, Carol Reed) also provides an agreeably realist spectacle of success in war that doubles as a comment on the state of the nation. Although a remake of a training short called *The New Lot* (1943), *The Way Ahead* comes ready made with a commercially viable message. Lt. Jim Perry (David Niven) is given a rough bunch of recruits that eventually coalesce into a fit fighting force destined for North Africa. By 1944, the larger social comment could be breached, as the tide of the war had turned: the nation began the war in a rather unruly state, but followed the respectable example of a competent leader (Niven's Perry, easily exchangeable for other national icons like Ernest Bevin, Montgomery, or Churchill) and rose to success. Where *We Dive at Dawn* and *The Way Ahead* differ most from the GPO films is in their privileging of the star (John Mills and Niven, respectively), which places the resolution of conflict—both in plot terms, and in relation to the ideological positioning of the military—onto the heroism of the exceptional male hero. Such

[41] Robert MacKay, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain During the Second World War* (Manchester, UK: Manchester UP, 2002), 158.
[42] Ian Dalrymple quoted in Sussex *Rise and Fall* 139.

heroic exceptionalism forecasts the war films of masculine adventure of the 1950s, a trend which in some senses helped occasion satirical, bleak, and tragi-comic counter-trends within the mainstream film industry in the 1960s.

The morale-boosting mode of realism that was dominant in documentary and feature film circles was as applicable to home front drama as to combat pictures. The wartime films of Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat provide the best example of how the commercial cinema could take the political lessons of the documentary movement and make them acceptable to the tastes of the quality critics. Their most representative, *Millions Like Us*, is a powerful melodrama that looks at the transformation of the Crowson family, especially youngest daughter Celia (Patricia Roc) as she becomes acclimated to the war, gets a job at a factory, marries an RAF pilot, and endures the devastation of his early death. The premise comes from *Night Shift* (1942, Garson Kanin), a Paul Rotha produced short featuring Danny Kaye (!) that profiles the 2000 women engaged in overnight factory work—carried out under blackout conditions—in a South Wales munitions factory (they produced, among other things, the shells for the anti-aircraft Bofors Gun).[43] Gilliat and Launder, who had appropriately worked both on fiction films—they adapted screenplays for *The Lady Vanishes* (1938, Alfred Hitchcock) and *Night Train to Munich* (1940, Carol Reed)—and Ministry of Information projects, decided to expand the frame around the story of a woman working in a munitions factory, giving it substantial comic and romantic elements.[44] *Millions Like Us* follows the Crowson family, mainly consisting of sisters Celia and Phyllis (Joy Shelton) and their widowed father Jim (Moore Marriott), as they vacation on the eve of war, where Phyllis' natural verve with men contrasts with Celia's shyness. Once the war begins, Jim's service with the Home Guard and Phyllis' enlistment in the Auxiliary Territorial Services

[43] Paul Rotha quoted in Sussex *Rise and Fall* 141; Edgerton 206.
[44] Bruce Babington, *Launder and Gilliat*, British Film Makers (Manchester: Manchester UP 2002), 45.

conflicts with Celia's desire to escape home life. She is eventually forced into the labor pool, and somewhat reluctantly takes on a factory job producing airplane parts, a new purpose which both integrates her into society writ large, and allows her to find personal fulfillment. Nation and the satisfaction of work trump other concerns. Despite constant family rows, Jim realizes Celia's duty, an admonition that almost instantly stops their conflict dead in its tracks: "if the country needs you, it needs you."

The directors play a delicate game, mixing national concerns with a plausibility that would endear audiences. According to Bruce Babington, "Launder and Gilliat's brief was clearly to represent factory work positively, but such positive representation had to pass a reality test by convincing viewers that it contained a sufficient quota of the actual to be acceptable."[45] This is mainly achieved by alternating the film's genre elements and emotional resonances with select sequences in a documentary style (some filmed on location in factories, some merely staged to resemble sequences in documentary films, some using actuality footage taken from elsewhere). Once Celia takes her job at the factory, these moments come more frequently. However, Babington finds that the opening credits set the tone, in the process signaling the film's decidedly mixed credentials: "The shot setups are generally so simple and the resulting images so natural, seemingly 'found' rather than constructed, that it requires some effort to articulate the meanings they propound—the ordinary, durable drabness of the workers; the starkness of their surroundings lit only by winter sunlight, the large number of women among the factory employees, all with their connotations of a quotidianly unidealized war situation"[46] How these shots "read" is further complicated by the fact that the credits list the major stars in a manner consistent with fictionalized features, but whose centrality as stars is tempered by the credit "and

[45] *Ibid*. 47.
[46] *Ibid*. 52.

millions like you."[47] *Millions Like Us* is slightly paradoxical in that it effaces much of the individuality of its cast (or of the motivations of its characters), i.e., what would otherwise be its selling points as a commercial feature, instead focusing on collective experiences commensurate with the "people's war" of national consensus.

This comes across not only in the film's narration, which does not rigorously stick to Celia, but rather moves between characters to show how several individual viewpoints work together, at a given time, to produce a national consciousness. The importance of collectivity is evidenced by the characters' sentiments (their sacrifice for nation, their deferrals of personal happiness), but also in the film's mise-en-scène. Many of *Millions Like Us*'s key sequences take place in spaces of communal leisure. The bar at the seaside resort, the reception of Celia and Fred's wedding, and the joint factory/RAF dance all stress the importance of maintaining a public life. The dance, in particular, features several long shots that emphasize the mass connections of the people—despite their couplings, they are shown to spontaneously move in unison. Following the quality critics, *Millions Like Us* is the sort of film that perfects an aspiring mode of realism. For documentary filmmaker Basil Wright, it deserves special praise, as it combines the socially committed spirit of public service films with the sentiments of commercial appeal: "I mean, the realism of the films made under the services is one thing, but if you take a film like Launder and Gilliat's *Millions Like Us*, that was made by two people who'd really dived headfirst into the documentary conception and come up with this very simple—I haven't seen it for years—but at the time it was a very moving, very beautiful, very true film."[48] *Millions Like Us* reconciles competing traditions in its construction of a representatively purposeful wartime cinema.

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[47] *Ibid*. 51-52.
[48] Wright quoted in Sussex *Rise and Fall* 140.

3. Other Traditions: Style, Genre, and the Displacement of Wartime Anxiety

Many films about Britain made just before and during the war broadly enforce official Ministry of Information positions about national unity, while working in representational modalities that do not consistently aspire to a realist paradigm. For the sake of manageability, examples from two strands of film production from the period stand as examples of a type of film that occasionally uses anti-realist tropes (histrionic acting, expressionistic visual style, oblique camera set-ups, the suggestion of supernatural or occult forces as informing life) in order to demonstrate how quality realist cinema did not have an exclusive stranglehold over representations of Britain during the war. On the one hand are a group of thrillers—officially Hollywood productions that focus on the situation of Britain and use British personnel extensively—that hail international audiences to sympathize with Britain through the individuated stories that expose the dangers facing Europe. *Night Train to Munich*, Hitchcock's war thrillers (especially *Foreign Correspondent* [1941]), and Fritz Lang's *Ministry of Fear* (1944, based on a wartime novel by Graham Greene) all use localized struggles with big ramifications to warn of the deceptive intentions and dangerously secretive ideology of Nazi Germany. On the other hand are many of the wartime films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger that contrast the realities of lived experience with explicit encounters with fantasy and excess. In particular, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) and *A Canterbury Tale* (1944) look at British attitudes over long historical trajectories, situating the contemporary lived experience of war against the imagined past. Both clusters of films align with the ideological goals of the national consensus while at the same time expanding its visual repertoire.

For Leger Grindon, suspense thrillers are one of a number of genre "modes," that offer a

broad designation of similarity to films with potentially vastly different intentions.[49] Martin Rubin claims that the thriller goes against the grain "of mundane modern life while at the same time remaining immersed in it," usually attained by creating "a double world, one that is both exotic and everyday, primitive and modern, marvelous and mundane."[50] If films discussed in the previous section attempt to woo audiences with a careful combination of actuality images and fitting forms of fictionalization, then thrillers shift representative registers by starting as fictional representations of a recognizable world and gradually moving toward the exceptional, implausible, and even mildly supernatural. In the case of *Night Train to Munich* (written by Launder and Gilliat, as was *The Lady Vanishes*, the film that serves as a template), this means taking a generally unsettling wartime scenario and shifting focus to the intense efforts of secret agent Dickie Randall (Rex Harrison) to rescue a Czech scientist and his daughter from the Nazis. This is not a tale of collective heroism, so much as a focus on the exceptional: at stake is important research, and the protagonists brave all manner of danger and travel all forms of transport to escape the terrible threat of the Nazis. The characters are elegantly dressed and the images are often lavish and use stylized lighting (shadows frequently cast over the faces of plotting antagonists), with suspense amply maintained through chases and gunplay.

Night Train to Munich was produced out of Britain for 20th Century Fox. It is, on one level, a British thriller that recycles elements of *The Lady Vanishes*, a characteristically British export. On another, it is a popular entertainment designed to induce audience sympathy in a contemporary struggle. The threat of the Nazis is real, not just on a large, abstract plane, but also in individuated, human terms. The unraveling of the recognition of this danger, the uncovering of

[49] Leger Grindon, "Cycles and Clusters: The Shape of Film Genre History," *Film Genre Reader* IV, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin, TX: U of Texas Press 2012), 43.
[50] Martin Rubin, "Thrillers," *Schirmer Encyclopedia of Film*, Vol. 4, ed. Barry Keith Grant (New York: Schirmer Reference, 2007), 255.

the threat posed by this occluded, conspiratorial menace, forms the subject of Hitchcock's war thrillers. John Orr characterizes Hitchcock's relocation to Hollywood in mixed terms, a good career move with bad timing: "Hitchcock was stricken with guilt at making the move across the Atlantic in 1939 as war threatened Europe."[51] The director began his American career with *Rebecca* (1940), a culturally English costume romance (with Gothic elements) that benefitted from the resources and technical precision of the American film industry. Hitchcock's fortunes were to rest as equally on American genre efforts—his move toward increasingly graphic and horrific thrillers, his honing of a style suitable for fast-paced thrillers—as on his background, not just as an apparently dapper and urbane filmmaker from England, but also as a seasoned professional who had witnessed other great masters at work. As a younger man, he had worked within the German film industry and had witnessed F.W. Murnau film *The Last Laugh* (1924).[52] For Orr, the German expressionist influence remained on Hitchcock into the 1940s in that his films were to tackle the extreme psychological and experiential psychoses so well visualized by German directors. Fritz Lang and his *Mabuse* films were a particular influence, and "it was Weimar Lang that still inspired American Hitchcock."[53]

Hitchcock's new position, his history of making thrillers, and the legacy of his influences feed directly into his war efforts, which include features, fictionalized shorts, and nonfiction public information films (including an unfinished project on the holocaust, *Memory of the Camps*, that benefitted from his supervision).[54] Orr considers his work crucial, since it connected the US and Britain before the consolidation of Allied power: "Yet during the period of American

[51] John Orr, *Hitchcock and Twentieth Century Cinema* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), 61.
[52] William Cook, "The Master and Murnau," *The Guardian* 29 Feb 2009, accessed 10 Feb 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/feb/27/alfred-hitchcock-berlin.
[53] Orr *Hitchcock* 62.
[54] Richard Brody, "The Front Row: Hitchcock and the Holocaust," *New Yorker*, 10 Jan 2014, accessed 10 Feb 2014, http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/movies/2014/01/hitchcock-and-the-holocaust.html.

neutrality Hitchcock began making key anti-Nazi films to turn the tide and in 1944 returned to London to make two short propaganda films [*Bon Voyage* and *Aventure Malgache*] about the Free French at the behest of the Ministry of Information."[55] *Saboteur* (1942) has an explicitly American setting, and *Lifeboat* (1944) boasts a tacit internationalism, but *Foreign Correspondent* is an explicit statement about Anglo-American relations, and therefore remains one of the most important pro-British propaganda films.

Foreign Correspondent follows an allegorical journey, where an apathetic and skeptical American is shown, first-hand, the true dangers facing the world. Reporter John Jones (Joel McCrea) is sent to London as a newspaper correspondent charged with figuring out whether or not there will be another war in Europe. He arrives and first encounters the world-weary Stebbins (Robert Benchley) and makes an effort to interview the Dutch diplomat Van Meer (Albert Bassermann), who is supposed to be honored by the Universal Peace Party, an apparently pacifist organization. Jones, who meets Van Meer on his ride to the party, thinks he witnesses Van Meer's death, as a gunman posing as a cameraman fires on the man at point-blank and then escapes. Jones gives chase, at first losing track of his assailants, but then finding Van Meer tied up in a windmill. From there, Jones and some colleagues track Van Meer, attempt to keep Jones' love interest Carol Fisher (Laraine Day) safe, and deal with the increasingly duplicitous Stephen Fisher (Herbert Marshall), Carol's father and leader of the Universal Peace Party. During a flight that is later shot down into the ocean, Stephen admits his guilt, his kidnapping of Van Meer, collusion with the Germans, and attempt to instigate war. Stephen sacrifices himself in order to save other plane crash survivors, thereby slightly redeeming himself and allowing Jones to marry Carol. The film ends with Jones' continued broadcasts as a radio correspondent who is riding out the Blitz in London.

[55] Orr *Hitchcock* 61.

This is an American feature film—shot entirely in California—that features a largely British cast, and works hard to establish definite Anglo-American relations. Early, when Jones is meeting with his superiors at the New York Globe, the conversation foregrounds the Transatlantic cables (then the primary means of communication between the two nations), which generally alerts the audience to sluggishness of media flows between the US and Britain. Stebbins notwithstanding, the film conceptualizes the job of "foreign correspondent" rather like the *Indiana Jones* films think about "archaeologists": dashing adventurers who start off jaded, but become believers. The general propagandistic thrust of the film is quite obvious, as it directly shows an American audience the conspiratorial political scene in Europe, and then ends at a moment when Britain is directly under attack, with Jones acting as the mouthpiece of concerned patriots. For Sandrine Boudana "this is Hitchcock's sacrificial contribution to the war effort," a gesture that warnings against Nazism were more important to him in that moment than the internal logic of Jones' character, or even the timbre of the rest of the film.[56] After all, most of *Foreign Correspondent* is not a series of loudly delivered agit-prop speeches that directly hail the sensibilities of its audience. The ending stands alone, to make a point.

Rather, *Foreign Correspondent* is a stylish thriller that showcases Hitchcock's interest in other currents in world cinema, from the formal experimentation of the Soviets to the object-centric mise-en-scène of the Surrealists. The sequence around the imposter Van Meer's death is a strong case-in-point. An outdoor setpiece in front of a civic building, Van Meer's death by camera-gun device shown from the side, using a sound bridge of the gunshot as a transitional herald to one brutal close-up of Van Meer's face, bloodied and in pain. Afterwards, his corpse rolls down the rainy steps. While on one level a reference to the Odessa Steps sequence in

[56] Sandrine Boudana, "The Ritual Function of the Press in Alfred Hitchcock's Movies," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 5.2 (2012): 285.

Battleship Potemkin, it also functions as a moment of brutal recognition, an otherwise uncharacteristic aesthetic flourish that signals something alarming (it is an initial call-to-arms for Jones, who sees this apparent injustice as a wrong that he can help right). After his recognition of what just happened, Jones takes off after the assailant, pushing his way through a massed phalanx of umbrellas. Despite their diegetic motivation as useful objects for a crowd in rain, the unnatural closeness of each umbrella, plus the sheer number, produces an uncanny effect, where the umbrellas appear less as discrete objects and more as a textured wall that Jones must break. The sequence continues with some deft camera movements that show how the characters weave in and out of traffic, culminating in that favorite of Hitchcock devices, the chase.

Other stylistic affectations hew closer to German expressionist precedent. *Foreign Correspondent* is filled with shadowy recesses, including the forlorn windmill where Van Meer is temporarily hidden (one inevitably associates such a setting with the dangerous, incendiary climax of James Whale's *Frankenstein* [1931]) and the seedy apartment where he is later held prisoner. When a man attempts to murder Jones by pushing him to his death, he does so in the precarious (and obviously unsafe) tower of a Gothic cathedral. The film explicitly plays with altered and subjective states of consciousness. For instance, Van Meer is being tortured by being kept awake—his captors want him to give up a secret—and Hitchcock temporarily aligns the audience with Van Meer's askew point of view. In one shot, Van Meer looks at his captors such that it appears that they are at a great distance from him, even though an earlier medium shot had established their proximity. His delirium is further emphasized when he begins talking ("the beasts of war will devour each other"), but does so in a direct address to the camera.

In an essay discussing the intertwined careers of Alfred Hitchcock and Fritz Lang, Thomas Elsaesser explores the 1940s anti-Nazi thrillers of both men, noting "*Ministry of Fear*,

on the other hand, could almost be seen as a spoof of British Hitchcock."[57] Lang, who had certainly influenced Hitchcock, in turn makes an American financed Graham Greene adaptation that bears the imprint of his young English protégé. *Ministry of Fear*, a Paramount produced but London-set thriller (recreated in studios, of course), is considered by many to be an unsuccessful adaptation of Greene's 1943 novel, a compromise that neuters some of the psychological depth of its central protagonist (in the novel, Arthur Rowe mercy-kills his sick wife, while in the film, protagonist Stephen Neale [note the Americanized name change] thinks about mercy-killing his wife, but she commits suicide on her own accord).[58] Don Willis has criticized the film for the tameness of its look, noting that "occasionally, it even has a hint of purpose behind its bland forties-Paramount appearance, as if the blandness of its lighting and sets and its lead actors were ironically intended, concealing some dark truths or mysteries."[59] Despite whatever shortcomings, Lang's film works as a companion piece to *Foreign Correspondent* in that it takes the Nazi menace as a constant, conspiratorial background threat. As with Hitchcock's John Jones, the nominally American Stephen Neale (Ray Milland) finds himself entwined in espionage, murder, and geopolitical maneuvers far outside his control. Like the Universal Peace Party, the Mothers of Free Nations claims a benign, internationalist facade that is later revealed as an ironic mask for sinister intentions.

The film opens in the shadows, with a reticent Stephen leaving Lembridge Asylum, where he has been convalescing since his wife's death (the full details of which are only revealed later). One of the virtues of *Ministry of Fear* is that its plot, at least at first, seems casually and

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[57] Thomas Elsaesser, "Too Big and Too Close: Alfred Hitchcock and Fritz Lang," *Hitchcock Annual Anthology: Selected Essays from Volumes 10-15*, eds. Sidney Gottlieb and Richard Allen (New York: Wallflower Press, 2009), 215.
[58] James M. Welsh and Gerald R. Barrett, "Graham Greene's *Ministry of Fear*: The Transformation of an Entertainment," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 2.4 (1974): 316; Mary Ann Melfi, "The Landscape of Grief: Graham Greene's *The Ministry of Fear*," *South Atlantic Review* 69.2 (2004): 55.
[59] Don Willis, "Fritz Lang: Only Melodrama," *Film Quarterly* 33.2 (1979): 7.

almost randomly motivated. Stephen, who will soon board a train to London, instead wanders into a church fete (hosted by the Mothers of Free Nations) visits a slightly deranged fortune teller, and (through some confusing circumstances) wins a cake, later revealed as containing a spy communiqué. Aboard the train, Stephen is approach by a blind man (Eustace Wyatt) with clear interest in the cake. The train is stopped because of a German air raid, and the blind man eventually goes after Stephen, who narrowly escapes. Once he gets to London, Stephen hires detective George Rennet (Erskine Sanford) and begins to investigate the Mothers of Free Nations, an organization with apparently good intentions run by two Austrian refugees, Willi (Carl Esmond) and Carla (Marjorie Reynolds). While it is later revealed that Carla is relatively innocent—and she of course falls for the personally uncertain but basically good Stephen—Willi is running a Nazi spy ring through this charitable front.

Ministry of Fear does its best to recreate the ambiance of wartime London for international audiences. At one point, Stephen and Carla shelter in an underground station, an improvised but cozy solution for the immanent threat of bombing that serves as the location where they personally connect and fall in love. *Ministry of Fear* reflects and refracts the war through imagery of familiar civilian life: a matte painting of St. Paul's amidst the bombed ruins of the City of London, the desolate moors near Lembridge that serve as the location for Stephen's first near-death experience. Like other films noir, *Ministry of Fear* projects the psychological states of its characters onto the environments it shows. Many of the sets are eerie, including the hallway in the Mothers of Free Nations building and the unassuming Edwardian interior that hosts the séance, where wealthy anti-rationalists commune with spirits (this serves as the site of a murder, for which Stephen, carrying the gun that belonged to the blind man, apparently looks guilty). The supernatural elements of *Ministry of Fear*—the fortune teller, the

séance—do not amount to actual invocations of fantastic or horrific beings, but rather establish a slightly deranged mood for the film, in which the most "sane" character, Stephen, bears the mental trauma of his wife's death. The subtextual suggestion of *Ministry of Fear* is that a dark and shadowy world best explores the threat of Nazism.[60] Of course, this gels with official US and Ministry of Information propaganda, where loose talk, deception, and the stealing of state secrets become matters of urgent and consistent public concern. Lang's paranoia mimics Allied paranoia about state security, coming through via aesthetic avenues unavailable to conventional realist representation.

The wartime films of Powell and Pressburger do not tread on propagandistic paranoia, so much as the longstanding development of collective national identity that transcends or reworks many of the dominant ideas about realism and quality film entertainment. Ian Christie identifies the somewhat aberrant nature of their work, noting that they generally follow Ministry of Information guidelines about unity, nation, and cinema as a source of morale-boosting entertainment, yet they also deliberately forego a realist representational regime.[61] Their films engage with Britain's preferred "people's war" narrative while flirting with Hollywood's program of individuated personalization, yet are hardly a straightforward hybrid of the two styles.

For example, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, Powell and Pressburger's first Technicolor film is a well-known work that is fraught with contradictions in its production and reception. A riff on the "Colonel Blimp" cartoon character developed by David Low in the 1930s, Powell and Pressburger's Blimp provides the pretext for revealing the life of a

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[60] Improbably, a similar line of occult conspiracy is traced in the Vichy French propaganda short *Forces Occultes* (*Occult Forces*, Jean Mamy, 1943). Here, the outbreak of the war is blamed on the dual influences of the Jews and Freemasons on the French Government (?!).
[61] Ian Christie, *Arrows of Desire: The Films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), 36.

representative officer-gentleman over several decades, as he attempts to go from a world of old-style nobility and valor to a culture that values the egalitarian and communitarian efforts of the worker.[62] Colonel Clive Candy (Roger Livesey), a bald, slightly bumbling figure of an older world of dashing warriors, attempts to make sense of life during World War II, where he is an officer in the Home Guard and sees his values superseded by younger generations. Through flashbacks that detail his life, his loves, and his friendships (corresponding to the Boer War [1902], World War I, and World War II) he attempts to make sense of his place in the world. A patriot through-and-through, he is hesitant to embrace the total war necessary for victory, yet he recognizes that his ideas about fair play and sporting contests are out of fashion.

For Maroula Joannau, Candy's concerns showcase a "conservative modernity" which, following Christine Geraghty, supports "a visceral dislike of change, deep-root affection for tradition, respect for hierarchy, and aversion to the heartlessness of modern society."[63] This is played out through the narrative and representational registers that tell Candy's story. Although it is a film about war, the central conflict is arguably Candy's historically obsolete self and beliefs, against the inevitable forces of youth, a new war, and a revised, more egalitarian society. Christie describes Candy as "more a hapless prisoner of his class tradition, steadfast to the point of obstinacy, unable to redirect his life, or his love, beyond the first *idee fixe*" and as "the centrepiece in a gallery of familiar stereotypes that are one by one animated with pathos and humour"[64] *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* uses Hollywood's preference for individual struggle, with a twist. Joannau notes that in the film, "political debates are articulated through

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[62] For a survey of the genesis and reception of *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, see James Chapman, "'The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp' (1943) Reconsidered," *Historical Journal of Film, Television and Radio* 15.1 (1995): esp. 24-26.
[63] Maroula Joannau, "Powell, Pressburger, and Englishness," *European Journal of English Studies* 8.2 (2004): 193.
[64] Christie 47.

personal relationships" (Candy's relationship with Theo [Anton Walbrook] charts a whole world of class-bound honor and Anglo-German relations onto the ongoing story of an on-again, off-again friendship).[65] At the same time, Candy's journey prompts him to see the value of something like anonymous service in the greater social good, even if he does not wholly agree with it. The film ends with a recognition of the value of the Home Guard, the importance of the new military, and the relinquishing of the old order.

Of course, this plays out against a film structured on subjective memories of the past, replete with some strange conceits. Many of the sets stress artificiality and the color palates accentuate the film's allure as a brilliant Technicolor presentation (most obviously striking is the redness of Deborah Kerr's hair and the halo she creates on screen, a recurrent fixation in Powell's cinema). Christie finds that "the tone is often skittish, playfully allegorical, animated by an anthology of brilliant filmic effects which constantly undercut any appeal to naturalism or nostalgia—like the squadron of dispatch riders who fan out in the opening sequence; the old Candy plunging water to reappear in the same shot as his younger self; and a duel which, literally, recedes into insignificance as soon as it starts."[66] Most memorable is Kerr's appearance as three characters (a different one in each time period), a deliberately provocative and anti-naturalistic statement that runs counter to convention, a choice at once radical (the device was favored by Brecht, and later Lindsay Anderson, whose *O Lucky Man!* [1973] endlessly re-uses the same actors in different roles) and in line with the implied sense of temporal continuity of Candy's life (that he "sees" that same woman over many years tells us about his obsessions, and is therefore in support of his consistency as a character).

Many commentators have discussed how Churchill disliked the film, both for its

[65] Joannau 194.
[66] Christie 3.

interrogation of wartime culture and for his curious stature as something of Blimp figure himself.[67] While Blimp was a troubled production that was almost suppressed before completion, was initially released in truncated form, was temporarily banned from export, and was (despite it all) a modest box office success, Powell and Pressburger's *A Canterbury Tale* is quite another story.[68] For their next major collaboration, The Archers created a bucolic, black and white meditation on wartime life in Deep England, looking at rural Kent and the small city of Canterbury. *A Canterbury Tale* is principally about the entwined fates of Alison Smith (Sheila Sim), Peter Gibbs (Dennis Price), and Bob Johnson (Bob Sweet), respectively an enlisted agricultural worker (a "land girl"), a British soldier, and an American soldier. The three arrive at a small Kent village via train, and are held up from their destination of Canterbury. While in the village, the three meet local luminary (magistrate, amateur historian, landed gentleman) Thomas Colpeper (Eric Portman), a respected member of the community who oversees much of the local civilian defense and who provides stationed soldiers with illustrated lectures as entertainment. However, the village is beset by a strange set of crimes: a man, dressed as a British soldier, is terrorizing local women at night, approaching them and smearing their hair with glue (the "Glue Man" strikes quickly and runs off into the night). Alison is a victim upon her arrival. While Alison settles into her job and Peter garrisons with his troupe, Bob tours the area, comparing it with his native Oregon. The three team up and attempt to figure out who is behind the glue attacks. After an investigation, they deduce that Colpeper is to blame. His goal was to scare local women from consorting with British soldiers, which would keep them moral and would prompt the date-less men to attend his lectures. This is finally hashed out on the train to Canterbury. Upon arrival, the three "pilgrims" all find a sense of closure or redemption.

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[67] For example, Chapman "*Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*" 24-30.
[68] *Ibid*. 34-51.

As Stella Hockenhull has argued, the film belongs to a transmedia genre of neo-romanticist aesthetic creation, a disparate tradition that includes artists and thinkers concerned with the British landscape, from Blake, Constable and Samuel Palmer to (arguably) psychogeographical luminaries like Peter Ackroyd and Iain Sinclair.[69] To an inordinate degree, *A Canterbury Tale* fleshes out and complicates its characters through the spaces they inhabit: Bob sees rural England and the people that work its land as his point of entry into understanding the culture of his temporary home (a conversation about the quality of different types of wood seals the connection); Alison, an itinerant laborer whose fiancé is gone (presumed dead) is associated with a kind of mobility, such as the caravan (camper) kept in storage that is discovered at the end of the film, when she learns that her lost love is alive; Dennis, often bored and ill-at-ease in military and civilian life, finds a spiritual connection in Canterbury Cathedral, where he is allowed to play the organ (thus fulfilling both his ethical and social quest for social cohesion, and resuming his vocation). Space is most complex for Colpeper, the eccentric country squire, who, as Powell notes, is "a slightly bizarre human being" constantly engaged in solitary pursuits, be they natural (hiking, mountain climbing) or cloistered (amateur history).[70] Each character is a type of a sort, clearly representative of a certain attitude, job, or social position, yet each gains individuated character through space and place. These categories are also used to span time periods. Early in the film, a visualization of medieval pilgrims en route to Canterbury in gives way to the contemporary inhabitants of Kent: a hunting hawk is released into the air and (through editing) becomes a fighter plane, a change bookended by cuts to the upward gaze of men on the ground. The past and present are simultaneously alive in this world.

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[69] Stella Hockenhull, *Neo-Romantic Landscapes: An Aesthetic Approach to Powell and Pressburger* (Cambridge: CSP, 2008), 21, 51.
[70] Roland Lacourbe and Daniele Grivel, "Rediscovering Michael Powell," *Michael Powell: Interviews*, ed. David Lazar (Jackson, MS: U of Mississippi Press, 2003), 51.

Yet, such an analysis hardly hints at the deep weirdness of the film, a wartime fable about home front life that is also something of a Christian allegory, a literary adaptation (of both Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* [1475] and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* [1678]) and a proto-slasher film. Hockenhull suggests that this was recognized by contemporary reviewers, who regarded the film as something of a failure: on the one hand, a patriotic film about Anglo-American relations that uses the landscape to great propagandistic advantage; on the other, a narrative that was "odd, unfathomable, and disconcerting."[71] The discomfort mainly has to do with Colpeper, played harmlessly and even redemptively by Portman as a mostly misunderstood man. This is somewhat at odds with his crime, which amounts to the ritualistic assault of young women with glue. That it is glue is suggestive of a latent perversity—for glue binds, thus forming the social cohesion and respect for the past that Colpeper endures, and it resembles semen and obviously comments on Colpeper's loneliness and sexual frustration—also found in other Powell films (especially *Peeping Tom* [1960]).

The anti-realist aesthetic register of *A Canterbury Tale* touts a wide message indicative of Ministry of Information goals, yet also gets at the desperation lurking just underneath the wartime psyche. Such explosive, subconscious, and momentary challenges to dominant aesthetic forms likewise inform the psychological challenge offered by two narratives about invasion that attempt to reconcile, variously, the extremely codified mode of realism praised by middlebrow critics and audiences with the more disjointed and stylistically playful forms of fantasy found in Hitchcock, Lang, Powell/Pressburger and select others.

[71] Hockenhull 65.

4. Speculative Invasion and Nominal Realism: *Went the Day Well*? and *The Silent Village* at the Limits of "Quality" Film

One function of propaganda is to spur preparedness and planning. During the summer of 1940 (immediately after the evacuation of Dunkirk), Britain had to face the stark reality that they were the next logical target for the Nazi war machine. Hitler's proposed invasion of the Isles, dubbed "Operation Sea Lion," saw a massing of armies on the coasts of Belgium, France and other Northern European nations, where, after the near-total destruction of the RAF, amphibious forces would land on a "long front," mainly in Kent and Sussex.[72] This invasion, of course, never happened. There are a number of theories as to why this was so, including the Nazi inability to rout British air forces in the Battle of Britain, Hitler's short attention span, and Nazi high command hopes for the exclusively land-based Operation Barbarossa (the invasion and occupation of the Soviet Union, a massive plan that eventually launched in June 1941).[73] Even though the British Channel Islands were occupied—and remained so until May 1945, though by that time the German forces were as isolated as the natives of Guernsey and Jersey—no German forces landed in England, Scotland, Wales, or Northern Ireland.[74] The British Empire's greatest fears never came to pass.

Of course, home front preparations continued apace with increased armed service training and munitions production. Angus Calder writes about the astonishing array of activity throughout 1940: signs and signposts were removed from roads to confuse the landing forces;

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[72] David Lampe, *The Last Ditch: Britain's Secret Resistance and the Nazi Invasion Plan* (London: Greenhill Books, 2007 [1968]), 6-7; Michael Kerrigan, *World War II Plans that Never Happened* (London: Amber Books 2011), 31.
[73] Kerrigan 39.
[74] Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp, *Discourse and Defiance Under Nazi Occupation: Guernsey, Channel Islands, 1940-1945* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State UP, 2013), 18.

fields were scattered with debris to prevent improvised aircraft landings; forts and roadblocks were built; gas stations were closed and the use of private vehicles discouraged; churches were even banned from ringing their bells.[75] Beyond these general steps were organized attempts at training a nascent resistance force in case of occupation. Major Colin Gubbins is the key figure of this facet of British home front defense, in that he was responsible for organizing a secret force to wage guerilla warfare against German troops by a group of men unknown to the Home Guard and other official forces. According to David Lampe, Gubbins' pamphlets on guerilla warfare circulated in Britain (and later amongst "virtually all the free world's clandestine warriors in the Second World War"), and he held private training exercises "for a few very carefully selected British civilians—explorers, mountaineers, linguists and international businessmen" who would form the core of the British Resistance Organization.[76] The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* claims that "their secret recruitment, training, and equipment in the summer of 1940 was a remarkable feat of improvisation and personal leadership."[77] The goal was very much to take ordinary, almost anonymous men and turn them into a disruptive fighting force that could sabotage equipment, stage limited raids of supplies, and generally keep an occupying army on edge. Lampe describes these citizen-soldiers as "poachers and gamekeepers, fishing and shooting ghillies, stalkers, Verderers in the New Forest, farmers and farm labourers, tin miners and coal miners, market gardeners and fishermen," as well as "parsons, physicians and local council officers, as well as blacksmiths, hoteliers and publicans."[78] What united these recruits, whose ages spanned the late teens until seventy, was

[75] Calder, *The People's War*, 138-140.
[76] Lampe 63.
[77] Peter Wilkinson, "Gubbins, Sir Colin McVean (1896–1976)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eee ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31180 (accessed March 31, 2014).
[78] Lampe 69.

their "ability to blend when necessary into the countryside around them, to keep a secret, to live rough and, if necessary, to go on fighting as they would be taught to fight—until they triumphed or were killed."[79]

The desire to show how ordinary citizens would react to invasion prompted fictitious scenarios of survival and guerilla war, including the Ealing Studios film *Went the Day Well?*. In fact, the key figure of the poacher—that maligned social outcast who generally lives on the edge of respectable civilization—unites Gubbins' remit and the film (as well as Graham Greene's story "The Lieutenant Died Last," on which the film is based). Such was the projected social unity of "the people's war" that even the most marginalized figure in a community could be valorized as a local savior. In Greene's story—which was first published in *Collier's Magazine* in June 1940, and was slightly revised for a British reading public in the women's magazine *Britannia & Eve* in September 1940—Boer War veteran Bill Purves saves the suburban commuter town of Potter from a small group of German parachutists who attempt to hold the town hostage.[80] Greene's story is terse, and narrates the invasion of this unremarkable town from the perspective of Purves, a somewhat psychologically damaged war veteran with a penchant for drink. Since the story is told from Purves' perspective, it retains the idiosyncratic obsessions of this largely antisocial man. Using his old war-issued rifle (also used for hunting), Purves shoots several Germans, killing the highest-ranking officer (a lieutenant who carries a picture of his young child) last. Purves is a good shot, but his thoughts cause him to read more as a sociopath than as the ascendant hero of his hometown. He describes his near massacre of the invading forces as "more fun than rabbit shooting" and feels only the faintest remorse at upon gazing at

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[79] *Ibid*.

[80] Graham Greene, "The Lieutenant Died Last," *The Last Word and Other Stories* (New York: Reinhardt Books/Viking, 1990), 46-59; David Johnson, "Graham Greene's 'The Lieutenant Died Last': Publication History," *Notes & Queries* 59.3 (2012): 433-434. Johnson notes that the version in *The Last Word* is identical to the *Britannia & Eve* version.

the picture of the lieutenant's young daughter.[81] Since Greene's story was written while the Ministry of Information employed him, it is often interpreted as his attempt to secure sympathy from the American reading public for the war.[82]

Both Greene's story and Cavalcanti's film contain the outward shell of a propaganda feature in line with official aims. Ordinary citizens save Britain from the threat of invasion. The Germans want nothing but power, and are willing in deceive in order to secure it. The blunt self-sacrifice of a community is enough to save it. Penelope Houston suggests that *Went the Day Well?* might be understood as nearer to a Powell/Pressburger feature than to a Crown Film Unit product. Produced by Ealing Studios outside of any direct government intervention (in fact, studio head Michael Balcon frequently complained about the amount of energy required to make independent films during wartime), *Went the Day Well?* is more redolent of the studio's brand of profitable entertainment and director Cavalcanti's blend of enthusiasms than it is of official government stances. For Ealing, it was a project about British community, local unity, and suspense (tempered with humor, and occasional eruptions of other, less quaint, emotions and tones). It was also a project that came around when there was space in the production schedule.[83] For Cavalcanti, it was a big English-language feature that in some senses combined his narrative work in France from the 1920s with his contributions to the British Documentary Movement in the 1930s. Elisabeth Sussex even claims that "*Went the Day Well?* pulls together most of the threads that run through Cavalcanti's work: the documentary authenticity, the drama, the surrealism."[84] Houston describes Cavalcanti as "a surrealist with a tendency towards realism," which comes across in the film's willingness to radically shift aesthetic registers, a trait that sets

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[81] Greene 55, 58-59.
[82] Penelope Houston, *Went the Day Well?*, BFI Film Classics (London: BFI Publishing, 1992), 15-16.
[83] *Ibid*. 26-27.
[84] Elizabeth Sussex, "Cavalcanti in England," *The Projection of Britain: A History of the GPO Film Unit*, eds. Scott Anthony and James G. Mansell (London: BFI/Palgrave, 2011), 146.

it apart from almost all other wartime propaganda.[85] Whereas the film was initially received in relation to its war themes (more on which later), it is now praised for its juggling of genres and moods. The critic Kevin Jackson considers it a complex and immensely satisfying combination of suspense, dark humor and vivid character sketches.[86] It is at-once a typical Ealing film and an exceptional intervention by a criminally under-acknowledged talent.

Went the Day Well? shifts "The Lieutenant Died Last's" setting from Potter to Bramley End, a fictitious, bucolic village in Deep England. While it maintains the key contribution of the poacher (now called Bill Purvis, played by Edward Rigby), the canvas is stretched to show the contributions and collaborations of the whole village. On Whitsun weekend (late May 1942), soldiers in British Army uniforms enter Bramley End claiming to be in the area to review local defenses. Lead by a man who introduces himself as Hammond (later revealed to be Major Ortler, a German, portrayed by Basil Sydney), they are billeted around the town. Hammond talks with Oliver Wilsford (Leslie Banks), a local squire who also heads the village's Home Guard. Dropping their facade, the audience learns that Hammond/Ortler and his men are Germans and Wilsford a Nazi-sympathizer who is collaborating in their attempt to jam local communications and hold the village for the weekend so that it can be used to stage a larger invasion. Over the course of the next two days, the German's true intentions are realized, culminating in a crisis. Ortler's German chocolate, the soldier's relationship to the village children, their occasionally odd phraseology, and the way they write numbers give them away. Wilsford tells Ortler about the villager's suspicions, causing a true lockdown. Most citizens are rounded up and held hostage in the church. The Home Guard, who hear the ringing of the bells in alarm, return to the village and are machine-gunned. Select villagers fight back. Poacher Bill Purvis protects Young George

[85] Houston 32.
[86] Kevin Jackson, "Out Debt to Alberto Cavalcanti," *The Guardian*, 2 July 2010, accessed 1 April 2014. http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2010/jul/03/alberto-cavalcanti-film-director-ealing.

(Bill Fowler) long enough for him to get away to Upton and deliver a message of the occupation. The townsfolk eventually break free from their captors in the church and make for the post office, where they get another message out. Wilsford continues his ruse long enough for him to seemingly help other villagers hold the Manor House until troops can reach them. As Wilsford removes barricades as a means of letting Nazis into the house, Nora (Valerie Taylor, a woman who earlier appears to be in love with him) discovers his deception and shoots him. British troops finally reach the house and kill the remaining Nazi soldiers. So ends the battle of Bramley End.

This film is outwardly and obviously an exemplary propaganda war feature. As S.P. Mackenzie argues, *Went the Day Well?* is made in the context of total war, when "Germans" and "Nazis" are treated as mutually interchangeable, resulting in "a nightmare image of Nazi frightfulness suddenly come to life in rural England in a picture in which Cavalcanti did not shrink from what was, for the time, a good deal of brutal realism in the depiction of violence."[87] *Went the Day Well?* shows the people triumphant against a Nazi threat, but also against the cowardly aristocrat Wilsford, thus giving the film a class politics in which everyone from the lumpenproletariat to the upper middle classes temporarily suspend antagonisms in the face of a national emergency. *Went the Day Well?* takes care not to offend all of the upper classes, because it features heroism by some of the rich citizens: Mrs. Fraser (Marie Lohr), a wealthy matriarch, sacrifices herself removing a live grenade from a nursery full of children. The film's realism is in its attention to detail and the breezy naturalness of much of the dialog, which comes from writers Angus MacPhail, John Dighton, and Diana Morgan and the assured performances

[87] S.P. Mackenzie, "Nazis into Germans: *Went the Day Well?* and *The Eagle Has Landed* (1976)," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 31.2 (2003): 85.

of the actors.[88] Some of the characters evince a plausible heroism, like The Vicar (C.V. France), who raises an initial alarm by ringing the bells of the church, just as he is unceremoniously shot.

Thus, a major strand of *Went the Day Well's* reception relates to its recognition as a "quality" film in line with many of the aims of middlebrow film critics. This mainly has to do with its perceived discourse of unity. John Ellis quotes a Dilys Powell review in noting "thus, though acting is an element often remarked upon, a film of quality like *Went the Day Well*? (1942) owes some of its unity to the way in which 'no player detaches himself from the mosaic of village society'."[89] Ellis finds this to be a vague, if consistently important, hallmark of quality: "Unity is important because it creates or reveals (the discourse hesitates here) a sense of purpose, a coherent purpose that may or may not be linked to a controlling intelligence."[90] The fact that critics like Powell favor such a concept without successfully defining it ("the discourse hesitates here") is precisely why it is problematic for a film like *Went the Day Well?,* where an outward unity and consistency is frequently undercut by aberrant images, psychological visualizations, moments of excess, and general disruptions to a tentatively unified facade. In her critical round-up on the film, Houston notes a lack of consensus that questions this supposed unity: "William Whitebait found reality in the film, Dilys Powell tradition and Caroline Lejeune silly fantasy."[91]

For *Went the Day Well?* is rife with challenges to typical propaganda, realism, the coherence of a national character, and behavioral properties. While the ultimate narrative message of the film is unified, its visual style and the nuances of its particulars are anything but. Much of what the film offers is typical of other war melodramas: the subtextual focus on a romance (here, between Tom [Frank Lawton] and Peggy [Elizabeth Allan]), or the focus on the

[88] Houston 33-34.
[89] Ellis 76. Quotes Dilys Powell, *Sunday Times*, 1 Nov 1944.
[90] Ellis 76.
[91] Houston 54.

practical stuff of life during war (rationed food, the logistics of billeting soldiers). Yet, this film tempers its traditional genre elements with sudden shifts in tone, shocking brutality, extensive violence towards—and even perpetuated by—women, and a kind of sadistic glee found in few films of the era. Early tastes of these excesses come during the round-up montage, in which the Nazi soldiers begin their "Plan B" and make themselves known to all the townsfolk. At first, individual violence is shown in a straightforward (if still unexpected) manner. A woman resists the order to meet at the church and is slapped into submission in front of her baby. Soon afterward, Daisy (Patricia Hayes) is running the telephone exchange and resists a Nazi soldier's order. This is an extraordinary sequence that portents even stranger shifts to come: lit expressionistically, filmed in close-up in a cramped interior, the scene shifts to an extreme close-up at the moment that the soldier slaps Daisy, thus lingering on the textures of her face as she experiences pain, in the processes accentuating and abstracting the hand such that what we've seen is no longer just "Daisy slapped by one soldier" so much as "all Nazi brutality towards those they conquer." In fact, much of the film's violence occurs in interiors, in physically and psychologically dark spaces that contrast with the frequent bright, daytime exteriors that showcase the naturally picturesque Bramley End. When Nora shoots Wilsford, she does so in a trashed mansion room full of debris and the shell of a large barricade. The room itself remains dark, but strong lighting originating from beneath keeps focus on the look of un-processable shock on Nora's face, a whole range of moments of surprise and revulsion that contort as she shoots Wilsford three times.

There is much outdoor violence as well (the film has an inordinately high body count, then as now). Penelope Houston highlights the stark scene in which the Home Guard men are massacred, a pivotal moment that rivals anything in a more well known film like *Rome Open*

City (1945, Roberto Rossellini): "The killing of the Home Guard, for instance, is a relentlessly curt and effective episode, shot with a kind of factual economy and conciseness, from the instant when the four men, cheerfully whistling, round the bend on their bikes and head towards the enemy machine-gun and the film's own camera position, to the bundling of the corpses and their gear in a ditch."[92] The camera's alignment with the Nazi machine-gunner temporarily implicates the spectator with his shooting. The quickly reversing fortunes of war swiftly follow, as another Nazi shoots a surviving Home Guard man in the back as he walks away, then a different downed Home Guard man in turn shoots said Nazi soldier in the back, at which time he is shot in the head by yet another opponent. But if this matter-of-fact episode arguably achieves the most shocking kind of combat realism, other conventional battle sequences retain a distantiating air. At the end of the film, as Home Guard and regular Army reinforcements re-capture the town, there is a surreal confusion to the action, as both the British and the Nazis wear British uniforms. Removed of narrative motivation, these images show the nation apparently destroying itself.

The sequence that best represents the ultimately excessive and disunified nature of *Went the Day Well's* aesthetic is Mrs. Collins' killing of her billeted soldier. In these few minutes, the film oscillates between comedy and horror, showing both brutally direct and artistically abstract images. Earlier established as a comic character with a sweet sensibility, Mrs. Collins goes through with a most uncharacteristically savage act. As she makes stilted small talk with a German soldier and serves him food, she unscrews a stubborn pepper pot and throws the powder into his face. As he falls over, the camera shows a close-up of Mrs. Collins' feet, as she walks by the fireplace and picks up an axe. The camera cuts back to the surprised and helpless soldier, but next cuts to a singular image of Mrs. Collins, filmed from a low angle, showcasing her shadowy face and hatefully heroic look. She raises the axe high and brings it down on the soldier, killing

[92] *Ibid*. 58.

him. But, rather than stick with a direct and casual style, the next shot is a kind of painterly tableau, a mock Dutch *vanitas* that shows the crumpled hand of the soldier, shattered porcelain plates and mugs, and a worthless revolver lying just out of reach.[93] The sequence continues with another close-up on Mrs. Collins' face as she regains her composure and begins to weep. She makes for the phone exchange, but a series of comic cuts to the operators in Upton show their willingness to let her wait. During this time, another soldier stumbles into the scene and unceremoniously skewers Mrs. Collins with his bayonet.

Houston reveals that this sequence was shot with great detail: the set was built to be smaller than life-sized, such that the cramped and claustrophobic mood was lost on nobody.[94] Such attention suggests that the psychological effects of this set piece are not an accident. In some ways, this is the key sequence of the film in that it whittles down the larger conflict of both the diegesis and of the wartime audience. When faced with extraordinary violence, extraordinary violence (even if not advised or desired) becomes the temporarily normalized response. Such a position is naturally schizophrenic—one does not maintain an even keel when faced with atrocities, but rather moves between extreme states—so Cavalcanti's decisions showcase something about war that most propaganda does not. In many of the quality films and films that skew towards typical versions of realism, these wild shifts do not occur. Unity reigns in tone and mood (as well as narrative aims and ideological intention). In *Went the Day Well?*, episodes like this one momentarily arrest dominant and official discourses and offer a kind of disruptive shock not found in most war films of the time.

Savagery of a different sort prompted *The Silent Village*, a Crown Film Unit production

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[93] For more on the composition of *vanitas* paintings see Hans J. Van Miegroet. "Vanitas." *Grove Art Online*. *Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed April 3, 2014, http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T087870.
[94] Houston 41.

directed by Humphrey Jennings that featured (more or less exclusively) the residents Cwmgiedd. As Wendy Webster speculates, this documentary memorialization of the Nazi massacre of Lidice is relatively absent for most discussions of wartime cinema:

> One reason for the neglect of the film may be the doubleness involved in transposing Lidice onto Cwmgiedd and casting Welsh villagers in Jennings's formulation, to 'play themselves and themselves as the people of Lidice'" This doubleness means that *The Silent Village* is not usually included in discussions of the 'people's war': an image and narrative which has attracted a great deal of attention.[95]

Lidice was a village near Kladno, west of Prague, in Czechoslovakia that was wiped off the map (173 men killed on June 10, 1942, with most women and children relocated to concentration camps) by Nazis who were in search of accomplices in the shooting of Reinhard Heydrich.[96] When news of this massacre began to circulate around the world, communities deliberately participated in this "doubleness," declaring solidarity with the people of the village. According to Nicolas G. Balint, "the Federal Housing Project at Stern Park Gardens near Joliet, Illinois, was renamed LIDICE on Sunday, July 12, at a heartwarming demonstration in which both Americans and Czechoslovakians participated."[97] Jan Masaryk, Czech Vice-Premiere and Foreign Minister in London wrote a message that connected Lidice to another sudden event: "Pearl Harbor and Lidice—two symbols and determination and freedom—are daily reminders to all of us."[98] Many villages around the world, including San Geronimo, Mexico, added Lidice to their names so that it would live on.[99] In the absence of direct connections between these places and this once obscure Czech village, "Lidice" became a kind of key place, like "Dunkirk" or "Pearl Harbor" or

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[95] Wendy Webster, "*The Silent Village*: The G.P.O. Film Unit Goes to War," *The Projection of Britain*, 263.
[96] Eduard Stehik, *Lidice: The Story of a Czech Village* (CZ: The Lidice Memorial, 2004), 6, 75. According to Stehik, the Nazis went so far as to level and process the remains of the village, thereby effectively wiping it off the map (92-93).
[97] Nicolas G. Balint, *Lidice Lives Forever* (New York: Europa Books, 1942), 39.
[98] Jan Masaryk, quoted in *ibid*., 45.
[99] Noel Joseph, *The Silent Village: A Story of Wales—and Lidice*, forward by Jan Masaryk, *Cinegram Review* No. 14 (London: Pilot Press, 1943), 43-45.

"Guernica," whose evocation instantly suggests Nazi atrocities, or innocents in the face of a bullying threat. In a world that did not yet know the full extent of the Holocaust, such an unfortunate set of events stood out as exceptional.

Director Humphrey Jennings was by this time the surest hand at the Crown Film Unit. During the previous decade, he was a strong, if occasionally dissenting protégé of both John Grierson (with whom he shared an interest in local, working class cultures) and Cavalcanti (whose sense of the surreal and stylistic experimentations complimented his own). In fact, Jennings arrived at filmmaking having already established himself as a polymath: a Cambridge-trained literary scholar, he was active in theatre, was a founding member of the British Surrealist group and a painter in his own right, wrote poetry, and co-founded the sociological venture Mass Observation.[100] At the G.P.O. Film Unit and Crown Film Unit, Jennings made poetically inflected propaganda films less about the bare realities of everyday life than about the comparative resonances of lived experience. *Spare Time* (1939) showcases the leisure habits of different working class communities. *London Can Take It* (1940, co-directed with Harry Watt) showcases the resolve of ordinary Britons in the face of aerial bombing. Both films actively court the sympathy of American audiences.[101] He is perhaps best known for *Listen to Britain* (1942), a mediation on British culture in the face of a persistent Nazi threat, and the dramatized documentary *Fires Were Started*, a longer film that explicitly tests the "doubleness" of being and performance that would characterize *The Silent Village.* In *Fires Were Started*, a film about volunteer firemen who combat the blazes of the blitz, Jennings had a script, but often worked

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[100] The most comprehensive discussion of Humphrey Jennings is in Kevin Jackson, *Humphrey Jennings* (London: Picador, 2004).

[101] For *Spare Time*, see Flanagan, "Humphrey Jennings and the Festival Audience"; for more on this aspect of *London Can Take It* (also called *Britain Can Take It*), see Forsyth Hardy, "The G.P.O. Film Unit, 1933-1940," *The Projection of Britain,* 114-115.

with actors to the point that they threw off their verbatim lines and bean to ad-lib.[102] These actors were non-professionals, and most made a living as firemen: they ended up playing men like themselves, whose invented names and fictionalized histories nevertheless allow a sense of personal solidarity to shine through.[103] *Fires Were Started* and *The Silent Village* attempt to balance the scales of politically committed cinema, where the individual retains an identity yet continues to associate with a social mass. Jennings does not practice an Eisensteinian form of typage, but rather makes social groups heroic through their internal hierarchies of leadership.

The Silent Village can be broken into two basic sections. The first showcases, in a manner familiar to *Spare Time*, the happy, everyday culture of the mining families of Cwmgiedd. The film visualizes slices-of-life, undiluted by verbal commentary or voice over narration. Children receive Welsh-language instruction in school, men and women garden, women perform household tasks, men fraternize at the mine head, congregants sing at their church service. The suggestion is of cultural unity, sold through unobtrusive camera work and the easygoing conversations of the participants. The second section is heralded by an occupying Nazi force that quickly gains control of the culture of the town (symbolized, for example, in the way that they forbid Welsh instruction in school). These invading Germans declare all Jews, communists and trade unionists to be enemies of the state, causing an initial wave of preemptive violence against the citizenry. Rather than confront these men outright, the townsfolk begin to sabotage machinery and work slowly. They wage a brief guerilla war against their captors, going so far as to ambush and kill several guards. Things become more serious after the announcement of the attempted murder of Heydrich (the same man who prompted the real Lidice massacre). This prompts a full registration of the village and threatened killings. Heydrich dies of his wounds,

[102] Brian Winston, *Fires Were Started*, BFI Film Classics (London: BFI Publishing, 1999), 32.
[103] *Ibid*. 31.

and the Germans formally accuse of the villagers of aiding his assassins. The men are brought into public. As they lift their voices collective voices in song, they are shot. The women and children are sent into exile. The film ends with scenes of the reactions of residents of Cwmgiedd to the story of Lidice (they act as themselves, not as the doubles in the main film diegesis): Lidice will live on in the hearts of free working people the world over.

Despite his wide interests, Jennings had not expressed any particular interest in Czechoslovak culture prior to *The Silent Village*.[104] The idea was brought to the Crown Film Unit by the poet Victor Fischel, who wrote a treatment that gave a starting place for the project.[105] Although it retained a primary goal of memorializing Lidice, the project was adapted to fit Jennings' interests and the larger, national aims of the Crown Film Unit. For Jennings, the project became a chance to work with a Welsh mining community, fulfilling longstanding interests in the history of labor and the local cultures created by the industrial revolution.[106] *The Silent Village* works as a C.F.U. project in that it valorizes a unified Welsh village against an encroaching Nazi treat, while at the same time suggesting a connection to Lidice.

Part of the film is obviously interested in a familiar treatment of actuality. The opening section clearly valorizes the everyday life of the citizens of Cwmgiedd. *The Silent Village* is as interested in the social effects of labor as any other film to emerge from the British documentary tradition. The general ideological messages of the film—social unity in the face of adversity, sacrifice for the greater good—correspond to the values favored by the "quality" critics. But as much as there is a nominal realist discourse in *The Silent Village*, the fact remains that it is a speculative invasion film suffuse with abstract representation. Philip C. Logan relates that the

[104] Author interview with Kevin Jackson, 03/15/14, Linton, Cambridgeshire, UK.
[105] Philip C. Logan, *Humphrey Jennings and British Documentary Film: A Re-Assessment* (Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 223.
[106] Author interview with Kevin Jackson.

film is, as a general rule, an "imaginative representation," in which Jennings foregoes direct reconstruction, instead focusing on the differences between the Welsh miners and their German occupiers on a symbolic level.[107] This abstraction corresponds to other texts that memorialize Lidice: Edna St. Vincent Millay's lyrical verse *The Murder of Lidice* (1942), by turns pastoral and suggestively violent ("Heyrich the Hangman he howls tonight/He howls for a bucket of bubbly blood"; Cecil Day Lewis' "Lidice (1944), which turns the tragedy into a bigger morality play ("The pangs we felt from your atrocious hurt/Promise a time when even the killer shall see/His sword is aimed at his own naked heart"); the cartoons of the Jewish-American artist William Gropper, who satirized the Nazi perpetrators in brute caricature.[108] The delicate game that each of these texts plays it to extract universal humanistic sympathy out of a singular, hyper-specific world-historical event.

Jennings would have had very little first-hand knowledge of the exact sequence of events that lead to the destruction of Lidice. There are obvious equivalences that he makes to tailor the event for a British Isles locale. For example, there is a total equivocation between the miners of Cwmgiedd and the citizens of Lidice, even though the largest employer of men in Lidice was the Poldi Smelting Works in Kladno.[109] For this project, the association with heavy industry provides enough of a connection. Moreover, Lidice had some socio-economic differentiation between its families, while Cwmgiedd is, in grand socialist tradition, shown as a relatively homogenous culture.[110]

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[107] Logan 224.
[108] Edna St. Vincent Millay, *The Murder of Lidice* (New York: Harper, 1942); Cecil Day-Lewis, "Lidice," *Lidice: A Tribute by Members of the International P.E.N.*, introduction by Harold Nicolson (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1944), 13; William Gropper, *Lídice: historia de una pequeña poblacíon* (Washington, El Coordinador de asuntos intenunericanoa, 1942). Gropper's illustrated pamphlet only appears to have been published in Spanish and Portuguese.
[109] Stehlik 22.
[110] Author interview with Kevin Jackson.

Historiographical qualms aside, *The Silent Village* expertly plays with conventions of realism, in the process suggesting possibilities that resonate strongly with alternative traditions of war representation in later decades. To a degree greater even than *Went the Day Well?*, *The Silent Village* takes what was by 1943 a largely fantastic scenario—the late-in-the-day occupation of Britain—and examines that situation's effects on morale, social cohesion, and a civilian capacity to resist. More specifically, *The Silent Village* refuses some of the common stylistic conceits of 1940s realist cinema. To begin with the specific: the film often strays from the privileging of medium shots and close-ups, used elsewhere in documentary films of the time to guarantee a given film's sense of the personalization of the real. In films like *Song of Ceylon* (1934, Basil Wright) and *Night Mail*, sequences about the lives, actions, and movements of individuals are almost totally done in medium shots or close-ups (long shots are present, but usually to establish spaces). *The Silent Village* differs a bit in this regard, as some key sequences deliberately keep a great distance between the camera and its apparent subject. For example, the film occasionally shows some townsfolk keeping watch from a ruined castle on high ground. The communication between those at watch and visitors is shown in long shot, to stress the smallness of the individuals in relation to the landscape, and to show the relatively isolated nature of their resistance and the sense of surveillance they can provide. Even more noticeable is *The Silent Village's* prevailing discourse of absences, which is at once a thematic resonance (its gaps in representation are a fitting tribute to a people who were wiped off the map) and a practical one (some of what is missing from the screen would have been expensive to shoot). The film rarely depicts the agents of Nazi occupation, and when it does, only shows isolated soldiers in obscure or partial views. When a small group of men takes a group of Nazi guards by surprise, the film lingers on the deliberate actions of the Welshmen, only depicting their targets in medium-long

shots, mainly from behind. Famously the Nazi "invasion" is first announced by diegetic sound, a car outfitted with speakers that cruises through the streets. Throughout the film, the Nazis are associated with sound: they are often "on screen" as a voice making claims through the speaker of a radio. Wendy Webster notes the distinction between the embodied speech of the townsfolk (recall their pride in speaking Welsh and singing hymns) with the "disembodied speech by Germans that emerges from sound technology" which "suggests a barbarism of modernity."[111] In other sequences, the bodies of the people of Cwmgiedd are displayed in full, while the Nazi force is occupied as jack-booted feet and the dangling butts of rifles. Kevin Jackson notes that in all of Jennings' wartime films, he almost never directly shows Britain's enemies: while *Words for Battle* (1941) contains some stock footage of prominent Nazis, films like *Listen to Britain* and *Fires Were Started* only represent the residual effects of Nazi aggression.[112]

Finally, tendencies found elsewhere in Jennings' films inform *The Silent Village's* uneasy relation to realism as such. Jennings has always produced images that gel with his version of surrealism, which might be summarized as the shocking intrusions of aesthetic flourish into the fabric of the everyday. In the multi-authored *The First Days* (1939), it is the strangeness of wartime life (the emptying streets, the quiet vigil of barrage balloons). *Spare Time* emphasizes the spectacle of costumed kazoo bands. *The Silent Village* dwells on the surreal encounters inherent in the ruinous. As the buildings of the village burn, the camera lingers on a still tableau: a white, intact sewing machine gleams amidst a destroyed building.

Thus, *The Silent Village*, despite having an avowed, unified political intention, participates in the same kind of tonal and stylistic oscillation as *Went the Day Well?*. While both films arguably fulfill propaganda aims, together they signal an unruly, challenging, not-always-

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[111] Webster 268.
[112] Author interview with Kevin Jackson.

successful, but visibly and audibly quite different approach to filming wartime resistance. Cavalcanti and Jennings made films that felt slightly out of synch with their times, yet signaled important changes to come.

5. Conclusion: A Look Ahead

Virtually all films made for public consumption in Britain during the war qualify as works of propaganda. Within this vast group—melodramatic romances, comedies, war films, historical swashbucklers—are (to varying degrees) general concessions to national unity, the importance of higher ideals, a sense of social nuance, and the veneration of tradition. Films that uphold the bulk of these ideals while providing well-made entertainment that aspires to larger notions of truth qualify, as per John Ellis' work with 1940s film critics, as "quality" film that encompasses a kind of "best of" set of criteria that was alive in its day, but remained a kind of dominant placeholder in British film historiography.

A large part of this discourse is a privileging of realism, both as it relates to "quality" films and as it interfaces with official propaganda produced by nationally funded filmmakers in the General Post Office and Crown Film Units. With some obvious gradations, "realism" becomes a paradigmatic signifier for British cinema whose reputation solidifies during the war, and whose residues find their way into (paradoxically) both the dominant strand of heroic-masculinist war films of the 1950s and into leftist, politically committed cinema of the same period (Free Cinema). That said, the wartime years also establish a tradition of fantastic or stylistically excessive cinema that emerges with defensible films by respected filmmakers (the celebrated Powell/Pressburger features, or the legacy of Hitchcock), but later migrates to more disreputable places like horror cinema or broad comedy. Of course, these are not hard-and-fast

distinctions, and films frequently mix these registers and markers of respectability.

As for the representation of war: in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, films continue to be made that might readily fit the dominant tradition of *In Which We Serve* (a blockbuster like *The Battle of Britain* [1969, Guy Hamilton] comes to mind). Likewise, films that identify more strongly with the generic mélange, violence and offbeat humor of *A Canterbury Tale* find their way to production, despite the odds (the World War I film *Oh! What Lovely War*). As I argue above, films of this tradition, and in particular the liminal case studies afforded by *Went the Day Well?* and *The Silent Village*, form a persistent, largely underexplored counter-tradition to films about war that correspond more closely to the ideal criteria of "quality" realist production. To trace a direct line, the seemingly realist aspirations of these two films are somewhat undone by their inconsistent tones, their moments of excess, the surprising risks they take—in short, their deliberate provocation of existing genre fare. They compare favorably with later films about speculative occupation: *It Happened Here* and *The Eagle Has Landed* (1976, John Sturges), films that would never be claimed by the dominant tradition, but which nonetheless offer historical and aesthetic challenges to comfortable, unified accounts of the changing face of war representation.

While wartime films of 1940s Britain predict many of the generic and ideological struggles to come in later decades, they are surely products of their times. Filmmakers from this context could not read the future. Any narrative of what happened to war representation in following decades is as much built around changing production circumstances, new kinds of wars, shifts in war-historical power flows, technological change, and the goals of younger generations of creative talents as it is on the precedent of film production during World War II.

Chapter 2

Traditions of War Comedy: Comic Alternatives to the "Pleasure Culture of War"

This chapter charts the expanded scope of war comedies in British cinema after 1956. Commentators and historians often cite 1956 as a watershed year of cultural change, even though Britain's world-historical importance had been on a general decline since the end of World War II.[1] Bankrupt and exhausted by the war, Britain lost its empire. In the years immediately following 1945, it relinquished control of, or was defeated in asymmetrical military campaigns in, Palestine, India, Malaysia, Kenya, Cyprus, and Aden.[2] This narrative of decline symbolically culminates in the battle for control of over the Suez Canal, which saw the nationalization of this important shipping route by Egypt, in the process illustrating the last days of an older form of European imperial authority.

My goal is not necessarily to claim that the debacle of the events surrounding the loss of control of the Suez Canal "caused" a restructuring of subgenres of war representation, but is rather to show how the genre remained a flexible site for a cultural imaginary that supported a range of ideologies, stances towards the military, and relationships to masculinity in the face of

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[1] Cultural change in the wake of the "Angries" and Suez is best explained in the statements made by the authors collected in the book *Declaration* (Colin Wilson, Lindsay Anderson, Doris Lessing, Kenneth Tynan and others), an early attempt to gather young intellectuals and artists together in the wake of the sudden fashionability of youthful stories of protest and dissatisfaction. See Tom Maschler, ed., *Declaration* (London: Dutton Books, 1958). For a broader overview, especially as these sentiments played out on the stage, see John Russell Taylor, *Anger and After: A Guide to the New British Drama* (London: Penguin, 1970). A general historical overview of the period, which carefully qualifies the novelty of the post-Suez Angries, is in Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had it So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to The Beatles* (London: Abacus, 2010).

[2] Martin Van Creveld, *The Changing Face of War: Combat from the Marne to Iraq* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2008), 221.

intense public criticism directed at Britain's declining status as an imperialistic power. I hope to show that war comedy in general, and a critical, politicized kind of comic irony in particular, thrived in cinematic and televisual representations of war, despite the continued dominance within the genre of a type of pro-militaristic, paternalistically masculine, and generally serious brand of war cinema that is firmly established during the 1950s, and continues as a dominant form within the genre through the early 1980s. This chapter explains some of the recurrent narrative and stylistic features of this dominant type of war cinema, but then goes back to previous decades to excavate nascent examples of war comedy, building to its solidification as a subgenre in the 1940s. War comedy, as it mutates in the 1950s and 1960s, becomes a key alternative discourse (at first a residual formation in line with older modes of film production and consumption, but then an emergent one that inaugurates a very different sort of cinematic experience). Ultimately, it becomes one that challenges many of the naturalized generic traits of serious war films predicated on redemptive heroism. Most specifically, a new brand of comic irony pioneered by films like *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and *How I Won the War* illustrates the stakes of this counter-discourse: in two big-budgeted feature films, directors Tony Richardson and Richard Lester dissect military failures set in the historical past (the Crimean War and World War II, respectively) that show none of the reverence for authority, trust in expertise, belief in British exceptionalism on the world stage, or sympathy for sacrifice that others war films offer.

1. Cultural Responses to War in its Immediate Aftermath: Defining the Dominant Tradition of the 1950s

By the 1950s, Britain's vision of war and of wartime life underwent a pronounced shift. If the wide, egalitarian reach of the "people's war" narrative could sustain the nation while its back was against the wall, then the reinvented myth of the war for a slightly younger generation would simplify and reshuffle popular memory in a notably conservative way. This differs strongly when compared with popular attitudes after World War I. Despite both wars ending in victories of a sort, their immediate legacies differ as much in tone as they do in technology. As for the latter, while many mass circulating war stories of World War I and the interwar years were mainly literary, the post-1945 era saw and more widespread ascendancy of visual and aural media, such that film, radio and eventually television provide as much content as, say, novels, memoirs and comic books. According to Martin Van Creveld, the years following 1918 saw a widespread adoption of "anti-militarist, anti-imperialist" sentiment, especially among the middle class, a distaste so powerful that it occasionally caused civilians to discriminate against soldiers in uniform.[3] The thoroughly anti-imperialist Communist movement gained traction, emerging as a "political religion" of a sort, especially after Bertrand Russell's visit to the Soviet Union in 1920 and the subsequent publication of his widely read book *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism*.[4] The Peace Movement (a loosely held together coalition of pacifists) spread rapidly, finally gaining widespread recognition during the 1930s.[5] Millions of Britons wanted to dissociate themselves from war.

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[3] *Ibid*. 83. This is similar to U.S. public response to soldiers during the Vietnam War.
[4] Gidon Cohen, "Political Religion and British Communism," *Twentieth Century Communism* 2 (2010): 197-198; Bertrand Russell, *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1920).
[5] Michael Pugh, "Pacifism and Politics in Britain, 1931-1935," *The Historical Journal* 23.3 (1980): 641.

In cultural terms, artists of this period processed war in distanced, laconic, occasionally ironic, and seemingly traumatic ways. Much war remembrance happened in literature. This tradition includes the grim reportage of Siegfried Sassoon, whose poems like "Counter-Attack" (1918) mix personal experience with collective shell shock.[6] A famous mélange of ambivalent sentiments about war are found in the tension between humor and atrocity in Robert Graves' memoir *Goodbye to All That* (1929). Towards the end, he scrutinizes the tropes of his life story, noting that "I had, by the age of twenty-three, been born, initiated into a formal religion, travelled, learned to lie, loved unhappily, been married, gone to the war, taken life, procreated my kind, rejected formal religion, won fame, and been killed."[7] Of course not all reflections on the war were as soul-searching. In discussing popular "boy's weekly" papers like *Gem* and *Magnet*, George Orwell describes how they can at-once tacitly support war and the imperial mindset yet still gel with their reader's instinctive isolationism:

> Throughout the Great War the *Gem* and *Magnet* were perhaps the most consistently and cheerfully patriotic papers in England. Almost every week the boys caught a spy or pushed a conchy into the army, and during the rationing period 'EAT LESS BREAD' was printed in large type on every page. But their patriotism has nothing whatever to do with power-politics or 'ideological' warfare. It is more akin to family loyalty, and actually it gives one a valuable clue to the attitude of ordinary people, especially the huge untouched block of the middle class and the better-off working class. These people are patriotic to the middle of their bones, but they do not feel that what happens in foreign countries is any of their business. When England is in danger they rally to its defence as a matter of course, but in between-times they are not interested. After all, England is always in the right and England always wins, so why worry? It is an attitude that has been shaken during the past twenty years, but not so deeply as is sometimes supposed.[8]

While retrospectively regarded as Neville Chamberlain's personal folly, his appeasement of Nazi Germany had a lot to do with widespread aversions to war, a phobia overcome by German

[6] Siegfried Sassoon, *Counter-Attack and Other Poems* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1918). Available at http://www.bartleby.com/136/index1.html.
[7] Robert Graves, *Good-Bye to All That: An Autobiography* (New York: Jonathan Cape, 1930), 426.
[8] George Orwell, "Boys' Weeklies," *Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (London: Gollancz, 1940). Accessed at http://www.orwell.ru/library/essays/boys/english/e_boys.

aggression in 1939. Engagements with war in the interwar period thus have a complicated relationship to national pride.

On balance, the decade following World War II prompted a different kind of reaction. While war memoirs (by figures as diverse as Winston Churchill and Spike Milligan) and war poetry (Edna St. Vincent-Millay, Alun Lewis) continued to find audiences, the war was to receive a massive, long-lasting memorialization in popular culture, especially in the cinema. In the decade following the war, Neil Sinyard claims the war film was "the most popular genre of the time," with comedies coming in a close second.[9] Despite some critical recognition of genre overlap and hybridization, war comedies were not to emerge as a visible genre sub-cycle until the latter part of the decade. Several writers, including Raymond Durgnat, Sinyard, and Christine Geragthy, describe British war films of the early 1950s (roughly 1950-1956) as the nation's answer to the American Western.[10] Both genres feature male spheres of action, rugged individuals that stands up to evil, and gun justice of a sort. Gergathy, however, qualifies the comparison by noting that while "the pleasures of the war film involves watching men taking action in a spectacular setting . . . the British war films lack the sense of rapport between man and landscape, the physical ease of action characteristic of the western." Furthermore, war films are mediated by their group nature, where "effective action is dependent as much on technology and teamwork as on individual activity."[11] That the American Western and the British war film should both enjoy a period of high budget prestige in the 1950s has as much to do with their legibility as successful entertainments within well-established genres as it does with the cultural politics of that particular moment (a time of rightward movement in America, where anti-

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[9] Neil Sinyard, "British Film in the 1950s," *BFI Screenonline*, accessed 22 May 2014, http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/1147086/.

[10] Sinyard "British Film in the 1950s"; Christine Geragthy, *British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre, and the "New Look"* (London: Routledge, 2000), 179. Durgnat is quoted in Geragthy.

[11] Geragthy 179-180.

Communist hysteria and Blacklisting suppressed much work from Left writers and filmmakers). Even though Britain welcomed expatriate talents like Joseph Losey, its national cinema during the early 1950s remains notably conservative in aesthetic, ideological, and representational terms. Sue Harper and Vincent Porter describe the conservative paradigm of British war films between 1953-1956, whose representative titles include *The Colditz Story* (1955, Guy Hamilton) and *The Dam Busters* (1955, Michael Anderson) as dealing, in the first instance, with narrative choices: "The story, which was often based on a real wartime episode, frequently consisted of an intelligently conceived and mounted attack by a small group of men on a prestigious, and often unsuspecting, enemy target."[12] These stories are not so much about war in larger geopolitical terms as they are about the successful execution of specific missions and hierarchical directives (in *The Dam Busters*, to take the most famous example, the bombing of industrial targets in the Ruhr Valley). Harper and Porter see these films as offering a multi-generational through-line with the boys weeklies described by Orwell: "Their combination of wartime history and a boy's adventure story made them ideal films to which fathers could take their sons for both nostalgic and educational purposes."[13]

The conservative war films of the 1950s are sensitive to the technological and administrative discourses of their time. Taken in sum, these films praise the standards of the modern, professional military, and offer a sort of heroism that has less to do with the tradition of communal amateurism (the stance taken by most 1940s war films) than with the glory of the few.

The cultural shift from mass achievement to singular success is, paradoxically, traceable to new forms of social design and planning that took root in the postwar era. Despite a broadly

[12] Sue Harper and Vincent Porter, *British Cinema in the 1950s: The Decline of Deference* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003), 255. Colditz is a German prisoner of war camp, housed in a castle, in a town called Colditz located near Leipzig.
[13] *Ibid*. 255.

progressive platform of reforms and economic provisions, near full-employment, and an increase in real wages for most of the working class, many of the Labour party's successes are tied to the figure of the paternalistic planner. David Kynaston points out that "a faith in the beneficent, public-minded expert underlay the creation of the modern welfare state."[14] While the war had featured its share of leaders, the new experts included curators (James Gardner, who designed and organized the "Britain Can Make It" show of industrial design at the Victoria and Albert in 1946), organizationally-minded politicians (Prime Minister Clement Atlee, overseer of the welfare state, or Aneurin Bevan, architect of the National Health Service), and what Christopher Frayling describes as the "designer as boffin" (the eccentric British creator, an example of which is Michael Redgrave's portrayal of Dr. Barnes Wallis, the main planner of the raid featured in *The Dam Busters*).[15] The immediate postwar era eventually resulted in social victories for "the people," but these were achieved in the pop cultural imagination through the tireless efforts of a few heroic men. Again, as much as the war years did valorize specific men as heroes, this discourse intensifies in the following decade, in the process downplaying the sense of collectivity in the People's War narrative.

The British war films of the first half of the 1950s directly continue aspects of the "quality film" of the 1940s, although that label of critical prestige was soon displaced onto works of humanist art cinema that were imported in ever-greater numbers throughout the 1950s.[16] Films of this period echo "quality" from the previous decade in their association of Britishness or Englishness with a coherent set of positive character traits. In this discourse, national pride is not something to be questioned or doubted, but celebrated. Geragthy writes that in this period, "the

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[14] David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain: 1945-1951* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 24.
[15] Christopher Frayling, "Design and the Dream Factory in Britain," *Design and Popular Entertainment,* eds. Christopher Frayling and Emily King, with Harriet Atkinson (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2009), 111.
[16] Ellis 90.

male star image made Britishness a virtue."[17] In *The Colditz Story*, John Mills portrays British P.O.W. officer Pat Reid, a resourceful man who is a child of empire (born in India, educated in Britain) and who helps other allied prisoner escape a heavily guarded camp housed inside a castle in Saxony. Mills was a major star through the 1940s, but by the 1950s, his star image and the roles he took suggest that he excelled at playing older, almost fatherly heroic types. Gill Plain has described this as "nostalgic virility," the retrospective look back at a previous historical moment in order to re-mythologize it.[18] Plain finds that films such as *The Colditz Story* and *The Dam Busters* "revisit the crises of wartime and rewrite them as adventure stories," in the process citing "the British soldier, seaman, or airman as supremely competent, tough, humorous, and resourceful," thereby repositioning the great man as the source of national triumph.[19] This is the strand of war adventure that most directly informs Ian Fleming's James Bond, and is a set of traits that can be traced through later British films (or, internationally sourced films that feature British male leads) like *The Guns of Navarone* (1961, J. Lee Thompson), *Raid on Rommel* (1971, Henry Hathaway), and *The Wild Geese* (1978, Andrew V. McLaglen). A celebration of traditional elements of masculinity like expertise and resolve is a central theme in the bulk of war films, which in this context ties directly to widespread national ideals and to the success of Hollywood genre films (especially Westerns and war films) that likewise celebrate the rugged individual.

Another connection between early 1950s British war films and the tradition of "quality" is a mutual emphasis on a specific conception of realism. If "quality" films are often praised as realistic for their ability to speak, in sentimental and humanist terms, to emotional states and supposed truths about life experience (recall John Ellis's evaluation, which essentially just

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[17] Geragthy 175.
[18] Gill Plain, *John Mills and British Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2006), 141.
[19] *Ibid*.

confirms that such truths are really just the tastes and preferences of the largely middle class reviewers, who project their values onto the films they see), then these war films are realistic for quite another reason.[20] What the war films of 1950-1955 may lack in emotional transparency is more than made up for in their representation of weapons, vehicles, and gear. Geragthy finds in the early 1950s war films a privileging of the technology of modern war as a path to verisimilitude. The fact that films are able to display authentic military memorabilia, decommissioned equipment, or expertly created props, and at the same time show that actors can wear, handle, or use these items in a correct manner, creates a material sense of the real, one that nonetheless can contrast with the historical validity of the narrative that is being told, the perceptual or emotional life of the characters being depicted, and the behavior of the men who brave life and death situations.[21] This obsession with technological authenticity (as much a concern in 21st century war films around the world as it was in Britain in the 1950s) has its roots in military propaganda from World War II. Martin van Creveld reminds that if World War I was the first technological war, then World War II was the first war rendered "esoteric" by the degree of specialization necessary to master the wide range of weapons, defense systems, intelligence codes, and strategic possibilities.[22] War films made in almost all the combatant nations (especially those made in Britain and the United States) were produced with the cooperation of military advisors, equipment, technological advisors, and even the support of active duty troops.

Post-1945 war films of the sort discussed above, whether tied to World War II or to historical moments in the history of the empire like *Northwest Frontier* (1959, J. Lee Thompson) or *Zulu* (1964, Cy Enfield), participate in a larger "pleasure culture of war," a phenomenon that Graham Dawson sees in a wider consumerist field of narratives about war and masculinity that

[20] Ellis 79.
[21] Geragthy 179.
[22] Van Creveld 71; 148-149.

work to reinforce older, explicitly paternalist ideas about the connection between national identity and heroic success.[23] Of course, pro-imperial adventure narratives predate the period after 1945: General Gordon's exploits in Khartoum, *Boy's Own* stories, military portraiture, and films like Korda's *The Four Feathers* (1939) come well before World War II, and the ideological positions they support are as important to a film like *Zulu* as more recent world-historical developments. What Dawson finds curious—and indeed, what my analysis of British discourses about war in visual culture explores in a variety of production cycles and smaller historical periods—is that the mobilization and spread of dominant ideological views about nation, war, masculinity, and empire comes precisely at a time of decline, when Britain finds itself at a low-ebb in world-historical influence.[24] Despite generational shifts, changes of political opinion, or any personal disagreements with the culture of the military, war stories of a sort more traditional than not thrive on a scale unseen in the modern world. Dawson partially attributes this culture of excitement for all things military on the part of men and boys to the wide expansion of consumer culture internationally, but in particular, with economic recovery of Britain in the 1950s and 1960s (in 1957, in the throes of full employment, and with a general election looming, Harold Macmillan told a crowd in Bedford that materially, "most of our people have never had it so good.")[25] The "pleasure culture of war" is fought on all fronts: "from the massive popularity of war adventure stories as bestselling fiction, comics, films and television series, to the use of war themes by the tourism and leisure industries, and by the military themselves, in museums, open days, historic sites and spectaculars such as the Royal Tournament; as well as war play and

[23] For an explanation of origins of this idea, see Dawson 1-5.
[24] *Ibid*. 2-3.
[25] *Ibid*. 3; H. C. G. Matthew, "Macmillan, (Maurice) Harold, first earl of Stockton (1894–1986)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2011, accessed 28 May 2014, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40185.

games, from toy soldiers and modeling to computer games."[26] Even though there were precious few wars still left to fight, the period between World War II and the Falklands War featured more narratives about war than ever before. The sustained buzz of a victorious "good war" in the 1940s and the reassurances that come with compensatory narratives sustained Britain's pride in its military.

Many of the best-known film and television explorations of war hew to the serious side of the "pleasure culture of war," and can be seen as in conversation with films like *The Dam Busters* or *They Who Dare* (1954, Lewis Milestone: a movie about a group of commandos who destroy German airfields in Greece). These are films of professional triumph, and of national affirmation by proxy: *Dunkirk* (1958, Leslie Norman), *The Battle of Britain*, and *The Sea Wolves* (1980, Andrew V. McLaglen) all showcase British triumph over adversity, using the familiar trope of the small group (the isolated island nation) against the big, sprawling enemy.

Such dominant narratives are not just limited to film and television. Take, as a representative example, the post-1945 development of war comic books. James Chapman identifies 1957-1958 (curiously, just after the "golden age" of British war films) as the period in which readers and the industry embrace war stories, with a true upsurge in titles during 1960-1963, the span of years where compulsory National Service was phased out.[27] Titles like *War Picture Library*, *Battle Picture Library* and *Commando* (which began in 1961 and is still active at over 4500 issues) constitute a major sector of comics industry in Britain. Chapman notes that these stories are comparable in function to films like *The Dam Busters* in that they unselfconsciously uphold the values of the "pleasure culture of war," and function specifically to allow "children to experience something of the thrill and excitement of war without being

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[26] Dawson 3-4.

[27] James Chapman, *British Comics: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), 95; 97-98.

exposed to its dangers."[28] Comics like *Commando* often resort to crude racial stereotypes and invariably offer narratives whose moral universe is as black and white as their colorless artwork (although former *Commando* editor George Low insists that their stable of writers would make some distinctions, such as the separation of ruthless Nazis and innocent, "good" Germans).[29] These comics represent the apex of infinitely reproducible genre content, which keep a certain dream of British military glory alive across historical periods. For instance, *Fleetway Battle Picture Library* #1331 (1979) features the story "Phantom Force Five," a typical tale in which a strong leader is able to shape a ragtag group of soldiers into a formidable fighting force. Clive Carter is put in charge of men who must protect Greece. Carter's soldiers are nearly decimated but (in order to help their flagging morale) he trains them into a fit unit who helps protect Crete from Nazi invasion, thus saving the Suez Canal.[30] That the British soldiers are able to "save" the canal in the historical past postulates a triumphalist kind of wish fulfillment, one in which the Empire still controls this key shipping route, and in which the cultural revolutions of the Suez moment never happened. The story moves between squad combat and "men-on-a-mission" set pieces, thereby wrapping the dictates of the battlefield action movie and the adventure thriller into one. Carter is an exceptional warrior-hero who fulfills the traits that Chapman outlines as central to the fantasy presented by these stories: he exudes an "ethos of courage, patriotism and duty," and tacitly reinforces ideas about Anglo racial superiority, expressed here in moral as well as physical terms.[31]

British war comics have the same "authenticity" discourse of the war films of the early 1950s. Chapman stresses the "psychological realism" that shines through the clichéd narratives, a

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[28] *Ibid.* 97.
[29] Sean Blair, "Gott in Himmel!," *BBC News Magazine*, 27 Apr 2007, accessed 29 May 2014, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/6599139.stm.
[30] *Fleetway Battle Picture Library* no. 1331 (London 1979), 31-35.
[31] Chapman *British Comics* 100-101.

kind of no-nonsense grit that comes from the fact that many of the writers of *War Picture Library*, *Battle Picture Library*, and *Commando* had served in combat during the war.[32] To call the unadorned tone of these comics "realism" is misleading, since these stories strenuously avoid many of the unfortunate mental states that come with combat, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or more physical forms of shell shock. As with their movie counterparts, these comics share an obsession with illustrating the correct appearance and use of weaponry of all sorts. The world offered by British war comics and war films of the early 1950s is almost entirely driven by male resolve, homosocial bonding, and a kind of camaraderie based on the absolute correctness of a consensus version of British national aims. War is just and the military-industrial complex works in the best interest of all citizens. Dissent is downplayed (or absent altogether), and an Anglocentric worldview is the only option. These traits are shared with the wider "pleasure culture of war," creating a dominant tradition of British war representation across media.

2. War Comedy Through the 1940s

In the abstract, most of the taken-for-granted ideological commitments of the "pleasure culture of war" are questioned, prodded, or sidestepped by traditions of war comedy, particularly as it emerged as an alternative strand of cultural production about war in the 1960s. This is not to claim that comedy films and television programs about war and wartime are always-already outside of the commercial sphere of the "pleasure culture of war," but rather to offer that they question its central propositions even as they function within the basic parameters of its discourse. Select few films about war, of whatever subgenre, strive to avoid the ideological consensus of the "pleasure culture," including critically strident movies like *Dr. Strangelove*,

[32] *Ibid*. 98.

How I Won the War, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, or perhaps introspective films made outside of the financial dictates of the mainstream film and television industries (*Captured* [1959, John Krish] or *Overlord* [1975, Stuart Cooper]). That said, the longevity and variety of the tradition of war comedy in Britain challenges the central, nostalgic war discourse on many fronts. War comedies test the flexibility of war discourse without scrapping it wholesale.

War and military comedies are primarily defined by their "institutional" settings as well as by their iconographic appurtenances and narrative trajectories. Hal Erickson has defined one tradition of "military" comedies (also called "service comedies") as "any film in which the main purpose is to arouse laughter with leading characters who are members of one or another branch of the armed services, and/or any film which is dominated by a humorous slant on military life."[33] Erickson focuses on the foregrounding of the armed services, in war and in peace, as the definitional pivot in his conception of the subgenre. I have modified this general set of possible films from the armed services as an institution (and Hollywood as a main production base) to include the culture of war as an institution (the services, plus war and wartime understood as a temporary cultural phenomenon, an industry, and, after Giorgio Agamben, a state of exception in which the law dictates a theoretically temporary reconfiguration of the productive forces and daily lives of the citizenry).[34] In Erickson's case and my case, the film and television genre cycle in question is defined not just by the milieu of the narrative events (people as they deal with military life, or soldiers and citizens as they deal with war or life during wartime), but also by a coherent iconography (what Barry Keith Grant describes as a set of "second order symbols" that come laden with associative and psychic meanings produced through previous usage in similar

[33] Hal Erickson, *Military Comedy Films: A Critical Filmography and Survey of Hollywood Releases Since 1918* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Pub, 2012), 4.
[34] Giorgio Agamben, "The State of Exception." Lecture at European Graduate School, August 2003, transcription by Anton Pulvirenti, accessed 30 May 2014, http://www.egs.edu/faculty/giorgio-agamben/articles/the-state-of-exception/.

films).[35] Thus, war comedies are identified as much by their aspirations toward making an audience laugh as with their use of recurrent images. For example, World War I comedies of all sorts and periods, from *Shoulder Arms* (1917, Charlie Chaplin) to *Oh! What a Lovely War*, are legible to audiences because they prominently feature differentiated uniforms (enlisted men in dirty Doughboy outfits, with officers in cleaner, smarter duds), sandbags, muddy trenches crowded by ladders, bolt-action rifles, and grim barbed wire.

At this stage, I am deploying comedy in a relatively open sense. Not all films labeled as such use the same techniques, and many mix multiple strategies in knockabout fashion. Something like *The Great Dictator* (1940, Charlie Chaplin) relies on mistaken identity (the confusion between Hynkel and the barber), slapstick forms perfected in a previous era (the various chase scenes), and behavioral inconsistency (the totalitarian Hynkel's balletic dance with the globe, his physical expression of conquest). In a completely different idiom (a different war, different performers, over forty years on), the World War I sketch from the "Fighting Each Other" section of *Monty Python's Meaning of Life* (1983, Terry Jones) uses sentimental wordplay and exaggerated generosity to show the enlisted men's appreciation for their superior officer in the moments before they go "over the top" (these extremely giving working class men laud their boss with cake, a grandfather clock, and a rousing rendition of "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" right before being mowed down by bullets).

Andrew S. Horton and Joanna E. Rapf remind us that film comedies almost always feature overlapping or mixed senses of humor, meaning that genre criticism is as much about

[35] Barry Keith Grant, "Genre," *Schirmer Encyclopedia of Film*, Vol. 2, ed. Barry Keith Grant (New York: Schirmer Reference, 2007), 300.

mapping common tools as it is about offering carefully observed categorical differences.[36] The films of this cinematic subgenre often rely on many of the structural tropes shared by comedies in general, including the use of inversion (the upending of hierarchies), exaggeration (the enlargement of things for comic effect), communicative misunderstandings, and the deflating of pomposity. British war comedies of all periods share a few recurrent strategies, including the frequent comparison of class differences or the ways in which men of regional backgrounds interact with southerners, forms of British national identification as compared to those offered by other countries, and a focus on the ways in which accidents, failures, or malfunctions inadvertently provide positive benefits to the tide of war.

War and comedy have some relationship in most periods of British cinema. The interwar years boasted a few war comedies, including *East Lynne on the Western Front* (1931), a "let's put on a play" narrative in which soldiers stage a revue for deployed troops.[37] Even the period from 1950-1956 occasionally features moments of comedy. Geragthy writes about the controlled rebelliousness of the heroes of these war films, where the protagonist's dislike of paper-pushing bureaucracy and incompetence (their self-reflexive sense of their own superiority) allows occasional comic bits.[38] Some of these moments are used to bring a humanizing degree of faux incompetence and humility to otherwise vaunted characters. In *The Colditz Story*, this explains the physical humor that John Mills uses in order to distract German guards during an escape attempt where men load a soldier onto the back a truck. Reid (Mills) and some drilling British prisoners draw away the attention of German guards while other prisoners facilitate the escape.

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[36] Andrew S. Horton and Joanna E. Rapf, "Comic Introduction: 'Make 'Em Laugh, Make 'Em Laugh," *A Companion to Film Comedy*, eds. Andrew S. Horton and Joanna E. Rapf (Somerset, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 5.
[37] "East Lynne on the Western Front," *BFI Film and TV Database*, accessed 1 Jun 2014, http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/32059.
[38] Geragthy 193.

Reid ends the drill by knocking his own hat off his head and scampering to pick it up. He momentarily makes himself the butt of a joke in order to achieve other ends.

The first articulate production cycle of British war comedies comes with the start of the Second World War. These war comedies roughly the follow the chronology of the war proper: films that make light of the organizational nightmare of ramping up defense and declaring war; "phony war" films that imagine the enemy before the major European campaigns; and films that insert comic characters into war situations, taking them from training to battle across the world. Robert Murphy describes a series of "joining up" comedies that feature citizens—however inane and incompetent—who commit to the war effort: *All at Sea* (1940, Herbert Smith) features radio comedian Sandy Powell playing a character called Sandy who enters the navy; *Old Mother Riley Joins Up* (1940, Maclean Rogers) concerns the cross-dressed Old Mother Riley (Arthur Lucan) entering the Auxiliary Territorial Service and fighting spies; and the various *Somewhere* movies feature Frank Randle, the Lancashire-based comedian who Jeffrey Richards discusses as exemplifying the tradition of "rough" (as opposed to "respectable") working class behavior.[39] All of these movies use the popularity of their comedians—known from other films, radio, and the stage—to poke fun at vogues in patriotism, as well as enduring class tensions. These comedies are seldom directed at the institutional legitimacy of any branch of the military or of any government ministries (as explained in the previous chapter, censorship guidelines would have prevented any of these ideas from reaching the screen), but instead show how the military and wartime institutions become temporary institutional homes for a kind of comedy that previously existed elsewhere in the culture. Murphy describes how this works in the Frank Randle films: "In

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[39] Murphy *British Cinema and the Second World War* 35-36; For more on Randle's regional comedy, see Jeffrey Richards, "Randle, Frank (1901–1957)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2011, accessed 2 Jun 2014, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/64583.

the *Somewhere* films, an upper-middle-class young man often finds himself serving as a private alongside Frank Randle and his cohorts, but like the principal boy in a pantomime, his story seems to exist alongside rather than form a part of the chaotic goings-on of the comic characters."[40] These movies showcase a resilient armed forces: neither the loucheness of Randle or the shrill pragmatism of his consort can derail what is represented as a supremely functioning organism.

In fact, the subtext of most war and military comedies of the wartime years (1939-1945) has to do with the tacit indestructibility of the British armed services. For, despite the feigned incompetence of their star comedians, the craftiness of the urchins and "wide boys" that pepper these films with minor crimes, or the near-total lack of skill or professionalism of the paradigmatic fish-out-of-water recruits, the films almost invariably end in some unexpected success that strengthens Britain's position in the war. This can be traced through the various tendencies in war comedies of these years: the armed services thriller with comic touches, comedy films that directly pit emasculated men against the demands of war, and the madcap military romp. *Cottage to Let* (1941, Anthony Asquith) has the narrative structure of a comedy-thriller hybrid. Its plot, which involves the attempt to steal military secrets from absent-minded scientist John Barrington (Leslie Banks), maintains a mysterious "who's to blame" opacity that is kept in tension with comic characters that counterbalance a set of more outwardly sinister presences. Robert Shail sees *Cottage to Let* as a strong directorial personalization of a genre necessitated by war, one that "combines propaganda with the expressive visual style" of Asquith's earlier films (like *Underground* and *Escape from Dartmoor*, both from 1929).[41] The story is a familiar one to the era—Nazi spies have designs on British secrets and recruit fifth

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[40] Murphy *British Cinema and the Second World War* 37.
[41] Robert Shail, *British Film Directors: A Critical Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007), 19.

columnists to extract them—but the narrative reads very strongly for the war effort because it features all the trappings of "phony war" life. The eponymous cottage is a spare building on the estate of the Barrington's land, where scientist John carries out his experiments at a distance from his bosses in London, and his wife (Jeanne de Casasllis) looks over the household, absentmindedly renting out a room to the creepy, though ultimately heroic Charles Dimble (Alastair Sim), even though she has to lodge Ronald (George Cole), an East-End London boy evacuated in anticipation of bombings. The comic tensions of all these incompatible characters—distracted inventor/boffin, fastidious homemaker, nosy and vaguely sinister old man, and mischievous kid—are exacerbated by the sudden appearance of downed pilot Perry (John Mills), a seemingly heroic RAF chap who ends up being the spy. He is cared for by the Barrington daughter Helen (Carla Lehmann), and while convalescing, attempts to steal Barrington's designs and engineering plans. The expressionistic elements (like the shadowy meeting between the Nazi agents, or the Frankensteinian lab where Barrington works), alternate with the noble, airy outdoor sequences (still studio-bound) where much of the comic misunderstandings take place. As a work of propaganda, *Cottage to Let* has a rather ingenious, if oft-repeated, message: the ramshackle household that is beset by war (the nation itself) can ensure its survival through attempts at interpersonal understanding that are part genuine and part motivated by paranoid suspicion.

King Arthur Was a Gentleman teases this "war as improvement" theme even further. The movie combines the narrative trajectory of a "joining up" film with musical numbers and mild supernatural elements. Meek civil servant Arthur (Arthur Askey) has a casual girlfriend named Susan (Evelyn Dall), but spends most of his days fantasizing about the exploits of King Arthur. Susan is a member of the Women's Auxiliary Force and is played by Dall with no-nonsense

practicality. In order to prove his worthiness to her and the war effort proper, Arthur forsakes his clerical job and enlists in the army, hoping that a life of adventure will help him win her hand. Once in the army, Arthur bumbles his way through training and is deployed into active duty. The film mainly plays on his absentmindedness (he endangers his fellow troops), his weakness, and his earnestness. His compatriots decide to mess with him by giving him a sword and telling him that it is Excalibur, a fact that he believes, and which causes him to have extraordinary bravery. Having proven himself, he eventually reunites with Susan.

King Arthur Was a Gentleman offers a "magical" world both in the sense typical to musicals (as described by Richard Dyer, as a place where people spontaneously burst into song, or, as per Jane Feuer, can engage in choreographed routines without practice) and in a sense typical to Arthurian myth (after Arthur and Susan reunite, Arthur throws his sword into a pond, and the Lady of the Lake's hand improbably surfaces and catches it).[42] *King Arthur Was a Gentleman* is an exceedingly obvious piece of propaganda, whose main subtextual statement is as transparent as its protagonist's motivations. Arthur has to prove his masculinity: the narrative essentially normalizes him to military and wartime standards of manliness and heroism, giving him strength and skills, an ability to work in a unit—contrast this with his solitary basement office at the beginning of the film—and a way to connect his passion for proto-British history and myth to the contemporary concerns of the homeland. This opens out to a wider field, in which alternative masculinities are encouraged to normalize and join the war effort, where all men can become warrior-heroes. Moreover, by showing the degree to which the army can tolerate a soldier even as apparently bad as Arthur, the film tacitly showcases the resilience of the military, its ability to mold unseemly material into fighting shape.

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[42] Richard Dyer, *Only Entertainment* (London: Verso, 2002), 30; Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, Second Edition (London: BFI/Macmillan, 1993), 9-13.

Gasbags, a Gainsborough Pictures feature from frequent comedy director Marcel Varnel, is the most daring of this cycle of war films. Channeling *Duck Soup* (1933, Leo McCarey) in both its showcasing of comedians previously known from the stage and its generally anarchic sensibilities, it nonetheless supports British war aims while offering minor institutional critiques. *Gasbags* stars the Crazy Gang—a rather ad hoc group of comedy double acts consisting of Bud Flanagan and Chesney Allen, Charles Naughton and Jimmy Gold, and Jimmy Nervo and Teddy Knox—a band of pranksters previously known for their comic revues and for films like *The Frozen Limits* (1939, also directed by Marcel Varnel). *Gasbags* shares a common core with other movies made early in the war years like *Let George Do It*! (see Introduction) in its belief that hopelessly outgunned and outclassed British representatives stand a fighting chance against Hitler's modern war machine. Part of the uproarious humor of *Gasbags* depends upon the degree to which the film sells this line of reasoning: six terrible soldiers, who accidentally end up in enemy territory, manage to foil several plots and abscond with a vaunted secret weapon, achieving all this while disrupting one another and ignoring all military protocols. The film opens with the six men opportunistically operating an ersatz fish and chips restaurant (the Union Jack Fish & Chips Saloon) out of a small shack attached to a grounded barrage balloon. Their enterprise is an emblem for making do in wartime, as their business is built from requisitioned or found parts (crates are clearly marked R.A.F.) and their stock consists of fish killed as a result of submarine warfare ("torpedoed daily!"). The generally impression the Crazy Gang gives during this sequence is of beloved lawlessness: crowds flock their shop and get angry at the commanding officer who stops by to force the business to close. They must take their balloon down, but in so-doing a large gust of wind causes them to lift off, making them fly over the channel and land somewhere on the border between France and Germany, on the Siegfried Line.

The gang are captured and sent to a concentration camp that has recently imprisoned Germany's entire population of Hitler body doubles. One of the camp inmates tells the Gang of a secret weapon, an underground drill that allows soldiers to borrow under enemy fortifications. They decide that this is their ticket home. Thinking that it can help his status, Teddy (Teddy Knox) does a Hitler impersonation of his own, which gets him and the gang recruited by their Nazi overseers to appear in public as a fake Hitler entourage. What the Gang does not know is that they are to be the target of an assassination attempt (designed to help some other Nazi higher-ups consolidate power). But, their sense of comic invention allows them to inadvertently avoid death. They escape and eventually find the weapon. Upon their return home, they are rewarded for their war work—intelligence gathering, and the disruption of the protective capacity of the Siegfried line—with 100 days detention.

Even though the aims of *Gasbags* is typical in that it demonstrates how the British military can benefit from even the most unruly sort of assistance, the film is by far the strangest of war comedies produced during the conflict. According to Murphy, its genius lies in its ability to cut dangers of momentous significance down to a recognizable, human scale: "*Gasbags* is a ramshackle affair, but the way in which it casually incorporates barrage balloons, concentration camps, secret weapons, the SS and Hitler into its zany, irreverent, knockabout comic world robs them of terror."[43] *Gasbags* has a flimsy narrative that barely stands up to logic, but it offers plenty of slapstick (innumerable pratfalls, well-timed ducks under miniature cannons), surreal bits of physical comedy (one of the Gang ingests gas from the balloon, swells up to a massive size, and is the pumped by his compatriots so that they have cooking fuel), and extensive sequences predicated on cultural misunderstanding. In addition to the odd sight of hundreds of supposedly German Hitler impersonators in a concentration camp that also houses prisoners of

[43] Murphy *British Cinema and the Second World War* 41.

war, the film plays to the knee-jerk Britishness of its central characters. Perhaps the funniest sequence features the largely indecipherable and unexportable East End cockney accidents of a few of the performers. At one point, the gang addresses the Nazi officers in the camp through their uncompromised working class dialects, and are met with looks of non-comprehension. This "insider" knowledge plays to the movie's presumed British audience, and is complemented by a sequence where one of the Gang breaks the film's already tenuous diegetic integrity by telling the Nazi soldiers to stop speaking German because the audience does not understand them.

The vogue for war comedies during the early years of the conflict was short lived. The fact that they often contained fantastic elements—physical impossibilities, magic, acts of implausible coincidence—removed them from burgeoning discourses of realism, as defined both by the commercial film industry in fictional features and by the state-sponsored documentary movement (see Chapter 1). The war comedies of the early WWII era set an important precedent for future developments in this subgenre: taken together, they appear, retrospectively, as a coherent "production cycle" with a distinctive vocabulary, set of social and cultural concerns, and function in the commercial film marketplace. Amanda Ann Klein has described such genre situations as "a series of cycles, that is, as smaller groupings of films that appear at particular historical moments, thrive for a period of time, and then cease to be produced when interest in the subject wanes."[44] This is as true of war comedies in the 1940s as it is of their resurgent moment in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Murphy notes the relatively sudden disappearance of the genre by the middle of the war:

> Films taught that the war did not have to be taken seriously all the time, that the deadly threat facing Britain could be laughed at. In response to the danger within, they show that appearances can be deceptive and that spies and fifth columnists are everywhere but it is

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[44] Amanda Ann Klein, *American Film Cycles: Reframing Genres, Screening Social Problems, and Defining Subcultures* (Austin, TX: U of TX Press, 2011), 35. The quotation is drawn from a discussion of classical gangster films.

> not something to worry about. On the contrary, rooting them out is great fun and dangers are more than compensated for by the prospect of romantic success. British comedies of the early war years were popular because they wear their propaganda burden so lightly. Later in the war, influences by the Ministry of Information on the industry shifted production in favor of realism and social responsibility, and films displayed that enlightened paternalism which was to give birth to the Welfare State. But in the early years these comedies present a less mediated response to the war.[45]

These early war comedies make war bearable, endurable. They critique some aspects of jingoistic military attitudes—after all, the protagonists are usually incompetent soldiers who expose problems with the chain of command—while redeeming others. That the military can benefit from the anarchic powers of the Crazy Gang with as much certainty as a well-trained commando unit shows that this early production cycle of war comedies could only be critical up to a point.

3. War Comedy Since the War: Continuity and Change

War comedies all but disappear from British screens for over a decade. With the exception of one-offs like *Private Angelo* (1949, Michael Anderson), a film made almost entirely in Italy yet counting as a British quota picture because of its funding, war comedies do not resurface in great numbers until 1956, the symbolically significant year of Suez.[46] The first major war comedies of the time are *Private's Progress* (1956, John Boulting) and *Carry On Sergeant* (1958, Gerald Thomas), two films that are as much residual expressions of genre traits established in the previous cycle of war films as they are markers of innovative social attitudes befitting a period of rapid change. Raymond Williams takes care to differentiate "residual"

[45] Murphy *British Cinema and the Second World War* 44.
[46] Myro, "Film Review: Private Angelo," *Variety* 175.5 (Jul 13, 1949): 16.

forms, which are alive to their current cultural moments, from "archaic" forms, which have ceased to bear any transformative usefulness:

> The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social and cultural institution or formation. It is crucial to distinguish this aspect of the residual, which many have an alternative or even oppositional relation to the dominant culture, from that active manifestation in the residual (this being its distinction from the archaic), which has been wholly or largely incorporated into the dominant culture.[47]

A number of war comedies made between the late 1950s and 1970s are "residual" in their relationship to the war comedies of the World War II period. The sets of narratives they feature and the attitudes of their central characters may correspond to aspects of wartime military experience, but their social resonances invariably speak to new and different cultural experiences. In broad terms, the reflowering of war comedies in the late 1950s maps onto Dominic Sandbrook's larger thesis about British culture in the post-Suez moment: that there are signs everywhere of new cultural formations, scattered criticism of old attitudes, and dispersed hints of social progress, all of which gets bound up in a larger cultural discourse that remains stubbornly conservative.[48]

The first production cycles of war comedies to surface in the late 1950s ably illustrates this paradox. One strand of war comedy is set in the contemporary military, while the other is set (sometimes nostalgically, sometimes not) during World War II. These both begin, in some ways, with the same influential film. *Private's Progress*, about a soldier unwillingly forced into war. As a movie about a young conscript, it resonates with audiences who had been required to do

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[47] Williams *Marxism and Literature* 122.
[48] Sandbrook *Never Had It So Good* xx-xxiv.

National Service. But, as a film set during World War II, it looks to a military situation of considerable urgency. One of the most influential aspects of the film is its reversal of a main tenet of most war films made during the 1940s. According to Marcia Landy, *Private's Progress* upends the earnestness with which characters act in those films, instead settling on a portrayal of the military in which most who server are either out for their own personal gain, or do not want to be there at all.[49]

One of the most widely seen military comedies of the time is *Carry On Sergeant*, a film whose relative lack of originality (it borrows its broad sense of humor and title from *Carry on Admiral* [1957, Val Guest], and many elements of its story from *Private's Progress*) became a hallmark of the long-running series of which it forms the first entry. The *Carry On* films eventually transcended the initial military setting and became *the* British comedic institution, itself an excuse to examine and poke fun at other institutions and historical periods, that flourished during the 1960s and declined with the rise of Margaret Thatcher.[50] These films prominently feature stock character types, actors reprising similar roles across different films, and a normalization of White, working and lower middle class British taste set against all others (foreigners, the posh, the intellectual, or the overly serious). *Carry On Sergeant* contains many elements found in later films, but its narrative is just as significant for its modification of the "joining up" narrative of World War II in the face of the now-mandatory experience of National Service. Like future *Carry On* films, *Carry On Sergeant* features a few central narratives—in this case, one of newlyweds Charlie (Bob Monkhouse) and Mary (Shirley Eaton) attempting to be with one another despite Charlie's required time in training, and one of Sergeant Grimshawe

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[49] Marcia Landy, "Nation and imagi-nation in *Private's Progress*," *The Family Way: The Boulting Brothers and British Film Culture*, eds. Alan Burton, Tim O'Sullivan and Paul Wells (Trowbridge, Wells: Flicks Books 2000), 175-178.
[50] See Steve Gerrard, "What a Carry On! The Decline and Fall of a Great British Institution," *Seventies British Cinema*, ed. Robert Shail (London: BFI/Palgrave, 2008), 36-45.

(William Hartnell) hoping to turn out a prize-winning platoon—that provide general justification for comic set pieces. Most of the bits come from the stereotypical positions ascribed to the members of the platoon, a social kaleidoscope painted in broad strokes that is at once heightened and at the same time based in some facet of lived experience (David Kynaston reminds us that National Service, especially in its phase of basic training, was a destabilizing "melting-pot" that mixed British men of all classes, regions, and levels of education).[51] In this group, Charlie is the unassuming everyman, Horace (Kenneth Connor) the hypochondriac, Golightly (Charles Hawtrey) the effete weakling, and James Bailey (Kenneth Williams) the witty, Wildesque intellectual, and Herbert (Norman Rossington) the slow-on-the-uptake failure. Like upcoming *Carry On* outings, this film uses double entendres (after being asked to spill the beans on his sexual exploits, Charlie asks "anyone for bayonet practice"), slapstick (Golightly is especially skilled at moving incorrectly), and the exploration of class differences (the recruits excel at temporarily undermining their hierarchical superiors). After causing all sorts of problems for Grimshawe, the men make good on their unruly training, overcome their shortcomings, and even tone down their personalities, in order to provide the Sergeant with his prize. The most socially transgressive element of the film—the sincere sense that the men did not want to be in training, in part because it does not initially suit their lives, and in part because of the lack of a war to rally around—is undone by the end, as the unit learns the values of National Service. As with earlier war comedies, the ultimate takeaway is of an army that can bring its hopeless recruits into line, in the process showing them (and the viewer) the value of normalization and teamwork.

Yet, *Carry On Sergeant* does contain isolated moments that hint at the changing possibilities for war comedy in the decade to come. The most significant plotline in this regard deals with Heywood (Terence Longdon), a handsome, well-spoken recruit who humorously

[51] Kynaston *Austerity Britain* 370-371.

sheds light on how the army populates its officer class. Initially, Heywood's narrative arc is played out through mistaken identity: he arrives at Camp Heathercrest in a sports car and kisses a beautiful woman goodbye. The camera regards him as a leading man, and reveals the instantly respectful, borderline envious gaze of other soldiers. His bearing means that he is greeted as a General and is treated nicely until he reveals that he was called up, like everybody else. Later, during drills, Captain Potts (Eric Barker) quizzes Heywood on his background, whereupon he reveals that all men in his family from the previous four generations were officers in the army. At hearing this, Potts makes up his mind about offering Heywood a commission. This resolves later in the film, during its most uncharacteristic act of social refusal. Longdon is brought before Potts and is wooed, but Heywood declines, stating that he has no interest in being an officer. This is among the first instances of genuine class transgression in a British war film. Heywood wants none of the instant privilege or financial stability afforded by the proposal: instead, he is content to live and work as others, presumably opting for the kind of meritocracy that was internationally recognized by the mid-1960s as signaling Britain's success as an egalitarian society lead by upwardly mobile youth from a variety of non-traditional backgrounds.[52]

Honorary *Carry On* film *Watch Your Stern* (1961, Gerald Thomas) shares cast members with the *Carry On* series proper, and combines the maritime setting of *Carry On Admiral* with the blunders at the expense National Service soldiers found in *Carry On Sergeant*. The contemporary military comedy of errors reaches its apex in *You Must Be Joking*! (1965, Michael Winner), a film that mixes the armed services ennui of earlier films of the cycle with the proto-typical narrative and stylistic elements of the "Swinging London" narrative films made in

[52] This phenomenon is discussed in Jonathan Aitken, *The Young Meteors* (New York: Atheneum, 1967); an interview-essay on the impact of the book is in Craig Taylor, "Promises, Promises," *The Guardian*, 5 Sept 2003, accessed 4 Jun 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2003/sep/06/weekend.craigtaylor.

quantity around the same time. Using crisp black and white cinematography (by Geoffrey Unsworth, soon to be director of photography on *2001: A Space Odyssey* [1968, Stanley Kubrick]), short duration shots, varied in-camera effects like zooms, and transitions based around still photography, *You Must be Joking*! weaves together a loose narrative that provides the flimsiest pretext for a string of comic vignettes.[53] In its opening titles, the *You Must Be Joking* uses sequential still images changed more slowly than typical film projection speed to produce an "animated" effect, and contains an opening sequence that boasts cut-out photographs that interact in the comically crude manner soon made famous by *Monty Python's Flying Circus's* "Gilliamations." The manic narrative pace approaches *A Hard Day's Night* (1964, Richard Lester) in its unsettled movement from one location to the next. Thematically, *You Must Be Joking*! makes explicit the generally worn-out, ineffective place of the British military in modern life. The plot concerns a group of hand-picked soldiers of different classes, regional backgrounds, and military rank (plus one American, the effortlessly cool Lt. Morton [Michael Callan]) who are recruited by Army psychologist Major Foskett (Terry-Thomas) to prove themselves as the ideal soldier of the future. Their task: in a hypothetical scenario in which Britain has been destroyed or conquered, and they must show the initiative to go on a scavenger hunt for objects that symbolize the British way of life. This plot is framed as having actual military value—soldiers might be responsible for the cultural heritage in a time of crisis—but the objects required, and the distance between this task and any actual military or war training, exposes the contest as a bizarre sham.[54] The men compete to find the silver lady figure from a Rolls Royce, a rare rose called a Lady Francis McDonald, a flight of porcelain ducks (a common

[53] For more on the connection between rapidity and swinging London films, see Peter Lev, "*Blow-Up*, Swinging London, and the Film Generation," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 17.2 (1989): 135; Kevin M. Flanagan, "Whitehead's London: Pop and the Ascendant Celebrity," *Framework* 52.1 Spring (2011): 282.
[54] This conceit is also found in the film *Monuments Men* (2014, George Clooney), based around the exploits of a unit of soldiers charged with recovering pilfered artworks.

kitsch decoration), the electric hare from a Greyhound racetrack, a lock of hair from a beloved French pop star (note the tenuous connection to a British way of life), and, eventually, the Lutine Bell, the heavily guarded treasure of Lloyds of London. According to Charlotte Brunsdon, the focus is typical of other swinging London films in that London becomes a space of acquisition and consumption.[55] These soldiers do not identify with their careers so much as with the mania for collecting, conning, or buying odd bits of cultural paraphernalia. The film perfectly aligns the attitudes of a culture that could re-purpose Edwardian bric-a-brac and old military uniforms for youthful fashion. *You Must Be Joking!* is a relic of mid-1960s pop-frenetic filmmaking, here best illustrated through Winner's editing, which Bill Harding describes as "the way the cutting is pepped up by a string of gimmicks—bells, keyholes and snipping effects—which complement the frenzied goings-on and make the scenes in which they appear seem even more crazy."[56]

Another residual cycle of war films, comedies with World War II settings, first appears over a decade after the war, gaining steam by the early 1960s and remaining alive (if not always popular) throughout the 1970s. As a general rule, these films combine situations that are avowedly nostalgic with aspects of more recent cultural experience. Again, *Private's Progress* is the prototype: a picaresque World War II tale that explicitly appeals to audiences with experience of mandatory National Service. *Invasion Quartet* (1961, Jay Lewis), a film about four injured and sidelined soldiers who sneak into France and destroy a massive Nazi cannon, encapsulates this transitional form of comedy in that its premise is at once a riff on a contemporary blockbuster (the film resembles *The Guns of Navarone*, a popular film from earlier in 1961) and a remake of an older movie (the narrative is basically the same as *Gasbags* in that a group of comedians crosses enemy lines in Continental Europe and stops a secret weapon from

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[55] Charlotte Brunsdon, *London in Cinema: The Cinematic City since 1945* (London: BFI, 2007), 34-36.
[56] Bill Harding, *The Films of Michael Winner* (London: Muller, 1976), 35.

harming Britain). *Goon Show* star Spike Milligan appears against type as Godfrey Pringle, a kind of straight man who reluctantly goes along with the bolder ideas of his compatriots. Like *Gasbags* (and *King Arthur Was a Gentleman*), *Invasion Quartet* showcases the general strength of the British military by showing the degree to which its least disciplined and most anarchic soldiers can serve the war effort. The film's given message is that even the Allies' most lazy and outwardly incompetent soldiers can defeat pompous Nazi Germany, whose dour seriousness becomes a weakness. This is illustrated by the almost religious ritualistic staging that accompanies the loading of the gun, a ceremonious sequence shot with strict compositional unity, ominous lighting and an eerie calm missing from the rest of the movie, a seemingly out-of-place sequence that reads as an attempt to emulate the style Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1934).[57] That the supposed sanctity of this gun can be so easily disrupted by a few bumbling British soldiers says a lot about continued national pride in the enduring myths of the war. In practical marketing and promotional terms, *Invasion Quartet* was handled much like other war pictures. The MGM press kit suggests promotions that exploit the local enthusiasms of veterans, such as Q&A sessions with soldiers, musical announcements from a military bugler, and slightly odder ideas such as a shoe-shining contest (a kind of pride-in-appearance totally missing from the film!)[58]

The 1960s and 1970s saw a general vogue for affectionately recasting the Second World War as farce. As with *Private's Progress* and the *Carry Ons* before them, many of these films are premised on the conflict between the rigidity of the military versus the initial laziness and petty-criminal behavior of the protagonists. Both *On the Fiddle* (a.k.a. *Operation Snafu*, directed

[57] More specifically, this seems to mimic (and later deflate) Leni Riefenstahl's use of myth-making tableaux vivants. See Brigitte Peucker, "The Fascist Choreography: Riefenstahl's Tableaux," *Modernism/Modernity* 11.2 (2004): 281-285.
[58] *Invasion Quartet* Press Book Kit, 1961.

by Cyril Frankel in 1961 although not released in the United States until 1965) and *Joey Boy* (1965, Frank Launder) concern the recuperation of spivs and delinquent youth as a result of war experience.[59] The spiv, an urban grifter associated with war profiteering and the black market, remained one of the most contentious figures in the social imaginary during the war years (their shirking of central participation in the war economy removed them from the British masculine ideal of the soldier hero, and their criminality created associations with homosexuality).[60] While some films about spivery maintain a queer subtext—Roger Hornsey cites *The Lavender Hill Mob* (1951, Charles Crichton) as a prime example—these war films downplay that element in favor of other kinds of petty crime and the unruliness of these men's disreputable, rough working class and *lumpenproletarian* backgrounds.[61] In *On the Fiddle*, Horace Pope (Alfred Lynch) is forced into joining the R.A.F. after he is caught selling black market goods to recruits. Pope teams up with slow-witted-but-good-natured Pedlar Pascoe (Sean Connery) for a string of cons that include systematized bribes that influence airmen postings, increased dealings in rationed goods, rigged drinking contests, and the abuse of delivery trucks. Like most war comedies, *On the Fiddle* pits the values held by its protagonists against those of the military. Horace games the system, pushing the boundaries of what is tolerable for an active duty soldier, yet never doing anything so inexcusable that he is kicked out. His dalliances are seldom taken seriously, and key scenes (like the mess hall food fight that breaks out over a wife's discovery of a cheating husband) mine a traditional sort of slapstick that uses composer Malcolm Arnold's whimsical music to moody effect. The institutional tensions come to a head during the film's final set piece,

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[59] A US review of *On the Fiddle* by Howard Thompson discusses the film's use of Sean Connery, who made this movie just before shooting *Dr. No* (1962, Terence Young). Howard Thompson, "Movie Review: *On the Fiddle*," *New York Times* 22 May 1965, accessed 22 Jun 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9A07E0D8123CE733A25751C2A9639C946491D6CF.

[60] The best discussion of spivs in wartime culture and the postwar imaginary is in Richard Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London* (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota Press, 2010), 20-21; 25-28.

[61] Hornsey 84-89.

wherein Horace and Pedlar are selling black market goods in the Ardennes. Their business escapades are interrupted when they take a wrong turn and end up on the front lines of a German push westward. Horace and Pedlar (lead by Pedlar's heroism and genuine desire to serve, as compared to Horace's reluctance) kill several undercover Nazis, and hold down a strategic position for 18 hours before being reunited with American troops. The film ends with the military acknowledging their heroism (underscored by their adaptive initiative and talent for improvisation), after which time they finish the war with a shot at running an above-the-board, respectable pub, a dream that represents the legal, mainstream utilization of their entrepreneurial skills.

Joey Boy traces a similar line, but avoids the total reformation of the titular character's criminal impulses. A Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat production, *Joey Boy* makes visual reference to the pair's earlier *Millions Like Us*, using faked newsreel footage of the British people working happily in tandem to set the wartime context for the petty criminality of Joey Boy Thompson (Harry Corbett). Joey Boy and his associates run a general den of vice (gambling, black market goods, booze) out of the basement of a flower shop, but are raided by the authorities and are forced into the army in order to avoid sentencing. Like *On the Fiddle*, the comedy comes from the feckless behavior of the spivs when faced with the drudgery of military life. The film reaches a narrative climax in a manner similar to *On the Fiddle*, with the criminal impulses of Joey Boy and co. being channeled by the army, as they sponsor their construction of a men's club in order to curb the rioting and lawlessness of occupying British troops in Italy after VE Day. The solution seems to perfectly combine the civilizing and controlling impulses of military life with the spiv's flair for criminal pleasures (their club features prostitutes, burlesque, alcohol, and gambling), but a last-minute inspection by a parliamentary review committee

exposes their intentions to the wider world. Joey Boy quickly changes the true function of the club to meet the expectations of the establishment (the burlesque stage is turned into a space for pedagogical plays, the alcohol is replaced by soda, and the gambling replaced by chess games), but the snooping of longtime nemesis Sgt. Major Dobbs (Bill Fraser) exposes the sexual licentiousness underneath. In the end, Joey Boy and his crew return to England, and despite Joey's desire to settle down and start a family, the film ends just as it began: with a raid by the police. Bruce Babington describes *Joey Boy* as a "coarsely reductive comedy," that pales in comparison to *Private's Progress*, noting that the film regards the spirit of 1940s war representation with a cynical, though hardly productive or innovative, lens: "here the 'myth' of wartime unity is replayed through the prism of modern British society, and revealed to be, at least from that perspective, only a front for exploitation and pocketlining."[62]

Even if aesthetically underwhelming, subgeneric trends in war comedies often attempt to wed war and wartime life to newly public regimes of personal experience. Using Raymond Williams' categorizations, these films still feel culturally retrograde, like residual formations that take existing genre components and infuse them with contemporary, "permissive" discourses.[63] *On the Fiddle* and *Joey Boy* both touch on one such trend, which is to become a coherent cycle of films by the end of the decade: the sexploitation war comedy. Most of these films maintain the generally masculinist perspective of other movies about war (this is sex as imagined by and represented for men), and make extensive use of double entendre and coded language. It is only in the 1970s, with the liberalization of the British Board of Film Censors under John Trevelyan,

[62] Babington 92.
[63] The term "permissive" was used, often in the pejorative, by cultural commentators who described Britain's changing attitudes to youth, multiculturalism, sexual rights, and the content of works of art. For a general sense of how the word describes the social world of the time, see Martin Pugh, "The Permissive Society," *State and Society: A Social and Political History of Britain since 1870*, 4th Edition (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 297-310.

that nudity and graphic on-screen sexuality enter the mix.[64] While these genres combine in service of several historical periods (films like the 19th century Raj comedy *Carry On Up the Khyber* [1968, Gerald Thomas], or the WWI set *Up the Front* [1972, Bob Kellett] frequently resort to sexual innuendo), these themes most frequently coalescence around the Second World War. Whereas films of the war years like *Went the Day Well?* and *Millions Like Us* show women's contribution to the war, films like *On the Fiddle* and *Joey Boy* insist on a wartime contribution that explicitly places women as objects of desire. In *On the Fiddle*, Pope and Pedlar spend time at a camp where RAF and Women's Auxiliary soldiers couple up and pursue sexual escapades (a narrative that is pursued at feature-length in *Carry On England* [1976, Gerald Thomas]). *Joey Boy* positions most women in Ally-occupied Italy as sex workers, a trope explored with greater aesthetic and emotional depth in the American film *Catch-22* (1970, Mike Nichols). *Undercovers Hero* (1974) is a later-day Boulting Brothers production set in a French bordello. The film is an uneasy mix of Peter Sellers character studies—he appears as no less than six roles encompassing five nationalities, including a brief turn as Hitler—and softcore sex farce.[65] *Undercovers Hero* and *Carry On England*, viewed forty years on, hardly play as comedy, instead seeming more like sexist missives from the decade that taste forgot.

In general, film and television from the late 1960s and early 1970s open films about war and wartime themes to a huge range of experiences and settings. The most representative title in this regard is *Dad's Army*, something of a cultural touchstone for war comedy in Britain. Often hailed as the nation's favorite TV comedy, *Dad's Army* is, owing to its longevity, one of the

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[64] For a discussion of changes to classifications of sex on screen, see Sue Harper and Justin Smith, *British Film Culture of the 1970s: The Boundaries of Pleasure* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2011), 27-28.
[65] Simon Sheridan notes that this was the only film that Roy Boulting was ever ashamed of making. See Simon Sheridan, *Keeping the British End Up: Four Decades of Saucy Cinema* (London: Reynolds & Hearn, 2001), 101.

most comprehensive portraits of Britain during World War II.[66] While the show is a broad situation comedy that relies on verbal misunderstandings and double entendres, its range of plots makes it a wide-ranging survey of its period. *Dad's Army* is mainly about the relationships of the members of the Home Guard in the fictional town of Walmington-on-Sea, lead by the pompous Captain Mainwaring (Arthur Lowe). That said, its episodes cover everything from guard duty and airplane spotting to rationing and medical standards. Over the course of the show, the characters receive basic training, go on maneuvers, capture downed Luftwaffe pilots, protect dignitaries, and go signposting. They are poor soldiers, often ending up more as liabilities than assets. Though an establishment program through-and-through (in some ways, it is the BBC's definitive nostalgic statement about the British experience of World War II), it proves subversive in two areas. First, it constructs a military culture out of mostly geriatric characters, which in itself is a challenge to the cult of youth that populates most tales of military heroism. Second, much of the show's humor comes from the troop's penchant for failure. If dominant expressions of war heroism from the 1940s and 1950s generally represent the efficiency of the British war machine, this is its critical opposite. Mainwaring and company spend the first few episodes waiting for equipment, a shortcoming that sets the tone for later episodes. Scarcity, poor health, and laziness plague the characters. For all their faults and grumbling, they are never actively contemptuous of Britain and its military. Sheila Whiteley argues that the show—especially its light-hearted use of evocative music such as Bud Flanagan's rendition of "Who Do You Think You're Kidding, Mr. Hitler"—creates positive associations with wartime culture (an optimism at collectively taking a stand against the Axis powers, which doubles as a desired national trait for

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[66] Graham Lord, *Arthur Lowe* (London: Orion Books, 2002), 291. The show was picked as Britain's favorite TV comedy in a 1993 poll.

contemporary viewers).[67] Graham Lord sums up why audiences loved *Dad's Army* so much, in a list that likens it to dominant and residual cultural formations: "People said they liked *Dad's Army* because it was clean, gentle family, entertainment as well as well written, funny, sometimes touching, always wonderfully observant of human nature, and vividly evocative of the nostalgic sights, sounds and songs of a braver, simpler, more decent golden age when Britons had been proud to be British—of Britain's finest hour."[68] A long-running television series whose characters and catchphrases have outlived virtually all its creative participants, *Dad's Army* is in many ways an exemplary artifact of the "pleasure culture of war."

Dad's Army is part of group of television and film projects from the late 1960s and early 1970s that focus on the humorous elements of idiosyncratic war experience, both of past wars and of war in the present day. One such movie is *Before Winter Comes* (1969, J. Lee Thompson), a vehicle for Topol (fresh from stage success in *Fiddler on the Roof*), where the ebullient performer plays Janovic, a man who acts as an interpreter for Major Burnside (David Niven), a British officer in charge of a displaced persons camp. The movie is set in the Austrian Alps at the end of World War II, and features a rather tragic ending, where Janovic—a deserter of the Soviet army—is sent back East to be executed.[69] Despite its inconsistent style and lapses into sentimentalism, *Before Winter Comes* showcases a suspicion of military protocols. Steve Chibnall writes that screenwriter Andrew Sinclair, who adapted a Frederick Keefe short story called "The Interpreter," is principally concerned with "the corrupting effect of militarism, and his script oscillates between light satire of army manners and culture (Bewley's [Anthony Quayle] inspection of the camp, for instance) and a more bitter condemnation of the military's

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[67] Sheila Whitely, "*Dad's Army*: Musical Images of a Nation at War," *Popular Music and Television in Britain*, ed. Ian Inglis (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 135-136.
[68] Lord 169.
[69] Steve Chibnall, *J. Lee Thompson*, British Film Makers (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000), 312.

involvement in civilian affairs."[70] The corrosive effect of war on individuals becomes a common theme, equally a topic for comic lampooning and serious critique.

Hannibal Brooks (1969, Michael Winner) is based on the war memoirs of Tom Wright, who worked in a German zoo in the 1940s while a prisoner of war, eventually looking after and growing fond of an Indian elephant called Stasi.[71] The unpublished manuscript was turned into a story by Michael Winner, who directed a variation of it based on a screenplay by Dick Clements and Ian LaFrenais, starring Oliver Reed as Stephen "Hannibal" Brooks, a POW who looks after an elephant, eventually escaping over a mountain to neutral Switzerland.[72] This is another film set among the Alps that looks at a creative person who is out-of-step with military expectations, and is moreover at least the second 1960s war comedy to focus on animals. The other, *Operation Snatch* (1962, Robert Day), has Lt. "Piggy" Wigg (Terry-Thomas) minding a group of Barbary Apes at Gibraltar in maintenance of the myth that British rule will continue there as long as the animals remain.[73] *Hannibal Brooks* is notable for its total dissociation of patriotic sentiment and nationalist sentiment from its enlisted soldier protagonist. Brooks's choice to volunteer at the zoo has him branded a traitor by the other British soldiers in his camp. Later, when he is reunited with former American POW Packy (Michael J. Pollard), Brooks is forced to weigh his loyalty to his elephant against the guerilla campaign that Packy and his consort of French and Austrian freedom fighters are waging against the Germans. He chooses to continue to tend his elephant. Brooks struggles against his German pursuers, as when he murders a guard who threatens to rape his love interest Vronia (Karin Baal), but does so primarily for personal reasons, with little sense

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[70] *Ibid*. 312-313.
[71] Cliff Goodwin, *Evil Spirits: The Life of Oliver Reed* (London: Virgin Books, 2002), 115.
[72] Susan D. Cowie and Tom Johnson, *The Films of Oliver Reed* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Pub, 2011), 107.
[73] Lizette Alvarez, "Where the British May Reign but the Monkeys Rule," *New York Times* 28 Jun 2005, accessed 15 Jul 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/28/international/europe/28monkey.html.

of the larger geopolitical conflict of which he is a part. Like previous Michael Winner/Oliver Reed collaboration *I'll Never Forget What's'isname* (1967), the film balances cheeky, anti-authoritarian comedy with occasional bouts of serious violence. Susan Cowie and Tom Johnson note that Brooks is virtually a pacifist in his disillusionment with both sides of the struggle (the film, therefore, represents a strand of anti-war sentiment that is not about protest so much as "dropping out").[74] Despite its familiar mock-happy ending (a "they all lived happily ever after" card, even though Vronia and many of Packy's compatriots were gunned down minutes earlier), *Hannibal Brooks* has narrative and ideological elements totally unlike previous British war films. According to Bill Harding, "the casting of the leading players in *Hannibal Brooks* is cleverly perverse, and lends the film a deliberate disorientation," with Pollard's "hippy-style American guerrilla" as "one of the most incongruous figures in the history of war films."[75] *Hannibal Brooks* is a movie where the most physically violent of leading men (Reed) avoids confrontation where possible, and the impish Pollard portrays a character that relishes it.

The Virgin Soldiers (1969, John Dexter), based on Leslie Thomas's novel about his experiences in Malaya during National Service, unites many of the genre tropes of *Private's Progress* and *Carry On Sergeant* with a frank discourse on youthful sexuality. Starring Hywel Bennett as Private Briggs (a somewhat disillusioned stand-in for the book's author), *The Virgin Soldiers* mixes anxieties about love, and worries over the dangers of imperial occupation, in equal measure. Set in 1951 (at one point, a diegetic radio broadcast mentions the Festival of Britain), the film shows something of the ugly side of the declining imperial power. A sequence at a camp dance depicts the British getting sloppy, with grotesque dancing, drunkenness, and miserable visages aplenty. Here, cinematographer Kenneth Higgins's hand-held camera gets

[74] Cowie and Johnson 105.
[75] Harding 51-52.

frenetic with the dancing, establishing an unbalanced subjectivity that parallels a larger sense of the loss of geopolitical control for British occupying forces. In the film's main narrative, Briggs's desire to lose his virginity is complicated by his burgeoning interest in the Camp Commander's daughter Phillipa (Lynn Redgrave), a headstrong teenage girl with her own worries about sex. The second half of the film concerns Briggs's initiation into a world of violence, as local anti-Imperial uprisings and increased guerilla actions become another proving ground. The film is tonally inconsistent, with frequent shifts between artful compositions (best exemplified by Briggs and Phillipa's conversation on the water pipeline, where they communicate while facing different directions) and pedestrian direction (the prime modality is drab realism), or comedy (the interactions of the young soldiers approximate the laddish humor of *Carry On Sergeant*) and grim violence (the sequence in which the soldier's train is ambushed captures a sense of desperation missing from the rest of the film). Drew Casper characterizes it as a film that espouses "the traditional movement from cowardice to bravery," though Briggs is hardly a converted hero, but more a man who endures what he has to before he can move on with his life.[76] *The Virgin Soldiers* contains a few moments that strip away all romance and hopefulness from military service. The best example comes during an improvised game of soccer on a beach, set up as the soldiers are on patrol in search of villages harboring insurgents. During the match, in the normal course of play, Sgt. Fred Organ (Robert Bridges) steps on a landmine (left over from World War II) and is obliterated. This moment signals an abrupt change in timbre for the film, as the boredom and complaining of routine life during National Service are contrasted with the very real dangers of the last big war.

Aspects of this new set of sensibilities in war comedy—the first sustained critical juncture for this subgenre of films—appear in select moments of films that otherwise feel

[76] Drew Casper, *Hollywood Film, 1963-1976* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 323.

retrograde in other areas. For instance, *Adolf Hitler: My Part in His Downfall* (1973, Norman Cohen) sits awkwardly between old and new attitudes. Based on the first of Spike Milligan's war memoirs, the great joke of *Adolf Hitler: My Part in His Downfall* is that it shows nothing of Milligan's actual military service: the film begins with his uptake in the Army, and ends as he and his division are shipped to Algeria.[77] The film offers no causal link, however improbable, between Milligan's army service and the eventual death of Adolf Hitler. This frustration is typical of the narrative and comedic strategies of the film as a whole: Milligan's experience, his sense of humor, and the flow of his narration, hinge on hierarchical refusal. Milligan was a pacifist who nevertheless participated in war; he was an anarchist who frequently espoused Tory sympathies to outmoded forms of behavior and address.[78] On a broad level, the narrative follows a familiar progression: Spike (played by Jim Dale) enters the Army through a training facility at Bexhill-on-Sea, gets in trouble with his superior officers, bonds with some of his fellow trainees, incidentally picks up some combat skills, participates in combat exercises, and eventually gets shipped off to war. Yet all of his laziness (he reports to camp three months late), insubordination (he repeatedly ignores superior officers), or frustrations (he wants to be a jazz musician, not a soldier), he is shepherded through the motions and is eventually welcomed into the Army. The film offers, on the one hand, the idiosyncratic behavioral tics of this strange and surreal comedian, and, on the other, that old narrative of the British army's ability to process and derive value from even the worst of soldiers.

The audience is taken along with Spike as he learns about fighting, but most of these sequences of learning are subverted through mistakes or social miscues. For example, the

[77] See Spike Milligan, *Adolf Hitler: My Part in His Downfall* (London: Michael Joseph, 1971). Subsequent wartime memoirs were published throughout the 1970s.
[78] Peter Wilkin, *The Strange Case of Tory Anarchism* (Faringdon, Oxfordshire: Libri Publishing, 2010), 18-19. Milligan's attitudes are discussed throughout the book.

soldiers in the camp are trained to use artillery on an initially non-firing gun, a holdover from the previous war for which they can only find one piece of ordinance. Despite the fact that they learn no useful skills, the troops are moved along to the next challenge. Their final test is to run a battle simulation, which Spike and his friends ruin by kidnapping their own officers rather than silencing those of their opposition. By the end of the film, Major Drysdale (Arthur Lowe) delivers a speech that pronounces the soldiers ready for duty, despite the fact that their behavior and work ethic has, if anything, become demonstrably worse. While the larger goal of the film may be to critique the British Army for its inability to properly train and control its soldiers, it also demonstrates how certain traumatic encounters puncture a youthful veneer of irreverence. One sequence in particular temporarily elevates *Adolf Hitler: My Part in His Downfall* into a more challenging representational discourse. Spike and his cohort load onto a troop transport to investigate a downed plane. Upon arrival, they discover the corpse of the German pilot. It is the only moment in the film featuring a dead body, and it is one of the few places in the film of sustained seriousness. After investigating the crash site, they leave one of their cohort behind to stand guard. As the truck pulls away, the plane (which has been visibly burning all along) explodes, killing their friend. This sequence compounds the sense of inadequacy that lingers by the film's end: not only are Spike and his friends massively underprepared to go to war, but the only real lessons they've learned relate to their inadequacy. Having seen the inefficiency of the military machine of which they are a part, and with a sense of perspective about the danger of their entry into the war, they are abruptly shipped off.

Taking stock of features from some of the war comedies of the later 1960s and early 1970s means revealing a pattern, one paradoxically based on inconsistency and dissonance. Unlike war comedy of the 1940s, or even earlier in the 1960s, *Before Winter Comes*, *Hannibal*

Brooks, and *The Virgin Soldiers* shift rapidly between different tones and moods, examine disillusionment, express dissatisfaction at military life, are critical of the national tradition of which they are a part, and, crucially, use comedy to illustrate the instability, failure, and outmodedness of the military situations in which they are set.

4. The Emergent Tradition: War Comedy Meets Modernism in *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and *How I Won the War*

The one truly emergent tradition in 1960s British war comedy combines the new atonalities just outlined with deliberate attempts at merging this seemingly formulaic genre with the critical legacy of modernism. In the war comedies discussed so far, style (even if unconventional) tends to be subordinate to content, and concerns about characterization, narrative, and gags trump conscious engagement with larger art movements. By contrast, the remainder of this chapter looks at two films that are both as relatable to international art house style as to the legibility of their genre. For the two films I will focus on, a kind of comic irony pervasive of tone, mood, and style missing from previous treatments of war reads as a signal of genuine difference. Probably the most enduring, innovative, caustically funny, and frankly, still unmatched comments on British militarism are Tony Richardson's *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, an account of British military folly in the Crimea in the mid-19th century, and Richard Lester's *How I Won the War*, the most formally experimental war movie of the decade, ostensibly an adaptation of Patrick Ryan's World War II set novel, but also an indictment of audience expectations relating to the style and iconography of the war film genre. While I will occasionally discuss other films in mapping the truly radical departure from earlier war discourse (Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* is also important to this context), it is worth stressing that

The Charge of the Light Brigade and *How I Won the War* are not isolated objects. These films are engagements with history offered by experienced adaptors (Charles Wood, John Osborne) and celebrated auteurs (Richardson and Lester) who were arguably at the height of their public and critical recognition, making explicitly subversive entertainment funded by a major studio (United Artists) historically receptive to strong creative talents, all in the context of a unmatched period of American financial investment in culturally British filmmaking. During the early stages of the "New Hollywood," before the youthful reinvention of the Roger Corman graduates who were soon to take the nation by storm, the U.S.-U.K. connection signaled some innovative genre entertainments.

With a shared language and potential cross-over markets between them, the war stories of both nations are connected, even when they are, as in the cases of *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and *How I Won the War*, explicitly British in subject and historical specificity. In general, the 1960s marked a moment of cultural exchange between the United States and Britain that, while not always co-equal, was comprehensively codependent. Writing about the seeming Americanization of Britain, H.L. Malchow notes, "cultural relations between the United States and Britain were especially close and indeed changed the cultural landscape in enduring ways that are not always obvious. The best metaphor for this may not be that of a rising and falling tide, but of a kind of ecological event that shifts the course of the future."[79] The name for this exchange is the "special relationship," the postwar alignment between U.S. and British interests as key allies in the shaping of the American Century.[80] While the United States was arguably the dominant force in the West, Britain made the most of its recent losses. If the postwar narrative of the United States, at least until Vietnam, is of triumph, expansion, and stability, the opposite is

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[79] H.L. Malchow, *Special Relations: The Americanization of Britain?* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2011), 309-310.
[80] *Ibid*. 1.

true for Britain. For historian Dominic Sandbrook, Suez was Britain's moment of self-recognized decline:

> Few historians dispute that, if there is such a thing as a historical watershed, the Suez crisis was such a moment. In the aftermath of the crisis, no-one could doubt that Britain's days as a great international power had passed, and Suez became a symbol of British retrenchment and reassessment, the end of the era of 'Britain Strong and Free' (as the 1951 Conservative manifesto had it).[81]

In the wake of Suez, there is a temptation to read Britain as a non-entity, a graying power on its last legs. However, Britain's earlier humiliation on the world stage might in some ways explain Britain's cultural interest to Americans in the 1960s. At the precise moment of two on-going American crises (the struggle for Civil Rights and the rapid escalation of the Vietnam War) British cultural centrality made a comeback in American minds. The so-called "British Invasion" of the 1960s lasted for nearly a decade, carried along by the massive sweep of The Beatles and James Bond, but extending through other areas of cinema, fashion, and design.[82] More specifically, Britain itself—especially London—became a tourist destination of Americans, as myths about the "swinging" city circulated in the American press (and in American-financed films) during the second half of the decade.[83] This mythologization coincided with a boom in American financial investment, which funded everything from the glamorous Mayfair Hilton (a destination done in the International Modern style) to films with British production bases like the *Charge of the Light Brigade* and *How I Won the War*.[84]

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[81] Sandbrook *Never Had it So Good* 29.

[82] For an account of the British invasion in cinema as experience by a American youth, see Ken Hanke, "The British Film Invasion of the 1960s," *Films in Review* vol.XL, no. 4 (April 1989): 212-219. This is the first of a four-part article.

[83] The most famous document from this trend is Piri Halasz, "You Can Walk across It on the Grass," *Time*, April 15, 1966: Academic OneFile Database, accessed 19 Jul 2010; Flanagan "Whitehead's London" 278-298.

[84] Malchow 31-33.

American expatriate Stanley Kubrick is a key figure in this regard, as the critical and commercial success of *Dr. Strangelove* likely made possible a cycle of ironic and comic films about different wartime contexts (his earlier war film *Paths of Glory* [1957] has different resonances, which will be explored in the following chapter).[85] While it would be misguided to mistake subsequent ironic or comic war films as totally owing their possibility to *Strangelove*, its Anglo-American credentials (an American director [Kubrick], a largely American cast [George C. Scott, James Earl Jones, etc.], a predominantly American *cultural* context combined with a British *production* context, a British star [Peter Sellers] in several roles whose brand of comedy came from the very British *The Goon Show*) certainly paved the way for films like *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and *Oh! What A Lovely War*, two large-scale films made by British filmmakers, in British historical contexts, but with American money and distribution.[86] The basic conceit is in all three: the decision to explore the military culture around a war or wartime scenario most frequently treated as serious war melodrama (or as traditionalist comedy) as something closer to savagely comic farce.

But while American money and audiences are important to *Charge of the Light Brigade* and *How I Won the War*, their aesthetic ambitions are more precisely embodied by a period-specific confluence of movements and ideas: the legacy of European modernism in the arts (Brecht's theatre, surrealism, ironic narration, the "New Waves" in European film) combined with the satirical, frustrated narrative voices of the British New Wave and the youthful Left. Both films share an investment in the ironic legacy of modernism (an irony inflected with a comic edge). *Charge of the Light Brigade*, for its part, tempers this tone with a style that is

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[85] For a concise guide to Dr. Strangelove's production, reception, and legacy, see Billy Budd Vermillion, "*Dr. Stangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*," *The Encyclopedia of Stanley Kubrick*, eds. Gene D. Phillips and Rodney Hill (New York: Checkmark/Facts on File, 2002), 87-95.
[86] Alexander Walker, *Hollywood, England: The British Film Industry in the Sixties* (London: Orion Books, 2005), 367, 401-402.

suspended between other modes of filmmaking. Using some formal techniques more closely associated with experimental film—a somewhat malleable diegesis that mixes animation with live action, as well as sequences edited to maximum shock effect—it walks the line between a conventional war epic based on splendor and spectacle and the angry deconstruction of that very type of film. The film is suspended in the valley between dominant conceptions of war realism and grotesque excess, a set of stylistic choices that aid the film's central thesis about the failure of insular military inflexibility and of the dangers of both living in the past and being too welcoming of rapid change. *How I Won the War* differs in its almost total avoidance of realist discourse. Using distancing devices like painted bodies and the direct address to the camera, the film unfolds over a nonlinear span of time, offering an intentionally disjointed experience about the absurdities of a poorly planned war. In place of triumph and success, these films offer failure. They both examine taboo thematic subjects that would never have passed muster twenty-five years previously: deliberate waste, willful miscommunication, the lack of common ground between men of different classes or social positions, and most crucially, the insistence on the pervasive fallibility and outmodedness of the cultural traditions of the armed services.

One trend in war films of the 1960s is toward an ironic exposure of the dissonance between official or mythological claims about the sense of social justice behind a conflict and the previous tendency toward a happy ending. An "ironic-comic" war film insists that the narrative mandate that underpins a triumphalist form of comedy (the marriage plot and inevitable happy ending of 1940s comedies like *King Arthur Was a Gentleman*, for example) is doomed to fail, even as laughter and other comic devices escort us to this conclusion. Films previously discussed in this chapter like *Hannibal Brooks* and *The Virgin Soldiers* momentarily hit on this sensibility. In *Hannibal Brooks*, the ending is ironic in its exaggeration, as it comes minutes after the

protagonist's love interest, and also for the suggestion that is better to drop out of a war (even as just a war as World War II) than it is to "win" it. In *The Virgin Soldiers*, Briggs leaves his tour of duty more mature, but disillusioned and no happier despite having had his first sexual relationships and occasionally proved his competency as a soldier. The promise of his lost virginity is a mirage.

4.1 But Why Irony?

Terms that nuance the type and degree of a comic gesture are a semantic nightmare. Every major theorist of comic performance or comedy as a genre selects different definitional parameters.[87] Critics often mix or misuse concepts like comedy, satire, parody, or irony. Often, a text is many things simultaneously. For instance, *Dr. Strangelove* has been described as everything from "political satire" to "black comedy" to "doomsday comedy," and some of its specific moments are profitably looked at as ironizing the Cold War impulse toward warmongering.[88] In colloquial speech, we frequently say that satirists and comedians use irony, or that ironists can function as political satirists. Yet, rather than dissect each appropriation of relevant terms, I intend to make a specific case for "irony" as a key component for thinking about a major trend in 1960s war movies. *Irony can be viewed both as an attitude offered by*

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[87] Rather than formalistically enumerate these, I will throw my lot in agreement with Amber Day, who reads a general "satiric/ironic/parodic" register as indicative of an emergent form of political criticism. Day uses specific terms when necessary, yet insists (I think rightly) that it is not always best to unravel or atomize these terms in relation to every given gesture, scene, skit, sentence or skirmish. See Amber Day, *Satire & Dissent: Interventions in Contemporary Political Debate* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2011), 2.

[88] Roger Ebert, "Dr. Strangelove," *RogerEbert.com*, 11 July 1999, accessed 29 Oct 2012, http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19990711/REVIEWS08/907110301/1023; Lee Hill, "Interview with a Grand Guy (Terry Southern)," *Alt X*, accessed 29 Oct 2012, http://www.altx.com/int2/terry.southern.html; Keith Uhlich, "Stanley Kubrick," *Senses of Cinema*, The Great Directors, 21 May 2002, accessed 29 Oct 2012, http://sensesofcinema.com/2002/great-directors/kubrick/; Glenn Perusek, "Kubrick's Armies: Strategy, Hierarchy, and Motive in the War Films of Stanley Kubrick," *Depths of Field: Stanley Kubrick, Film, and the Uses of History*, eds. Geoffrey Cocks, James Diedrick, Glenn Perusek (Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 97.

content and as an assumed stance toward decoding said content. It has a wide resonance, yet a slippery quality that demands careful critical analyses from its subjects. Following Linda Hutcheon's careful parsing of the term, I take "irony" not as a "limited rhetorical trope or as an extended attitude to life, but as a discursive strategy operating at the level of exchange (verbal) and form (musical, visual, textual)."[89] Generally, irony might be understood as a temporary discursive *frisson* that is opened up in the space between what is said/shown and what is meant/inferred that results in something "absurd or laughable."[90] More specifically, irony's historical function "refers to a reflexive understanding of the contingency or lack of foundations" of a set of cultural norms or social beliefs.[91] Whether ultimately used in pursuit of a conservative or progressive agenda, irony attempts to expose a contradiction that stable address or purely serious intention cannot uncover.[92] One of the most important facets of Hutcheon's understanding of irony is that it demands both an originator (an *ironist*) and an interpreter. Irony needs an interpretive feedback loop that demands that an audience critically examine what it is presented with. Thus, irony does not always work as intended. Because understanding can form on so many levels, something like an active "discursive community" is necessary.[93] Although potentially construed along class, racial, gender, or ideological lines, such communities share a set of cultural touchstones and assumptions with the ironist, or are at least in a position such that they are able to decode their strategies. Another reason to discuss *Charge* and *How I Won the War* in terms of irony is the polarizing nature of their comedy, where the humor operates on such a level that education and shared background determine the direction and effect of their comic

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89 Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge, 1995), 10.
90 "Irony," *Dictionary of Media Studies*, accessed 22 Oct 2012, http://www.credoreference.com/entry/dictmedia/irony.
91 "Irony," *The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies*, accessed 22 Oct 2012, http://www.credoreference.com/entry/sageukcult/irony.
92 Hutcheon 29-30.
93 *Ibid*. 99.

setpieces. Their complexity and unconventional mounting means that many will not get the joke.

Writing in the 1970s, Paul Fussell posited the importance of what he calls "irony assisted recall" in the formation of literary memories about World War I.[94] In studying a wide-range of retrospective writings about this war, he noticed the tendency to order personal experience against larger stories of the conflict's significance. In some ways, these literary texts—and by extension, the films that I discuss that port this tradition to the screen—anticipate the ironic feedback loop that Hutcheon describes. These writers serve as ironists who offer a reading (often personalized) about the real meanings of their wartime experience, in expectation that an interpretive audience will weigh said readings against official cultural myths or dominant interpretations. Books like Max Plowman's A *Subaltern of the Somme* (1928) and Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) tie ironic comment to war, a trend that Fussell sees as carrying through to one strand of representational history about World War II.[95] In an American context, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* latches onto this challenge, using visually allegorical scenes peppered with disconcertingly graphic detail, a combination that creates a kind of "primal scene" for what was to become the ironic war film. Fussell specifies Heller's treatment of the death of the young soldier Snowden, who dies almost like Jesus in a Pieta scene, with a helpless Youssarian offering a death shroud in the form of a deployed parachute.[96] The sense of contradiction here does not just relate to the dueling representational modalities (allegorical vs. broadly realist), but also to the tone (tender, yet drawn-out to the point of laughter). Fussell ends his analysis of *Catch-22* with the following, a clarion call that gives some perspective on why the ironic-comic war film might actually be a sensible response to the past:

This "primal scene" works because it is undeniably horrible, but its irony, its dynamics of

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[94] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000), 30.
[95] *Ibid*. 33.
[96] *Ibid*. 34-35. Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (New York: Dell, 1983 [1955/1961]), 446-450.

> hope abridged, is what makes it haunt the memory. It embodies the contemporary equivalent of the experience offered by the first day of the Somme, and like that archetypal original, it can stand as a virtual allegory of political and social cognition in our time. I am saying that there seems to be one dominating form of modern understanding; that it is essentially ironic; and that it originates largely in the application of mind and memory to the events of the Great War.[97]

While Fussell uses irony as a means of asserting the continued relevance of literature about the experience of World War I, he also suggests that the sense of irony migrated into other forms, and attached itself to new situations, as the century continued. Mark Connelly argues that World War II was a truly public and massively visual war, as opposed to World War I, whose experiences were largely disseminated through literary channels (and whose memorable cultural artifacts often privilege the individual artistic viewpoint of their creators).[98] As filmic and televisual representations of war—not just current or recent wars, but all wars—gained popular currency, there emerged an ironic tendency on screen. While irony is an essential device in modernist literature and art (from Joyce to George Grosz), it does not emerge in commercial feature filmmaking until later. For Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, this late-game introduction of modernist tropes is indicative of the new European cinemas of the 1950s and 1960s, and by extension, mainstream attempts to harness these aesthetic innovations. He notes that changes such as an interest in the legacy of modernist or avant-garde art, a direct engagement with semiotics, and Marxist politicization "took place in the first instance in arts other than the cinema, and in thinking about arts other than the cinema, and infiltrated the cinema only slowly and often indirectly."[99]

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[97] Fussell *Great War* 35.
[98] Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It!: Britain and the Memory of the Second World War* (New York: Pearson/Longman, 2004), 6.
[99] Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Making Waves: New Cinemas of the 1960s* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 38.

Within this ironic tendency, we can distinguish between films that use irony as a localized, scene-specific device on the one hand, and films that more thoroughly map irony or ironically portrayed characters across their narratives on the other. In *Dr. Strangelove*, a film concerned with an immanent world nuclear crisis, President Merkin Muffley's (Sellers) line "Gentleman, you can't fight in here: this is The War Room!" stands as a perfect example of an isolated moment. Though the film may not aspire to comic-irony for its entire duration, this specific line—said to quell bickering amidst his inner circle of strategists and policy-makers—draws attention to the fragile edifice of the foundational stability on which the hierarchical chain of command is built. The military top brass, who in other films would be represented with the expertise and dignity befitting their rank, are here reduced to the status of bickering children. The ironist (Peter Seller's Muffley, who utters Terry Southern's line) addresses both a diegetic audience of shamed participants and a film audience (the "real" discursive community) who decode the message, in the process realizing how the line simultaneously acknowledges the reality of the situation—the dangers of breaking the artful balance necessary to wage a "cold" war—and draws our attention to the petulance of those in power. The impressive war room set, designed by celebrated production designer Ken Adam, has a similarly ironic feel: despite its cavernous appearance, it simultaneously utilizes the visible motivating light source (a ring hovering over the central table) to suggest a kind of claustrophobia and containment.[100] The room itself is therefore at-once an emblem of the enormity of American military might and monetary commitment to the cause of nuclear supremacy and a subterranean prison, a self-imposed cage for the decision-making elite. Another ironic set piece comes in the film's final moments, with the triggering of the "Doomsday Device." Without the soundtrack, the moment suggests the finality of Cold War mistakes: one false step on either side and the escalating

[100] Christopher Frayling, *Ken Adam: The Art of Production Design* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005), 110.

counterattacks will shortly render the world uninhabitable. However, this montage of explosion footage is augmented thanks to the accompanying Vera Lynn recording “We'll Meet Again.” Lynn's reading of the song is nostalgic, and her sentiments about reuniting families and lovers in the wake of war hit a resonant chord after World War II. However, the combination of stock footage of nuclear detonations and Lynn's song creates an ironic *frisson*: because of the finality of the bombs, viewers are encouraged to identify with the less apocalyptic stakes of the last widespread conventional war, when a sense of reconciliation and reversion to sane life was still possible.

4.2 The Charge of the Light Brigade

The Charge of the Light Brigade, by contrast, offers a sustained feeling of comic-irony blended with modernist and art-cinematic devices. The film uses a combination of ironic-comic elements to punctuate the contradictions inherent in the story of this ill-fated military maneuver, an event famously memorialized in Tennyson's poem, in Michael Curtiz's 1936 Hollywood epic, and in Cecil Woodham Smith's *The Reason Why* (1953), then and now considered to be the definitive account of this Crimean tragedy.[101] The Crimean War was fought over claims to Russian influence, especially in Turkey and the Ukraine, as a preventative precaution. It is one of the several “little wars” waged by the British Empire in the 19th century. Byron Farwell writes of the righteousness with which these campaigns were carried out: “The British people, from prime minister to yeoman, and British soldiers from general to private, were sustained in their

[101] The convoluted history of the film (it was initially a kind of adaptation of *The Reason Why*, but was later rewritten by Charles Wood for legal reasons, even though the rights to access to that material were secured), which lead to an end to Tony Richardson and playwright John Osborne's friendship, is partially recounted in John Heilpern, *John Osborne: The Many Lives of the Angry Young Man* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 344-348 and Mark Connelly, *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (London: IB Tauris, 2003), 22-25. The earliest film version of these events that I have been able to find is *Balaclava* (1928, Maurice Elvey).

international martial activities by an unquestioning and unquenchable conviction that British institutions and British customs, beliefs and doctrines were the best in the world—not only for Britons, but for all the other peoples of the earth as well."[102] *The Reason Why* gives extensive contextual background to the rivalry between James Brudnell, 7th Earl of Cardigan (hereafter Lord Cardigan) and his relative George Bingham, 3rd Earl of Lucan (hereafter Lord Lucan). Woodham-Smith chronicles the privileged lives of these two men—aristocrats who purchased military appointments, a practice finally abolished in 1871—before, during, and after the famous Battle of Balaklava.[103] Charles Wood, who served in the 17th Queen's Royal Lancers, a regiment that participated in the battle, redirected the script to focus on Captain Louis Edward Nolan (played by David Hemmings in the film).[104] For Alexander Walker, Wood's script "captured the murderous insanity of running a military campaign on Alice-in-Wonderland logic."[105] While the film still dwells on Cardigan's (Trevor Howard) outmodedness, it offers the struggle between youthful professionalism as represented by Nolan as a contrast. The film walks a thin line between living in its historical moment (in its locations and manners of speech) and breaking through to the concerns of the present day (a key scene features antiwar protestors who are scattered by drunk cavalrymen, while the clothing and grooming of the featured actors looks as much Neo-Victorian Carnaby Street as it does historically Victorian). Writing about *The Charge of the Light Brigade's* historical context, Mark Connelly notes "it was a film of its time and a parable for its time but it was also a film intent on capturing the spirit of a past age, a spirit that

[102] Farwell 3.
[103] *Ibid*. 187.
[104] Dawn Fowler and John Lennard, "On War: Charles Wood's Military Conscience." *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama, 1880-2005*, ed. Mary Luckhurst (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 342-343.
[105] Walker 367-368.

could not easily be quantified."[106] Such a statement rings true for the film's ambiguous tone, which is by turns indignantly angry and bitterly funny.

The Charge of the Light Brigade was, at its time of release, the most expensive British film ever made.[107] It featured fine establishment actors (John Gielgud, Howard), young talent (Vanessa Redgrave, Hemmings, Jill Bennett), maverick technicians (David Watkin), young turk historical filmmakers (Kevin Brownlow, serving as editor, and John Mollo, an expert on military uniforms, as a period advisor) and pop credentials (the soundtrack album features John Addison's music, but is headlined by a performance of Tennyson's "Charge" by Manfred Mann). Parts of the film—its historical sweep, its locations, and its visual commitment to the past—make it feel like a conventional epic. In promotional materials, United Artists stressed the "grueling realism" of the production design and costumes.[108] Yet *Charge* is silly, angry, unsparing in its treatment of bloated authority, and anything but earnest.

The film's comprehensive use of diegetic voice over narration draws direct attention to the character's ironic tendencies. This sort of voice over is used to create a parallel situation between the film's two central actants, the cantankerous Lord Cardigan and the idealistic Nolan. In the film's first post-credit sequence, a solemn Lord Cardigan surveys a line of troops standing for inspection. This scene instructs viewers on the film's willingness to use a textbook kind of irony, drawing attention to how the film's soundtrack (which features the internalized thoughts of the characters) differs in kind and intention from the visual actions of those characters. In this moment, Cardigan inspects his troops with a measured look, suggesting a real personal investment in his men, and suggesting his tacit approval of their appearances. However, his words on the soundtrack completely undercut this. As he rides by this regiment of Hussars, he

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[106] Connelly *Charge* 19.
[107] *Ibid*. 3.
[108] *Charge of the Light Brigade* Pressbook, S/M. BFI Reference PBM-140989.

talks incoherently about his own status, the amount of money he spends out of pocket to keep the appearances of his men, and suggests that he'll “flog their backs raw” if they do not fight to his specifications. The scene is punctuated by Cardigan ending his monologue by looking directly at the camera (a momentary challenge to the safely hermetic world of conventional historical filmmaking). Later, Nolan exits the cavalry mess, a large neoclassical building that epitomizes the high rank afforded these troops. He walks into a tableau of soldiers calmly enjoying the afternoon. As he walks by, apparently unfazed and disinterested, he thinks: “at times I'm so pent up with their languor that I could scruff hold of any two of them and bang their noodles together until their doodles drop off.” This highlights Nolan's sense of self-worth. In this corrupt, stagnant military, the fineries of rank and the privilege of leisure overshadow the actual tasks of training, skill, and discipline. The officers that Nolan passes are themselves a kind of ironic send-up to the “toff,” a figure of disdain in the meritocratic 1960s. Nolan’s fellow officers, who form an absurd contingent present for many of the film’s major sequences, are the 19th century source of Monty Python’s unfortunate Upper Class Twits of the Year, an enduring sketch about the obnoxiously posh written a few months later.

The film's most frequent ironic device is its animations. Overseen by Richard Williams, several parts of the film simultaneously condense the geopolitical situation leading to the Crimean War, as well as the British public's response to the prospect of that war, while giving some narrative justification to the sequence of events that leads to the disastrous charge. These animations work in an ironic-comic register because they draw attention to the absurdities of Britain's stake in the war while using the very tools that initially presented the war to the British public in the first place. Williams and his animators researched illustrations from the Victorian

era, notably political cartoons that appeared in *Punch Magazine*.[109] They reportedly worked on these sequences for at least two years.[110] Rather than explain Britain's interest in Crimea through text, dialog, or even voice over narration, the film begins with an animation of Britain, visualized as a sleeping lion, roused to awareness thanks to the furor created by Russia's predatory swipe at Turkey (Russia, of course, portrayed as a bear, while Turkey is shown as its namesake). So, on the one hand, this introductory sequence justifies the Crimean War in period terms (Britain as sleeping lion, roused to action while the world watches), but it also draws attention to the transparent and reductive nature of this explanation. We are swept up in the glorious music and the stately pomp, but we must ask, why did Britain have a stake in this far-off nation? What economic or political incentives came along with its protection and liberation? The aesthetically impressive, yet intellectually reductive set-up cues an audience understanding of the film's methodological ambition. This is historical justification through caricature, not through measured argument. This is an intensified kind of patriotic fervor, but *there is no there there*. How can this historical justification ever satisfy the eventuality of war?

The answer is that these animations do not definitively answer our foundational questions, and that is precisely the point. Their ironic-comic register negotiates a space for such cognitive dissonances. These sequences want the audience to see the assumptions that make up genre conventions or heavily mythologized stories. For all that is familiar about *The Charge of the Light Brigade*—the period costumes, the love story between Nolan and Clarissa Morris (Vanessa Redgrave), the spectacle of battle—there is plenty that is dissonant. Unlike most British war films, *Charge* does not cast the British populace as a force of absolute right acting for

[109] Linda Constanzo Cahir and Stephen Cahir, "History Revisited: *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1968)," *The Cinema of Tony Richardson: Essays and Interviews*, eds. James M. Welsh and John C. Tibbetts (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999), 170.
[110] Connelly *Charge* 31.

the good of the world. During a later animated sequence, Williams animates a bloodthirsty body politic, one that becomes a series of John Bull dogs, who tear the Russian bear to shreds in what has to be one of the most graphically violent animated moments in a major feature film up to that point. The anger and the patriotic fervor contrasts with the aphoristic text that accompanies ("Right Against Wrong") and the music (triumphant, masking the horrors of what is represented with nationalistic bathos). What is truly remarkable about *The Charge of the Light Brigade* is that continuously reflects admiration away from Britain and its military, all without necessarily being reductively anti-war. Mark Connelly ascribes this to Charles Wood's understanding of the terrible appeal of the subject: "that although it [war] is ultimately an awful, destructive, wasteful process, it has inspired men and motivated them intellectually and emotionally."[111]

The Charge of the Light Brigade is named after the catastrophic action that ends of the film, a cavalry charge based on an ambiguous order that lead to hundreds of needless deaths and exposed, in microcosm, most of what was wrong with the British army of the 19th century. That Farwell is able to say "the Crimean War was undoubtedly the worst managed war of the century: logistics, tactics and strategy were all badly handled" seems extreme, but it gels with Richardson (and Woodham-Smith's) accounts of the central folly of the Battle of Balaklava.[112] As filmed, the sequence connects to the preferred mode of ironic spectatorship, and connects Richardson's directorial style and Kevin Brownlow's editing to other trends in contemporary art cinema, especially the *nouvelle vague* (a comparison previously established, at least, in the climatic running sequence of *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* [1962]). The irony of the charge is anchored in history and dutifully shown in the film: a group of spectators, including civilians, looked down at the battle, and could see the opposing Russian armies, thus knowing

[111] Connelly *Charge* 17.
[112] Farwell 69.

that Nolan, Cardigan, and the Light Brigade (whose vision was blocked by hills and bluffs) were riding in the wrong direction, and were headed at a superior force. Their order was dictated by Lord Raglan, played by John Gielgud as a doddering old fool, and is presented in confusion. Nolan, already impatient to get on with the battle, gestures to the battlefield, imploring Cardigan to let them go after their captured cannons and ordnance.

The charge proceeds, the result of an elaborate misunderstanding. As it gets underway, Cardigan insists on leading, and sets off at a slow pace. The impatient Nolan speeds up, not exactly as an affront to Cardigan, but more to survey the field. He realizes the mistake, panics, and tries to warn the others, but he, the brave soldier and best cavalry strategist of his age, is shot, the first casualty of the battle. Nolan's death is a shocking moment. It is accompanied by dissonant noise unlike anything else in the film. It's editing momentarily defies the logic of continuity cutting. Nolan's fall signals the end of immediate reform and the hope of victory. The charge continues, which Connelly describes as alternating between closely-cropped medium shots and close ups, and the occasional long-shot, "with the strange puffs of smoke and clouds of dust, [that] imply the surreal, chaotic madness of battle."[113] After the charge, which decimates the British ranks, the survivors regroup at their initial starting point. Lucan (Harry Andrews), Raglan, and Cardigan argue, like an aristocratic riff on a "Who's On First" routine, over whose error caused such a terrible massacre. Blame is eventually passed onto Raglan's assistant. The film's exposure of hollow patriotism means that the film cannot end in glory, but rather in utter dejection. Like *The 400 Blows* (1959, Francois Truffaut), *The Charge of the Light Brigade* ends on a freeze-frame. But, unlike Truffaut's famously ambiguous image, *Charge* fixes an afterimage of loss. The last shot is of straggling soldiers on the smoky battlefield, a mess of blood corpses, and unsettled earth. The credits roll.

[113] Connelly *Charge* 53.

4.3 How I Won the War

Around the same time as his taking over the *Charge of the Light Brigade* script from John Osborne, Charles Wood wrapped up work on *How I Won the War*, his third screenplay for American ex-pat director Richard Lester (the previous two being *The Knack...and How to Get It* [1965] and *Help!* [1965]). *How I Won the War* is adapted from Patrick Ryan's novel-memoir of the same name. Like *Charge*, is features cinematography by David Watkin. *How I Won the War's* American connection comes courtesy of United Artist's finance (for a time, they had something of a cornered market in atypical war movies) and Lester's Philadelphia-based upbringing, which allows him something of an outsider's eye view onto the eccentricities of the British. The film expands vignettes from the book, injecting pop-modernist sensibilities into an already satirical novel.[114] Andrew Yule notes that Wood and Lester did not think that Ryan's book was sufficiently critical, such that "little was retained of Ryan's work except the title, one or two episodes and the names of a handful of characters."[115] Dawn Fowler and John Lennard argue that the film is "close in content and theme" to Wood's *Dingo*, a play that also premiered in 1967.[116] Their description of *Dingo* gels with decisions made in both *Charge* and *How I Won the War* (while simultaneously aligning Wood to a modernist superstar): "*Dingo* mixes elements of absurdism, music-hall, expressionism, the comedy skit and realism, as army theatricals and many other kinds of popular theatrical evening do without much caring about it, but Wood has rarely been extended either the understanding or the baffled respect that Beckett won as *Waiting*

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[114] Malcolm Page, "Charles Wood: *How I Won the War* and *Dingo*," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 1.3 (1973): 256-258.
[115] Andrew Yule, *The Man Who "Framed" the Beatles: A Biography of Richard Lester* (New York: Donald FIne, 1994), 129.
[116] Fowler and Lennard 350.

for Godot and *Endgame* settled into repertoire."[117] Lester was able to translate Wood's strange brew into a film with a split pedigree. It stars Michael Crawford and John Lennon, alumni of previous projects that found mainstream success, but looks and feels utterly unlike any other British war film, then or since.

How I Won the War was different by design. For Neil Sinyard, "everything in *How I Won the War* is an attempt to deconstruct and demoralise the conventional war film."[118] The film is framed as the memoirs of Lt. Goodbody (Crawford), an insecure middle class officer who panders to his superiors, speaks condescendingly to his subordinates, and occasionally grovels to his Nazi captors. The main narrative concern's Goodbody's deployment to North Africa, and his charge to construct a cricket pitch, in the middle of the desert (which is, of course, in occupied territory), all for the probable enjoyment of a V.I.P. visitor. The film's subtext jumps out: this is a film about the wastefulness of war, its absurdities, and its futility (not to mention the sense of arrogant cultural hegemony that would promote British cultural values in such a way). Many men die in pursuit of these silly orders. The film later follows Goodbody and his men in the campaign on the Western Front, where more men die as a result of Goodbody's poor planning. His capture, which is introduced early in the film (but happens towards the chronological end of the narrative), allows him to retrospectively narrate many of his experiences. The film ends with the allied taking of an intact German bridge (echoes of the important bridge at Remagen, which was a boon to the United States in 1945).

Much of the film's comic irony comes from its modernist use of theatrical techniques in the context of a thoroughly cinematic film. Lester revisited the "Greek chorus" device he had used in *The Knack*, wherein characters are temporarily introduced in order to comment on or

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[117] *Ibid*. 349.
[118] Neil Sinyard, *Richard Lester*, British Film Makers (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2010), 61.

elaborate upon developments in the main narrative.[119] One example is the British woman in civilian clothing called Flo (Pauline Taylor) who suddenly runs to comfort a British driver whose legs have been badly damaged after his jeep explodes. She begins to address the camera, lamenting, “It is impossible to tell all the touching and heroic stories” occasioned by war, but is interrupted by the soldier, who complains that he is very hurt. She unexpectedly dismisses him, in the process showing the she has no conception of the gravity of war injuries, telling him to “run them under the cold tap, love.” Another theatrical conceit is a reliance on monologues. Grapple (Michael Hordern) speaks almost entirely in non-sequiturs and staccato monologues, even when he is ostensibly having a conversation with another character (he also almost never makes eye contact or otherwise directly regards those he talks to). This character trope is literalized in an early sequence in which Grapple appears to be speaking to other soldiers, in footage that is cut in parallel to Goodbody and his troop’s basic training. Towards the end of the sequence, Grapple’s context is revealed through camerawork and a sound bridge. His babbling overlaps with a drilling scene, which cuts to a seated Grapple talking. The camera zooms out to reveal Grapple, in his own uniform, performing in an all-soldier amateur dramatics production (his theatrical life as a monologist is almost indistinguishable from his life as an officer). As officers, Grapple and Goodbody prove the worst at communicating their intentions, a popular Charles Wood theme that is also important to *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (the irony, of course, is that the men raised and bred to lead prove terrible at it). Frequently, characters appear to be having wholly different conversations from one another, despite the physical evidence of their speaking to one another. *How I Won the War* is so unstable a film that it does not even let its central narrator speak of his life and experiences without giving other characters a crack at his self-mythologizing. During Goodbody’s introductory cricket scene, where he sets the stage for

[119] Yule 137.

his story, characters like Juniper (Jack MacGowran) and Gripweed (Lennon) hijack Goodbody's narration, counteracting his self-image and admitting that, far from being liked by his men, he was actually a bit "rubbish." Sometimes Lester goes so far as to undercut the stability of even the most innocuous moments, with characters occasionally finishing one another's sentences, as when Juniper appears from inside a truck to hijack one of good soldier Transom's (Lee Montague) exacerbated laments. The film is so suffused with comic irony in its dialogue and language games even normalizing forces or straight men like Transom cannot get a word in edgewise.

The film uses self-reflexive techniques throughout. In the first sequence, Lt. Goodbody directly addresses the camera and acknowledges his status as a character in a story. Other men under his command do as well. Drogue (James Cousins) mentions that he is to die while they are in North Africa, and later forecasts his own death by trying to give away his worldly possessions. The most confusingly fantastic device is the film's unique brand of reincarnation, where the men who die remain in the film as ghostly toy soldiers. They are immediately brought back into the film as silent participants, providing an eerie visual reminder of the afterlives of the rank and file. In *How I Won the War*, soldiers are hyperaware of their social conditioning and often make literal their class affiliation. Early on, Lt. Goodbody admits that he is from a grammar school, and therefore emulates the received pronunciation of an aristocrat (the envy, and the attempt, are both presented as typical of middle class insecurity). At one point, Gripweed tells superior officer Grapple that he prefers slapstick to other methods of comedy, because "of course, I'm working class." In addition to constantly addressing the camera, characters consciously stand in highly mannered tableaux rather than in naturalistic relation to one another. This is not war as a

commonsensically heroic pursuit, or even a quotidian struggle: it is the fantastic theatricalization, the modernist, radical opening up, of an exceptional type of experience.

Lester and Wood do everything possible to maintain an unstable diegesis. At the end of the film, two soldiers billed with the appropriately Brechtian names of Reporter (Bryan Pringle) and 2nd Replacement (Ken Colley) stop before the camera and begin discussing the fact that they hear there is a war in Vietnam going on, and while they'd like appear in it, they don't much like working with the director (Lester). As Glenn Erickson notes, the film connects its daring cinematic devices to older traditions, namely “gags and routines seemingly sourced from the British Music Hall, with a generous helping of *Goon Show* absurdity.”[120] After their first battle (wherein the troop is bombed and loses much of their equipment), Juniper undercuts Goodbody’s authority by staging a comic play, a verbally dexterous diversion that instantly engages the other men, starts and stops on a dime, and comes complete with canned laughter. This battle is itself unconventional, in that it freely mixes color footage, new black and white footage, and black and white newsreel footage to impressive, if deliberately confusing, effect. Everything that would typically ground the film in a realist discourse—the military regalia and equipment, the actuality footage—is tempered by something incongruous or outlandish. Sinyard sees this as the film’s aesthetic provocation: “Lester’s style is a mixture of humour and horror, realism and surrealism, designed to keep an audience on edge, unable to indulge either its sympathies or its patriotism.”[121] This battle sequence even ends with a single shot that sums up the mélange. Lester and Watkin’s camera lingers on a corpse, but the camera tilts up to reveal a woman sitting on the ground a few feet away, making glamor poses and interacting with a photographer as if nothing had happened. Lester prodded Wood into writing an inordinate number of drafts, and

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[120] Glenn Erickson, “DVD Savant Review: *How I Won the War*,” *DVD Talk*, 2011, accessed 13 Dec 2012, http://www.dvdtalk.com/dvdsavant/s3511won.html.
[121] Sinyard *Richard Lester* 61.

with each successive version, similar moments of calculated incongruity had to be cut. In Lester's copy of the first draft screenplay, there is a big "X" through the following scene, one whose presence was meant to suggest the uneasiness of life during wartime, but had nothing to do with Goodbody's narrative arc:

> A STREET AT NIGHT
>
> A WOMAN LOOKS THROUGH THE CURTAINS AND WATCHES ANOTHER WOMAN IN TURBAN AND STRAP SHOES BEING KISSED BY A FLAPPY TROUSERED MAN IN A RESERVED OCCUPATION WHICH HE HAS WRITTEN ON A PLACARD ROUND HIS NECK. HE HAS HIS HAND UP HER UTILITY SKIRT. THEY ARE BOTH SLIGHTLY DRUNK. WITH GAS MASKS
>
> THEY SING ROLL ME OVER IN THE CLOVER AND STAGGER INTO THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR.[122]

This draft also contains a lengthy court martial of Juniper, in which characters wear placards that proclaim their thematic function. For instance, our hero wears a sign that stating: GOODBODY "I AM A MOBILE FIELD LAUNDRY."[123]

The accumulated effect of these self-reflexive gestures roughly approximates the claims of Brecht's *lehrstücke*: confront the audience with the bare facts, situations, and conceptual tools, at-once defamiliarizing them (in Lester's case, it is an apparent involvement in the mise-en-scène of typical war films, with a sense of staging that is utterly alien to them) and offering a sense of how they can be better understood (the characters themselves continuously point out what is wrong with war, rather than unconsciously jump into the fray).[124] While there was a vogue for Brecht on the British stage beginning in the mid-1950s—performances of his plays had an immense effect on young playwrights like John Osborne and young directors like Lindsay

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[122] Charles Wood, *How I Won the War*, First Draft Screenplay, 14. BFI File RLE/1/7/2.
[123] *Ibid*. 32.
[124] John Willett and Ralph Manheim, "Introductory Note: The Lehrstücke or Learning Play," *Brecht: The Measures Taken and Other Lehrstücke* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2001), 6.

Anderson—his effect on the British screen was less noticeable.[125] Lindsay Anderson's *The White Bus* (1967) and *if….* (1968) alternate between B&W and color, and contain other Brechtian devices like direct address of the camera. While some experimental films released in a commercial milieu had used some of these devices (I'm thinking, especially of the cinematic versions of *Billy Liar* [1963, John Schlesinger] and *Morgan: A Suitable Case for Treatment* [1966, Karel Reisz], as well as Peter Brook's film of *Marat/Sade* [1967]), *How I Won the War* is a rare attempt to do so within the confines of the war film genre. Sinyard argues that *How I Won the War's* closest thematic kin is Joseph Losey's *King & Country* (1964), in that "both films are highly individual responses to identical influences: Bertolt Brecht and Stanley Kubrick's film, *Paths of Glory* (1957)."[126] More on Losey's relation to Brecht, and the strain of films influenced by *Paths of Glory*, in the next chapter.

How I Won the War uses absurd wordplay, humor based in the incongruity of its narrative (the ineptitude and idiocy on display do not outrage so much as amuse) and slapstick. One of the film's most traditional comic sequences comes when a truck gets stuck in the sand. Over the course of a few shots, Clapper (Roy Kinnear) backs an armored vehicle into the truck, Spool (Ronald Lacey) hits Goodbody in the face with a metal beam, and Goodbody is launched into the air by a cable, which causes him to land, head-first, in the sand. Extensive pantomime and expert comic timing keep the film darkly comic, if always critical.

Finally, *How I Won the War* is a story of hypocrisy of a kind comparable to the *Charge of the Light Brigade*. While he spends much of the film chumming up with Nazi officer Odlebog (Karl Michael Vogler) to negotiate either his eventually release as a POW or control of the bridge (this only comes later, and as a surprise), the narrative's central mission for roughly two

[125] Sandbrook *Never Had it So Good* 188.
[126] Sinyard *Richard Lester* 59.

thirds of the film's running time is a monumental figuration of absurdity and British imperial insolence. The folly of the cricket pitch embodies British cultural arrogance and assumed mastery, at the same time crystallizing the leisurely, rarefied world of the officer class. That said, this is not the standard against-the-odds war story. The soldiers do not inevitably and collectively triumph. Goodbody does succeed at both creating the pitch and securing the bridge, but he does so through a narrative that renders ironic the typical dimensions of such a story. He is personally responsible for the deaths of most of his men. He tries to bargain with a Nazi general and even flatters him. He leads several disastrous charges against the enemy, misuses his weapon, and often delegates tasks to subordinates who are even less equipped than he is. The basic claim of the film isn't something like "the war was won by the British *because* of heroism and know-how," but rather "the war was won by the British *in spite* of cowardice and idiocy."

5. Conclusion

United Artists did not know how to promote the comic criticism of *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and *How I Won the War. The Charge of the Light Brigade*, as befits a film of its size, had tie-ins with everything from Cutty Sark to the British Cycling Bureau, and U.A. suggested that exhibitors put soldiers on parade to drum up interest in screenings (they wanted the pomp, without the explanation of the circumstance).[127] The pressbook for *How I Won the War* suggested, rather more honestly, to court the controversy that had already circulated about the film, by drawing audience attention to some of the more incendiary quotations to appear in the press, but also pandered to Beatlemania by urging collaborations with barbers, a "Victory for the scissors" campaign in which fans could get a version of John Lennon's haircut from the

[127] *The Charge of the Light Brigade* Pressbook S/M, BFI Reference PBM-140989.

film.[128] Tony Richardson courted his own controversy by refusing press screenings of *Charge*, a move that at-once made him look petulant, gave the film an air of mystery, and probably prompted its mixed reviews.[129] *How I Won the War*, a more modestly staged and budgeted film (accounting records list the film's final cost as 415,408.21 pounds, with a daily progress report listing that the film was in the can in 63 days, one day early than expected), failed to achieve blockbuster status, though this, in itself, would seem antithetical to the film's sensibilities.[130] Andrew Yule claims that the Brechtian techniques hurt its commercial prospects.[131] Both films were defiantly British productions whose relative failure helped facilitate the withdrawal of American finance in the national film industry, a process all but complete by the early 1970s.

Although war comedy had been a popular genre hybrid at select moments in British cinematic history, the late 1960s yielded a new sensibility that merged comic material with attitudes and ideas that had previously been absent from the screen. War comedies made during the Second World War almost invariably illustrate the indestructibility of the British armed forces. Although the early 1950s are most closely associated with serious war heroism (with occasional flashes of comedy) and represent the commercial apex of the war film's popularity, war comedies see more frequent production by decade's end. In the years following the Suez Crisis, war comedies occupied a hybrid space, taking residual elements from earlier moments in the genre and commenting on contemporary concerns. By the mid-1960s, war comedies became increasingly untethered from tradition. With films like *How I Won the War*, the old pieties were (temporarily, alas) shattered. Against the grain of the nostalgia industry around the "pleasure culture of war," this counter-tradition used a comic treatment of war to expose the things that

[128] *How I Won the War* Pressbook S/M BFI Reference PBM-32965
[129] Connelly *Charge* 60-61.
[130] BFI file RLE 1/7/8; BFI file RLE 1/7/7.
[131] Yule 140.

dominant narratives suppressed: war crimes, collaboration with the enemy, nuclear war, desertion, hubristic defeat through carelessness, and class-bound ineptitude. This new approach to war and war narratives, which formed an important strand of representations on film and television, mainly thrived from the mid-1960s through the mid-1970s. If popular war comedies like the *Carry On* films and *Dad's Army* maintained conservative values, things like *Dr. Strangelove*, *The Virgin Soldiers*, *How I Won the War* and *The Charge of the Light Brigade* deliver something of a counterblast, using critical, often ironic, comedy to criticize the institutions and rituals of British militarism.

Sometimes, as with a film like *All This and World War II* (1976, Susan Winslow), a found footage documentary that uses Beatles music to ironically comment on the imagery the conflict (for instance, a cover of "Fool on the Hill" by Helen Reddy that accompanies film footage of Hitler relaxing at Berghof, his vacation house), the level of ironic detachment reaches almost excessive levels. More frequently, irony, satire, and parody become useful tools for offering pointed criticism of vaunted institutions. Despite the relative big budgets of some of these productions, many of them failed at the box office or disappeared from circulation: then, as now, they do not readily conform to genre expectations, instead seeming more coherent as isolated productions by specific auteurs. I suggest that they *can* be read as a subgenre (or, commercially, a production cycle) a momentarily emergent tradition that represents a genuine attempt to revise the nation's historical relationship to war. This new sensibility in war representation is not reducible to the individual decisions of directors, a general flowering of youth and countercultural protest, or a genre nominally changing or evolving based on the social relevance of its ideas, but rather a combination of all these in the larger context of a fluid culture industry of war. Put another way, exceptional films like *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and

How I Won the War are not just a reaction to social changes or cultural moods, but an aesthetic expansion of the possibilities of war representation itself. But fusing war with comedy in new ways was not the only way that artists and filmmakers re-visioned Britain's martial identity. Films of this period also relied on a gritty mode of tragedy aligned to the British reception of existentialism to expose the horrors of war.

Chapter 3

"For Christ's Sake, We're Surrounded!": Tragedy, Bleakness, Cynicism and Existentialism in British War Cinema, 1957-1977

War films often interact with other genres, in the process expanding their communicative repertoire to the point of extreme variation from seemingly foundational conventions. Along with comedy, a blanket genre modality that wrestles war narratives away from their frequent reliance on heroic exceptionalism is tragedy, an old workhorse that, since the Greeks, has provided a narrative trajectory, a worldview, and paradigm for the experience of loss. While comedy, including satire and exceptional dark humor, often deflects, undercuts, or downplays the dignity of its subjects, tragedy forces its audiences to confront this inescapable loss of freedom and life. Of course, tragedies can contain moments of laughter or involve comic characters (just as comedies can contain tragic figures and moments of sadness).[1] What I am interested in here is the type of tragedy, rooted in 19th and 20th century conceptions of the term in which individuals are isolated, persecuted, and eventually doomed by systematic forces larger than themselves.[2] There is a sub-cycle of British films about war that were released between the loss of British control of the Suez canal in 1956 and the rise of Thatcherism that rely on tragedy to illustrate the shortcomings of military life and logic. This kind of tragic war film is tempered by a frequent bleakness in art design, mise-en-scène, and visual style; adopts a pervasive mood of cynicism that is utterly alien to older understandings of protagonist behavior in war movies; and, perhaps

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[1] Adrian Poole, *Tragedy: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford UP), 73.
[2] Clifford Leech, *Tragedy: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 1969), 22-23.

most strangely, becomes one of the most sustained attempts to marry a selective version of existentialist thought to a mainstream film genre. This exceptionally tragic production cycle of war films is an under-acknowledged current in the British representation of war that challenges widespread critical and social conceptions of how war could be differently talked about after the materially and morally exhausting Allied victory of 1945. These films form a surprisingly consistent dissenting counterblast to what Andrew Dawson calls "the pleasure culture of war," the culture industry of films, television shows, comic books, games, and toys that package a heroic version of war for consumers (especially boys) and that, taken together, tell a narrative about Britain's relationship to war in a politically and aesthetically regressive way.[3] To borrow Raymond Williams's terminology, if war films like *The Battle of Britain* and *The Sea Wolves* (1980) can be called "residual" cultural formations in their reliance on tropes (heroic masculinity, nationalist pride, martial prowess through moral superiority, etc.) that fossilized in older historical periods like the 1940s and early 1950s, then some war films (including many tragic, cynical films discussed later in this chapter) of the same period can also be characterized as "emergent" in their attempts at consciously avoiding, deconstructing, reconfiguring, and otherwise moving away from what came before.[4] I use Williams to suggest a historical mutation, but what I am interested in can be put a bit differently: a genre's tendency to hybridize and become self-critical, in tandem with outside cultural and political developments that encourage such experimentations, yields genuine organizational and ontological distinctions to the ways we conceptualize movies.

Although I provide a number of examples of films that stake claims to this confluence of tragedy, cynicism, bleakness, and existentialism, the end of the chapter focuses on a comparative

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[3] Dawson 3-4.
[4] Williams *Marxism and Literature* 121-12.

analysis of representative "emergent" films by American expatriate filmmaker Joseph Losey, who made two movies about war while working in a British context: *King & Country* (1964), a film about the court martial of a deserting soldier set in the trenches of World War I, and *Figures in a Landscape* (1970), a war thriller in which two escaped British P.O.W.s flee a largely unseen and under-described enemy in an unnamed country. Taken in tandem, these films are redolent of larger cultural discourses of decline, while at the same time are specific of a generic shift in war movies away from associations as popular entertainment or propaganda, and towards a liminal position somewhere between genre spectacle and art film.

1. New War Tragedy: The Intellectual and Genre Context

Tragedy describes one of the narrative and experiential concerns that unites this cycle of war films: the tendency, against the grain of popular genre film tradition, to end a story with loss, hopelessness, and defeat. In *The Death of Tragedy* (1961), George Steiner claims that "tragedies end badly," and "the tragic personage is broken by forces which can neither be fully understood nor overcome by rational prudence."[5] Nick Lacey describes the "essence of tragedy" as "the unnecessary death of the good person," a point of structural continuity that necessarily changes with conceptions of goodness.[6] Tragedy has a long history in Britain, especially as a theatrical modality. Richard Hillman notes that tragedy was a flexible concept for British writers of the 16th and 17th centuries, with "its only truly obligatory feature" being "a more-or-less bloody ending."[7] Yet, as much as Shakespeare wrote plays that spoke to his countrymen, his sources were truly international and transhistorical, with Greek, Roman, and French precedent looming

[5] George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1996 [1961]), 8.
[6] Nick Lacey, *Narrative and Genre: Key Concepts in Media Studies* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), 82.
[7] Richard Hillman, *French Origins of English Tragedy* (Manchester: Manchester UP 2010), 5.

especially large.[8] As a live modality that speaks to contemporary concerns, tragedy changes with the points of reference that frame meaning making and with different audiences. Peter Brooks has analyzed Steiner's *The Death of Tragedy*, in which is it argued that Romanticism displaced the classical stability of tragedy, noting that, on the balance, the decline of tragedy in its older form coincides with the rise of melodrama, which retains aspects of this grand modality.[9] That is, film melodramas retain the sense of affective loss felt so deeply in tragedies, though they need not necessarily end in grisly death (often, as in *Mildred Pierce* [1945, Michael Curtiz], they end with a redemptive sense of hope in spite of a previous slog through death and mourning). Tragedy does not go away, but how and where its sentiments are expressed changes with the viable genres of a given historical period. Contra Steiner, Brooks argues that one of the reasons that tragedy (by this point aligned strongly with traditions in Christianity) is eclipsed is the gradual displacement of religion in intellectual life. "For men of the post-sacred universe," he writes, "the mimesis of sacrifice no longer has clear referents. With the loss of sacred symbolism, only the uncertain constructions of dramatic metaphor remain."[10] Despite this shift in experience, the impulses of tragedy are alive, if critically and popularly scattered. Terry Eagleton reads tragedy as a wedge that divides critics of the Left and the Right, with both sides of the discussion paradoxically aligned in their confusion over its centrality to what remains of grand narratives of human capability.[11] Helene P. Foley and Jean E. Howard refer to tragedy as "something horrible, and yet, paradoxically, edifying," continuing that "for those who are morally inclined, it demonstrates the punishment that befalls the proud or the flawed; for those more fatalistic, it suggests humanity's unmerited but inevitable suffering in an indifferent

[8] *Ibid*.
[9] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985), 81.
[10] *Ibid.* 107.
[11] Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 21-22.

universe."[12] As some of the following 20th century war narratives will show, a few of the Christological dimensions of tragic sacrifice remain, even as they gain a subversive or radical function seemingly at odds with the redemptive tradition of which they become aligned.

In this chapter, I engage with tragedy as a progenitor to film melodrama. While most of the films discussed in this chapter could be argued to be melodramas (in their individualized focused on the effects of war and in the heightened ways they treat their subjects), tragedy provides an even more contested and contestable lineage from which to situate a particularly new type of war film. By situating this new mode of cynical, existential film into the history of tragedy, I want to draw renewed attention to a theatrical tradition and context for presenting ideas that has as much to do with a new kind of avant-garde art as it does a film tradition.

Outside of their endings and their connection to the strictures of a larger European narrative tradition, tragedies offer a conceptual journey of fated consequences. Paul Hammond finds that tragedies commonly estrange their protagonists from familiar territory or home ground, in the process destabilizing their very being, sending the self into crisis.[13] Tragedies, even those with restricted settings or few characters, stress the enormity of the world and its institutions. Even when restrained by scope or acting style, tragedies tend to give dignity and gravitas to their characters' struggles. Tragedy exposes the limits of heroism, self-determination, and social compassion. But the interpretation of tragedy cannot be unanimously assumed. For some critics like D.D. Raphael, tragedy is a liberating and uplifting thing that in some senses celebrates the human capacity to act on the sublime forces of the world.[14] The tragic angle that I discuss in the war stories analyzed for the rest of this chapter yield less positive valences, their existential

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[12] Helene P. Foley and Jean E. Howard, "The Urgency of Tragedy Now," *PMLA* 129.4 (2014): 617.
[13] Paul Hammond, *The Strangeness of Tragedy* (New York: Oxford UP, 2009), 4-5.
[14] Eagleton 24-25.

inflections and the social circumstances of their making rendering these texts less available for redemptive readings.

Feature filmmaking in Britain borrowed many of its narrative models from the United States, especially insofar as it generally adopted at least nominally or provisionally happy conclusions over tragic ones.[15] As a recreational activity for the masses often experienced during precious free time, a happy ending ensures an edifying and complete experience of escape. For Horace Newcomb, the endings of narratives are especially important to genre films, as endings provide both the familiar reassurances that producers trust and audiences expect as well as the most contrived repetitions that keeps genre films predominantly conservative in outlook.[16] A limited repertoire of endings is typical of genres, but not essential to their identity. For example, just because most narrative sports movies end with the victory of an underdog team does not mean that films that do not end this way (like, for instance, *Rollerball* [1975, Norman Jewison]) are automatically discounted from the genre. I am not claiming that tragic endings are unheard of in mainstream popular British genre films—think of their place in melodrama, such as the interrupted affair of *Brief Encounter* (1945, David Lean) or the downward fall in Gainsborough Picture's *The Wicked Lady* (1946, Leslie Arliss), where the rich Barbara (Margaret Lockwood) turns to a life of crime and dies as a result. Rather, tragic endings remain suspiciously absent, owing to issues ranging from official censorship to latent ideological propriety, from certain genres at certain time periods.

In the context of Hollywood cinema, Robin Wood defers to Douglas Sirk, calling happy endings "emergency exits" for the spectator, continuing that they "are a barely plausible pretense

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[15] James MacDowell, *Happy Endings in Hollywood Cinema: Cliché, Convention, and the Final Couple* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2013), esp. 64.
[16] Horace Newcomb. "Narrative and Genre." *The SAGE Handbook of Media Studies*, edited by John D. H. Downing, Denis McQuail, Philip Schlesinger and Ellen Wartella (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2004), 425.

that the problems the film has raised are now resolved."[17] Commercial feature films lean towards happy endings, and as much as all war films inherently contain both winning and losing, triumph and defeat, it really was not until the late 1950s and early 1960s that British war films could end with British defeat and self-doubt. By then, the necessary assurances of wartime survival that were standard industry practice in the 1940s had lost their urgency. In the war period, even when history demanded that a film not end in victory, such as with the sinking of the HMS Torrin in *In Which We Serve*, loss could be deferred and deflected into something positive. The destruction of this ship is only temporary, a stepping stone to something better, a rallying point, like the ad-hoc miracle of Dunkirk that leads to bigger and better acts of heroism.

This strand of cinematic valor remains a prototypical one in later decades, but by no means a consensus. Jonathan Rayner argues that during the 1950s, even in the context of subdued, realistic melodramas based on the British experience of war, the exaltation of victory is not a given.[18] With that in mind, British war films throughout the 1950s and 1960s still overwhelming end with triumph for their protagonists. Though tone and mood varies, *Sea of Sand* (1957, Guy Green), *Sink the Bismarck!* (1960, Lewis Gilbert), *The Longest Day* (1962, Ken Annakin et. al), *Zulu*, *The Dirty Dozen* (1967, Robert Aldrich), and *The Battle of Britain* stand as representative examples on a broad spectrum.

That said, in the wake of Kubrick's monumentally important *Paths of Glory* (released a year after Suez), a Hollywood film set in Great War France, about a Colonel (Kirk Douglas) who refuses to give his men an order that would lead to their certain deaths, British cinema likewise embraced stories and ethical positions that ran counter to official wartime propaganda and more

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[17] Robin Wood, "Ideology/Genre/Auteur," *Film Genre Reader IV*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin, TX: U of Texas Press), 80.
[18] Jonathan Rayner, *The Naval War Film: Genre, History and National Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007), 76.

contemporary conservative fantasies, by showing military mismanagement, the refusal to obey superior officers, and the death of the innocent or the conscientious. *Path of Glory's* sense of tragedy—that the sane man who does what is right will be destroyed by the institution and the inflexibility it produces—is structurally repeated in many films, but its tragedy is tempered by other recurring motifs, moods, and intellectual currents. Another film of 1957, *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (directed by David Lean, from Pierre Boulle's novel), is important for its resemblance to the emergent sensibility that I am working to outline. Set in a British P.O.W. camp in Burma, the movie follows a group of captured British soldiers who variously struggle with their Japanese captors. The eponymous bridge, meant to be a tactical aide to the Japanese and, subtextually, as a point of pride for British engineering artistry, meets a comparable fate to most of the film's central players. A commando operation lead by Shears (William Holden) destroys the fragile equilibrium that previously held the different national interests in check. The bridge is demolished in a somewhat boggled action that results in Shears' death, with both the Japanese leader Saito (Sessue Hayakawa) and the British leader Nicholson (Alec Guinness) killed in the fray. What sets this film apart from something like *King & Country* (outlined below) is *Bridge's* relationship to nationalistic heroism. As much as war corrupts, and best laid plans are laid to ruin, the film offers an underdog, if ultimately normalized, voice of British military reason. The tragedy results in cris-crossed interpretations of what duty means in a wartime context. With its memorably upbeat music and the implied nobility of its sentiments (where Nicholson's duty, forthrightness, and old-fashioned sense of right are contrasted with Shears, who lies and acts through subterfuge), *Bridge on the River Kwai* is an exemplary example of a residual war film, marrying the ideas alive in heroic adventure films from earlier in the decade to a delicate and humanly resonant tale of tragic struggle.

Another major film of the period that does not quite fit the schema I am presenting is *A Bridge Too Far* (1977, Richard Attenborough), the all-star recreation of "Operation Market Garden," the allied attempt at entering the Ruhr Valley by way of the Netherlands that, if successful, could have ended the war in Europe several months earlier. The plan was orchestrated by General Montgomery with American and Polish cooperation, but was risky, since it depended upon paratroopers who were initially cut off from supply lines and artillery support. Although aspects of the plan were productive (some territory was secured, and Montgomery retrospectively called it "ninety percent successful"), it is widely regarded as a failure, as the Allies did not capture Arnhem and could not keep progressing into the Ruhr Valley.[19] *A Bridge Too Far*, a United Artists production with an expansive roster of stars, follows the lead of *The Longest Day* in its massive recreation of an event, showing it from all angles, replete with extensive battle sequences. Even though the film ends on a decidedly grim note—allied soldiers captured, a family forced to leave its home (it had been turned into a hospital), Lt. Gen. Browning (Dirk Bogarde) flippantly dismissing Maj. Gen. Urquhart's genuine anger over the operation's failure—it does not go as far as to openly question any of the ethical dimensions of war. So, as much as *A Bridge Too Far* remains a rare feat—a massively budgeted production about failure—it is still wedded to traditional notions of heroism and valor, and represents Operation Market Garden not as a folly so much as an honest misjudgment. In tone, it weds aspects of the very World War II movies that Attenborough himself acted in with the "sense of pessimism" that Dominic Sandbrook sees everywhere in British life in the late 1970s.[20]

[19] Martin Watts, "Operation Market Garden: Strategic Masterstroke or Battle of the Egos?," *History* 98.330 (April 2013): 198.
[20] Dominic Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun: The Battle for Britain, 1974-1977* (London: Penguin, 2013) 87-88.

Most notable for the post-1956 wave of tragic war movies is a pervasive bleakness of mood and mise-en-scène. This bleakness informs the tone of character interactions; describes the landscapes (location and studio-based) in which these war narratives are set; and gives hints as to the general experiential feeling of these movies. Gone, probably forever, is the wartime optimism, the sheer pluck and endurance, of state-sponsored films like *Target for Tonight* or even *Fires Were Started*. But the films under consideration here even eschew the certainty and competence that underpin movies like *The Colditz Story* or *Where Eagles Dare*.

One way to talk about this pervasively bleak sensibility is as a tone. Raymond Durgnat settles on something like tone as a conceptual register for watching films, somewhere between "style" (aesthetic choices of ordering shots, or framing them) and "content" (elements of mise-en-scéne, narrative), but without the hard-and-fast distinction of the two.[21] For Durgnat, whose gift at synthesis allows him to reveal unlikely through-lines between films that outwardly have little in common, tone often overrides national origin or genre as a characteristic that links films to one another. Douglas Pye, writing more recently, gives another account of this notion ("a critical concept" that "has been out of favor for many years"), claiming that tone is "not simply what is being signified in the dramatic material of the film but about the ways in which the film addresses its spectator and implicitly invites us to understand its attitude to its material and the stylistic register it employs."[22] In some ways, what Durgnat and Pye advocate is a spectatorial reaction that invites us to respond to what a film feels like, to the general mood it engenders. Durgnat urges viewers to respect a movies "intuitive intention," as "often the best way for a director to sensitively nuance every aspect of his medium is to forget about 'style' altogether and immerse his conscious mind in his feelings and ideas; just as the thoughtful spectator will often

[21] Raymond Durgnat, *Films and Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967), 26-27, 30.
[22] Douglas Pye, "Movies and Tone," *Close-Up 2* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 7.

arrive at the most sensitive understanding of a film by giving the artists the benefit of any reasonable doubt…"[23] Pye regards tone as an especially important category for the beginnings of films, where "we seem, more often than not, to respond almost instinctively to the various elements in a film's opening that in combination signal its tone—part of the complex but seemingly automatic process which enables us to understand the kind of film we are watching and how it wants us to take it."[24] Tone is something that can both be inferred based on what film artists seem to be saying, and the matter of viewer interpretation, an implicit thing that depends on cultural and historical context.[25]

In the war films discussed in this chapter, spaces and places immediately inform tone. While this quite obviously comes from these films' reliance on the spaces of battle, captivity, and wartime deprivation, it also attaches to a deeper discourse in British culture relating to weather and the effects of industrialization on the landscape. In other words, one of the defining characteristics of British cinema in general, a point of continuous fascination across different periods and genres, is the investment in the psychic and affective heft of environments, spaces, and places, especially as they relate to their obvious opposites (this notion comes up, for example, in the discussion of Powell and Pressburger in Chapter 1). Nikolas Pevsner ties climate to a longer historical lineage in English art, noting that it helps explain everything from color palate, to choice of materials, to temperament.[26] While admitting that reading art as a response to climate conditions creates a somewhat essentialist notion of national character, the point remains that there are traits commonly associated with the English that might just as easy describe a

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[23] Durgnat 30.
[24] Pye 7.
[25] *Ibid*. 8.
[26] Nikolas Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art* (New York: Praeger, 1956), 13-14.

subset of their people (especially as they emerged from years of austerity) as their weather: overcast, damp, chilly, generally temperate but prone to occasional excess.

Climate informs our understandings of landscape as much as the physical characteristics of their topography. In tandem, these spaces inform our attitudes of narrative and character. A senior officer depicted sweating in the desert does not signify the same thing as that officer shivering on a windswept tundra, which certainly does not mean the same thing as a shot of that officer seated, comfortably in front of the fire, in the plush splendor of a gentleman's club. Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner give landscapes a sense of intentionality, characteristics that intuitively yield tones that can comment on other aspects of a film:

> Landscapes, therefore, are not only selective but are never neutral in intention or reception. Depicted landscapes are often symbolic, and frequently contribute to social formation, impacting upon human associations and societal norms. In the sense of landscape as illusionistic space, in which invented features are foregrounded and the topographical is secondary to the evocative, the relationship between individual or group disposition and landscape depiction is even further heightened.[27]

One practical manifestation of this divide is in the longstanding distinction in British cultural criticism between the urban and the rural. In the film *The Country and the City* (1979, Mike Dibb), host Raymond Williams notes that their seeming opposition—what is presented as the gap between a peaceful corn field and Hogarth's *Gin Lane* (1751)—actually reveals a mutual dependency (the profitability of the landed interests of the country need a city of consumers, and vice versa). In his monumental, never-finished historical work *Pandaemonium 1660-1886: The Coming of the Machine as Seen by Contemporary Observers*, Humphrey Jennings chooses and juxtaposes a series of "images," documentary selections that illustrate changes to the British

[27] Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner, "Introduction - Cinema and Landscape," *Cinema and Landscape: Film, Nation and Cultural Geography*, eds. Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2010), 16.

landscape and national character that were born out of the smog of the industrial revolution.[28] The general impression is of a green and pleasant land suddenly beset by grim urbanization. The city/country, urban/rural, polluted/clean distinctions are worth stressing because in the cycle of tragically bleak war films that will be discussed, the binarism does not stand in the familiar way. In these war stories—set outside the isles, in the far corners of the earth—rural expanses lose their serenity. War happens everywhere, largely outside of the major metropolises. Fields are no longer verdant, but rather tactically unsuitable spaces that house inhospitable trenches. Forests are not symbols of plenty or nature's bounty, so much as places of paranoid wandering and possible subterfuge.

Thus, bleakness manifests itself in many ways, from the environmental to the purely psychological realm. Contrast the orderliness and inevitable sense of winning behind war films of the 1940s and early 1950s with the calculated disorder of *Cross of Iron* (1977), Sam Peckinpah's British-German co-production that illustrates late, desperate days of World War II from a German perspective, in which war is a grey stew of ugly options and moral impasses set amidst the ruinous battlefields of the Eastern Front. A grim mood often comes from design choices and location. Mid-to-late 1960s films about World War I dwell more specifically on the environments of the Great War than anything in the previous half-century: the Stephen Weeks short *1917* manages to meld the inarticulate muddiness of trench warfare into a constricted set—an abandoned zinc mine—that is simultaneously claustrophobic and expansive, while Losey's *King & Country*, despite being filmed entirely in Shepperton Studios, depicts the trenches as flooding rabbit warrens, where corpses lie just under the freshly disturbed layers of earth.[29] In

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[28] See Humphrey Jennings, *Pandaemonium 1660-1886: The Coming of the Machine as Seen by Contemporary Observers*, eds. Mary-Lou Jennings and Charles Madge (New York: The Free Press, 1985).
[29] Stephen Weeks, *Ghost Story* DVD Booklet (London: Nucleus Films), n.p.

one sense, this bleakness picks up on a general theme from 1950s war cinema, in which Christine Geragthy detects a view of the wilderness (and the environment more generally) as something that must be fought against.[30] But, the twist of this new tragic modality is that spaces of wartime suffering can no longer be overcome: in the film version of *The Long, the Short, and the Tall* (*Jungle Fighters*, Leslie Norman, 1961), a hut in the Burmese jungle accelerates the inevitable dissolution of an isolated patrol of soldiers, while, in Losey's *Figures in a Landscape*, the vast, panoramic vistas of an open mountain range are dwelled upon as much for their sublime beauty as for their tactical insufficiency (without proper cover, the film's protagonists could die at any moment). *The Block House* (1973, Clive Rees) takes this to a visual and conceptual extreme: the film is about a group of men, once prisoners of the Nazis, who become trapped in an underground bunker during the D-Day invasion, and are destined to die of boredom and despair in the darkness. Tragedy is consonant with bleakness: each of the films just mentioned ends in some kind of death, either shown or implied.

The corollary to this tonal bleakness is an attitude: the development of an all-pervasive cynicism, a crisis in confidence and faith in which the soldier-protagonists of these films recognize the deep flaws in the hierarchical and nationalist system of which they are a part. Such cynicism works in tandem with war tragedies, since the films tend to imply, to varying degrees, that the hierarchical system of the military is as much to blame for the deaths of its own men as the stated enemy. L.E. Navia describes the cynic as "someone who is unduly critical and suspicious, apathetic about certain issues and rebellious in response to others, selfish, and indifferent toward traditions and accepted beliefs, and unconcerned with the public welfare. The

[30] Geragthy 180-181.

cynic is often viewed as a person who has severed all ties with his social context."[31] Samantha Vice regards cynicism as an ambivalent character trait, in which the cynic's negativism and pessimism are tempered by his or her "unflinching honesty and realism" in calling out injustices.[32] As a concept traceable to a Greek philosophical position, cynicism has a long history in Western thought, even though its use to describe people who are "sneering fault-finders" comes from the early 17th century (in other words, its usage gains descriptive heft in the early modern period).[33] Sharon A. Stanley argues that cynicism provides a through-line between Enlightenment thought and our contemporary moment: "what travels under the name 'postmodern cynicism' comes not from a rejection of enlightenment principles but rather from their amplification and ultimate self-subversion."[34] To be cynical is to lose faith in the foundations of cultural and social life, such that the subject rejects familiar trajectories of success and cohesion.

Such cynicism, it should be noted, is not limited to tragic war films, but is a prevailing attitude in other kinds of narratives of the period. Many of the ironic comedies mentioned in Chapter 2 address their audience from the skeptical position of the cynic. One trend across the board is the stance, articulated on the Right and the Left, that governmental institutions had become increasingly shabby and dishonest. Dominic Sandbrook speaks about the early 1970s in particular as a time in which a public culture of corruption dominated interpretations of public institutions. He nominates Lindsay Anderson's *O Lucky Man!* as exemplary in its exposure of

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[31] L.E. Nadia, "Cynicism." *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 2, ed. Maryanne Cline Horowitz (Detroit: Scribners, 2005), 525-526.
[32] Samantha Vice, "Cynicism and Morality," *Ethical Theory and Modern Practice* 14 (2011): 169.
[33] "cynic, adj. and n.". *OED Online*. September 2014. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/46638?redirectedFrom=cynic (accessed September 25, 2014).
[34] Sharon A. Stanley, *French Enlightenment and the Emergence of Modern Cynicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), 160.

"corruption [as] one of the cliches of national cultural life."[35] Anderson's film—the second in his Mick Travis trilogy, which loosely charts the fortunes of a man who variously engages with British hypocrisy—is by turns a picaresque comedy and a Brechtian expose.[36] In *O Lucky Man!*, every figure of authority (in government, science, law enforcement, or religion) is corrupt to some degree, while those with no power—the overworked housewife, the gigging musician—are browbeaten enough to either contemplate suicide or drop out of public life altogether. Cynicism happens in war movies that do not overtly play as tragedies. In the comic *Hannibal Brooks* (discussed at greater length in Chapter 2), Stephen "Hannibal" Brooks turns his back on his life as P.O.W. and as a British soldier by escaping over the Alps to Switzerland with his pet elephant in tow (Brooks, who had been assigned duty at a German zoo, excuses himself from the war altogether, preferring the company of his animal pal to his comrades in arms).

Most illuminating is the pervasive mistrust of *Play Dirty* (1968, Andre de Toth), in which British soldiers in World War II more-or-less have to be bribed into helping a British Petroleum oil engineer called Douglas (Michael Caine) who is charged with securing the crude reserves of a compromised desert town. Here is a film where communication is dead on arrival because of world weariness and jealousy, where the once idealized British soldier has more in common with an opportunistic mercenary than the selfless servant of nation. Many of the characters in the film are cynical because of their having witnessed loss: in the world of *Play Dirty*, failure, not victory, is the norm, and the waste of resources, intelligence, and men is built into the cost of doing business. *Play Dirty* remains a tragedy of a sort, since by the film's end, Douglas and

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[35] Dominic Sandbrook, *State of Emergency: The Way We Were: Britain, 1970-1974* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin, 2010), 514-515.

[36] To be fair, Colin MacCabe has argued that the film is an ineffectual approximation of Brecht's ideas. See MacCabe 26.

Leech (Nigel Davenport) work together, and by the time the two attempt to return behind British lines (their mission a failure), they are shot, mistaken for German soldiers.

For a film to be both tragic and cynical seems slightly oxymoronic. How can movies with angry, antisocial characters elicit the necessary empathy and sympathy that tragedy traditionally hails from its viewers? The distinction lies in how and where a narrative positions its cynical voice in relation to its tragic outcome. In something like *Play Dirty*, the film reads as more cynical than tragic because of the dysfunction of its central characters, while in a film like *King & Country*, the central characters (Hamp and Hargreaves) move away from cynicism by the film's end (even as similar attitudes remain a part of the personalities of more minor characters, like the officers who ultimately send Hamp to his death). There is something like a sliding scale that can account both for a film's projected tragic impact and for its degree of anti-social, anti-institutional criticism. So, far from mutually excluding one another, tragedy and cynicism can be regarded as concepts that relate to one another in contextually specific, continuously negotiated ways.

However, many of the new attitudes and stylistic choices of the cycle of films I will examine—and here I am implying that there are a set of films that all inhabit this seemingly improbable space of being simultaneously tragic, cynical, and bleak, to varying degrees—are traceable to the British reception of existentialism, an on-going process of digestion and popularization that begins in the 1950s but becomes increasingly commonplace throughout the 1960s, even as existentialism falls out of favor with the intelligentsia. In brief, existentialism is a strand of mainly French philosophical inquiry that flourished in the immediate post-1945 period that investigates the individual's struggle against larger forces—an uncaring universe, coercive

social totalities—and his or her quest to maintain free will.[37] According to Fred Newman, for Jean-Paul Sartre and other existentialists, existence precedes essence, subjectivity is the ground zero for experience, and humankind becomes the effective center of the universe.[38] As proponents Sartre, Martin Heidegger, and Gabriel Marcel were not publishing in English, their ideas reached England on delay. Sartre, especially, was well-poised to benefit from the changing intellectual landscape of the postwar years. For Nicholas Hewitt, Sartre was aligned with a new generation of thinkers, and defined his world view out of his connection to the French Resistance (despite being an underdog nationalist movement, the resistance embodied, in miniature, aspects of existential struggle).[39] Like Marxism, existentialism remained a lively, if ultimately historically contingent, intellectual position that engaged, challenged, and occasionally enraged a generation of Western artists and writers. In Britain, contemporary fiction, drama, and (on a delay) film proved key sites of popularization and dissemination.

The novelist/philosopher Iris Murdoch introduced many British readers to Sartre through a monograph and several essays, though she remained critical of his thought.[40] In "The Existentialist Political Myth," Murdoch noted existentialism's political ambivalence:

> I have been suggesting that existentialism can be seen as a mythological representation of our present political dilemma. I think the Marxists are right when they say that a powerful reason for the popularity of existentialism is that it makes a universal myth of the plight of those who reject capitalism but who cannot adjust themselves to the idea of socialism, and who seek a middle way. They seek it, the Marxists might add, in doubt and despair, finding no genuine political road in the centre, but only turnings away to the left and the right.[41]

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[37] "Existentialism," *The Bloomsbury Dictionary of English Literature*, ed. Marion Wynne-Davies (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), accessed 18 Aug 2014, Credo Reference.
[38] Fred Newman, "The Origins of Sartre's Existentialism," *Ethics* 76.3 (1966): 183.
[39] Nicholas Hewitt, "The Selling of Sartre: Existentialism and Public Opinion, 1944-7," *Journal of Romance Studies* 6.1-2 (2006): 10-11
[40] Peter Conradi, "Preface," *Iris Murdoch: Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Peter Conradi (London: Penguin, 1998), xii.
[41] Iris Murdoch, "The Existentialist Political Myth," *Iris Murdoch: Existentialists and Mystics*, 141.

Later, Murdoch concludes that existentialism "offers no answer," though it remains attractive in its attempt "to preserve the values of an innocent and vital individualism."[42] This individualism is central to the way in which existentialism gets popularized in narratives. The experience of the individual hounded by competing ideologies, new modes of social control, and their own self-doubts proved a pervasive theme, almost a ready-made narrative trajectory that found a natural audience in consumers whose lives were increasingly beset by new technologies and cultural experiences. This severing from community carries over to religious attitudes (the "death of God" as signalled by long-term declines in Church attendance) and contributes to a new, gnawing sense of social atomization.[43]

Young turk Colin Wilson, self-proclaimed genius and autodidact author of *The Outsider* (1956), introduced a generation to the existentialist notion of the man at odds with society, in a series of exciting but sloppily made books that won him a few best-selling notices, the ambivalent honor of being an "Angry Young Man," and a pitying critical establishment that took him less and less seriously with each publication.[44] For cultural critic Kenneth Allsop, Wilson, along with Bill Hopkins and Stuart Holroyd, were on the political right of the existentialist cause, situating their ideas as a pseudo-authoritarian will-to-power that could liberate the misunderstood artist, the eponymous "outsider" from banality.[45] These "Neo-Nietzscheans" became associated with the ideas of such politically differentiated "angries" as Kingsley Amis, John Osborne, and Doris Lessing not through some rigorous intellectual kinship, but rather as they were a group of

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[42] *Ibid*. 144.
[43] On the decline of C.O.E. attendance, see "Church of England Attendance," *Christian Research*, accessed 9 Feb 2015, http://www.christian-research.org/religious-trends/anglican-uk/church-of-england-attendance/.
[44] Nicolas Tredell, "Colin Wilson," *British Novelists since 1960: Second Series*, ed. Merritt Moseley (Detroit: Gale Research, 1998), accessed 9 Feb 2-15, Literature Resource Center.
[45] Kenneth Allsop, *The Angry Decade: A Survey of the Cultural Revolt of the 1950s* (London: Peter Owen, 1964), 30.

writers, all of whom were associated with post-war, post-Austerity malaise, that purportedly spoke for a younger generation.[46] Wilson's existentialism is peculiar, clearly the creation of an idiosyncratic thinker, and evidently the work of a man who abandoned rationalism in favor of the occult and supernatural. While Wilson agrees with Sartre's *Nausea* (1938) and its fundamental portrayal of the world as a realm of experience beset by absurdity (Wilson succinctly notes that "the starting point of existentialism is the alien-ness of the world,") his verdict is far different from his contemporaries.[47] For him, existentialism is life-affirming, as it moves the individual from disgust "towards the mystical acceptance of everything."[48] Wilson's "New Existentialism" is his first attempt at a theory of everything: "the existentialist contends that all values are connected with the problems of human existence, the stature of man, the purpose of life."[49] To read Wilson is to encounter something of an intellectual conspiracy theorist. Ken MacLeod has usefully characterized Wilson's method as trying "to make everything fit together into a coherent story," a task he enthusiastically championed, despite the one intellectual skill he lacked: "a training in critical thinking."[50] Whatever his flaws as a thinker—and they are legion—Wilson was undeniably popular for a brief period of time, and in retrospect is an important figure in British irrationalist thought, caught as he was between philosophy and mysticism.

Samuel Beckett, and Joseph Losey's collaborator Harold Pinter, were two playwrights who modified existential ideas as one part of a large set of theatrical innovations that shook the London stage. While neither Beckett nor Pinter's major works of the late 1950s and early 1960s (*Waiting for Godot* [1953], *Krapp's Last Tape* [1958], *Happy Days* [1961], *The Birthday Party*

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[46] John A. Wiegel, *Colin Wilson* (Boston: Twayne, 1975), 28.
[47] Colin Wilson, "Existential Criticism," *Eagle and Earwig* (London: John Baker, 1965), 58.
[48] *Ibid*. 59.
[49] *Ibid*. 84.
[50] Ken MacLeod, "Strange Life," *Aeon.co*, 23 Dec 2013, accessed 26 Sep 2014, http://aeon.co/magazine/culture/colin-wilson-the-permanent-outsider/.

[1957], *The Caretaker* [1958]) can be classed as tragedy, all of these plays were first staged in a milieu in which aspects of the legacy of existentialism loom large. For Beckett, as with Sartre, dramatic tension comes from absurd incongruities. In *Waiting for Godot*, first staged in London in 1955 in a production directed by Peter Hall, such existentially-inflected absurdities include a human-centric scale of time revealed through the staging of boredom and a looming sense of expectation and anticipation (tinged with powerlessness).[51] Pinter, whose work also gets classed with the absurd, made a mark by staging plays of disjointed communication, where the central characters (as in *The Birthday Party*) seem to be aggressively talking through and around one another. Naturalistic being and realistic style are out of place in his world, where the old guarantees of human interaction seem to be dead. The novelist, historian and playwright David Caute used existential themes in his *Confrontation* trilogy (1970-1971), a set of books about the coming to consciousness of an English professor.[52] Caute is a key figure in the discursive spread of existentialism from a British perspective. A Marxist with experience writing about blacklisting, he was approached by the Losey estate to write a biography of the director. While Losey is a key figure in this new mode of war representation, where grand modes like tragedy and the aesthetic conceits of European art cinema meet a popular genre best known for its nationalism and dogged relationship to established values, he is by no means the sole practitioner.

[51] Peter Hall, "Godot Almighty," *The Guardian*, 24 Aug 2005, accessed 25 Sep 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2005/aug/24/theatre.beckettat100.
[52] N. Tredell, "Caute, John David," *Continuum Encyclopedia of British Literature*, eds. Steven Serafin and Valerie Grosvenor Myer, accessed 30 Aug 2014, Credo Reference.

2. Tragedy, Existentialism and War: Some Key Texts

Expressions of dissatisfaction with military life and war seem to generally circulate first in literary forms like novelistic prose and theatre, only latterly spreading as moving images. As with most war cinema and television from this period, the great majority of works are adapted from literary sources. In Britain, post-1956 theatre proved an especially important place to incubate such ideas. With increasingly young and anti-establishment audiences, directors and impresarios that leaned to the Left but who were old enough to have either enlisted or done National Service, and expressions of empire and imperial decline still everywhere in the news, plays by debuting playwrights spoke eloquently to increasingly critical attitudes to war.

The English Stage Company of the Royal Court Theatre in London's Sloane Square, fresh off the critical successes of John Osborne's 1957 debuts of *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer*, quickly became synonymous with most Left currents in narrative theatre. Their 1959 season contains two new plays with military themes, both directed by Lindsay Anderson: Willis Hall's *The Long, the Short and the Tall* (which ran in January) and John Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* (which had a short engagement in late October).[53] Hall and Arden, along with Charles Wood and John Antrobus, are probably the most incisive interpreters of war themes on the post-1945 British stage. Of the two Royal Court productions of 1959, Hall's play was by far the more successful in box office terms, with *Musgrave* a "box office disaster," only playing to a 21% audience (given the Court's size, this means small audiences of around 100 per performance).[54]

[53] Richard Findlater, ed. *At the Royal Court: 25 Years of the English Stage Company* (New York: Grove Press, 1981), 206.
[54] *Ibid*. 44.

In spite of its initial unpopularity on the stage *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* contains many of the ideas that typify the emerging trend in tragedy in that the institutional context of warmongering is criticized for its implicit destruction of communities. *Musgrave* is set in the industrial north in the later part of Victoria's reign and takes place during an extended coal miner's strike, in the midst of a harsh winter and near-starvation conditions (it is, in a word, bleak). The play—an "unhistorical parable" that is "realistic" but not "naturalistic"—concerns the sudden appearance of Serjeant Musgrave, an apparently pious officer, and his men, who claim to enter town on the pretext of recruiting men for the army.[55] The social context of Musgrave is similar to the situation offered in Richardson's later *Charge of the Light Brigade*, where the army uses drink and the promise of escape from total poverty to coerce men into joining up. The fortunes of the eponymous character in *Serjeant Musgrave's Danc*e unravel due to the increased unrest of the town, ultimately shattering because of the sudden death of Private Sparky, who falls onto his own bayonet. By the end, Musgrave holds the town hostage with a machine gun and reveals his true intentions: he and his men want to take the lives of townsfolk as revenge for the loss of his comrades, who died protecting British colonial possessions (in his Old Testament view of the world, the sacrifices of serve should demand a proportionate sacrifice on the home front). Before this vengeance can be achieved, cavalry rides into town and brings Musgrave to justice. He and his men had been wanted for desertion and murder. The play ends with Musgrave in jail, facing his own probable death. In the play, the army is not presented as a desirable alternative to the toil of heavy industry, and despite the nominally positive resolution of the play's main problem—the renegade Musgrave is brought to justice—it ultimately offers no solutions about labor unrest, poverty, or the redemptive potential of patriotic service. *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* was adapted for ITV's "Play of the Week" strand in 1961, with Arden's

[55] John Arden, *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* (New York: Grove Press, 1962), 5.

involvement and a strong central performance by soon to be star Patrick McGooghan. John Wyver has assessed it as a radical adaptation that seemed well received, but notes that the significance of its political message (relating to the corruption of the army as an institution of social justice) was not apparent until much later.[56]

The Long the Short and the Tall was also adapted (but as a feature film) in 1961. Its more recent setting and its closer connection to the psychological effects of combat help explain its initial popularity, as does the prestige of its original theatrical cast, an ensemble that included Peter O'Toole and Robert Shaw at their most ascendant. While these two did not stick around for the film, which was rebranded as *Jungle Fighters* in North America, the feature did boast Laurence Harvey and Richard Harris, two among that young generation of actors who had found consistent success by decade's end. Playwright Willis Hall, who served in the army between 1947 and 1952, grounds the production in some recognizable sense of psychological realism, but allows the almost constant bickering, casual racism, and selfishness of the central patrol reach such soaring heights as to render it fantastic.[57] Tony Howard calls *The Long the Short and the Tall* "a revelation in its day," such that it marks a starting point for a trend in anti-heroic tragedy.[58]

Despite filming at Elstree Studios, Leslie Norman's film convincingly replicates the claustrophobia of the Malayan jungle, presenting a world beset by constant rain, dense foliage, and networked caves, an alien landscape that besieges the seemingly commonsensical and normalized behaviors of the British soldiers, thereby presenting a situation in which the shared

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[56] John Wyver, "*Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* (Granada for ITV, 1961)," *Screen Plays: British Theatre on Television*, accessed 28 Sep 2014, http://screenplaystv.wordpress.com/2012/11/12/serjeant-musgraves-dance-granada-for-itv-1961/.

[57] "Hall, Willis," *Contemporary Theatre, Film and Television*, eds. Linda S. Hubbard and Owen O'Donnell. Vol. 6. (Detroit: Gale Research, 1989), 175-176.

[58] Tony Howard, "Hall, Willis," *The Continuum Companion to Twentieth Century Theatre*, ed. Colin Chambers (London: Continuum, 2002), 338.

assumptions of a national heritage no longer explain and justify the effects of war. The film dwells on regional differences and class tensions to suggest that there is no such thing as a common cultural core to unite the British men, a distinction that is never afforded the Japanese. A similar dichotomy is later introduced into many American films set during the Vietnam War, where American cultural specificity (and competing ideas about its importance and what it means) leads to hubristic military defeat.

The central goal of the isolated British patrol is to return to base, despite their being lost and presumably cut off by rival Japanese soldiers. Already bickering amongst one another, things really begin to go wrong as the men capture a lone Japanese patrolman. Renegade Private Bamforth (Laurence Harvey), who is established early on as the most incendiary character (he may be the most cynical character in any British film made to that point), befriends the prisoner, whom they call Tojo (Kenji Takaki), a sympathy that especially angers Corporal Johnstone (Richard Harris) and Liet. Corporal Macleish (Ronald Fraser). The men fight with one another until they try to make a break for where they think their camp to be. In the process they kill Tojo and disperse. Within minutes, they are surrounded by Japanese soldiers and are massacred. By the end, only Private Whitaker (David McCallum)—the man most responsible for Tojo's death—remains, now (ironically) placed in the same position once occupied by the man he killed. The film's whole narrative is about individuals who are variously alienated from the group to which they belong.

On television, the most important series to explore themes at the intersection of cynicism, tragedy, and existentialism, though leaning more heavily to the Beckettian absurd, is ITV's *The Prisoner* (1967-1968). Created by and starring Patrick McGoohan, *The Prisoner* is a paranoid

Cold War fantasy that turns the conventional television thriller on its head.[59] A secret agent resigns his post in outrage, is captured by an obscure, shadowy organization, and is held captive in a seaside town, with his masters constantly applying physical and psychological pressure. McGoohan's agent is, oxymoronically, an heroic failure. He does all he can to damage the village, remains cooperative with others only to the degree that he can use them to achieve his goals of escape, and is stubbornly resistant to the apparently comfortable life that the village can offer him. As an existential hero, his motives remain pure—free will and individual choice must be upheld in the face of collective control—but his ontological dilemma supersedes his agency (he never definitively escapes the village, even in the deliberately ambiguous final episode, "Fall Out"). His cynicism is extreme. John Thomas McGuire refers to him as "an extraordinarily cranky individual, frequently demonstrating an irascibility and, at times, a fierce temper."[60] The show, largely filmed on location in Northern Wales at Portmeiron, contrasts the colorful eclecticism of the village proper with the grim, alienating beaches of the coast. Piers D. Britton and Simon J. Barker describe the look of the show as a "closed system," suggesting that its repetition feeds into the allegorical trap at the center of the show.[61] Chris Gregory argues that the show concludes (with the agent, Number 6, apparently assuming the role of Number 1, his own tormenter) as "an eternal 'cyclic' text," showing that "The Prisoner's struggle—that is, the struggle of every one of us to maintain our individuality within society—will always continue."[62] Like other Cold War displacements of conventional warfare (where secrets, duplicity, and symbolic forms of conflict supercede the immediacy of uniformed combat), *The Prisoner*

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[59] Piers D. Britton and Simon J. Barker, *Reading Between Designs: Visual Imagery and the Generation of Meaning in The Avengers, The Prisoner, and Doctor Who* (Austin, TX: U of Texas Press, 2003), 95.
[60] John Thomas McGuire, "A Mentor-Protege Relationship?: Orson Welles, Patrick McGoohan, and The Prisoner Television Series," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 31.7 (2014): 650.
[61] Britton and Barker 99.
[62] Chris Gregory, *Be Seeing You…: Decoding The Prisoner* (Luton: John Libbey, 1997), 177.

condenses whole regimes of philosophical and ideological belief onto a relatively small scale conflict whose implications are monumental. While the series does not play as tragedy in the sense suggested by many of the other films explored in this chapter, it gestures towards many of the same attitudes about an individual's ability to affect change to authoritarian systems.

Play Dirty belongs to the same angry, deliberately unlikable and anti-heroic strand of British war representation as *The Long, The Short, and The Tall.* It offers a neat contrast to *The Prisoner*, in that both play up the existential themes of frustration and failure, yet the two take diverging approaches to audience sympathy and identification. Despite McGoohan's irascibility in *The Prisoner*, his endlessly repeated bids at freedom seem a noble fight, with his constant failure to escape and eventual reversion to prisoner status at the end of each episode coming across as tragic. By contrast, *Play Dirty* features wall-to-wall criminals, smugly superior officers, and moody individualists, none of whose attempts to get ahead read as even remotely morally defensible. The film, which Howard Hughes characterizes as "an ultra-cynical remake of *Sea of Sand*," is certainly among the most corrupt and opportunistic films about war ever produced for mainstream consumption.[63] As with its characterizations, so to with its tone: Jeremy Havardi has described *Play Dirty* as "unremittingly bleak from start to finish," a statement that covers everything from environment (desert wasteland) to relationships (after a captured German nurse [Vivian Pickles] helps save one of Douglas and Leech's men, she is the target of an attempted gang rape, and dies in captivity along with her patient).[64] Caine's Douglas is a frustrated loner, a BP officer who must accompany a gang of criminals to an oil depot in order to blow it up. His introversion is visualized in the film by his preference for chess instead of conversation, while

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[63] Howard Hughes, *Where Eagles Dared: The Filmgoers' History of World War II* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 90.
[64] Jeremy Havardi, *Projecting Britain at War: The National Character in British World War II Films* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Pub, 2014), 176.

his unease comes across most when he tries to give orders to his men, who laugh him into backing down. There is some motivation to this distrust of Douglas: everything he conceives or executes proves a colossal blunder, either resulting in lost equipment or the threat of death. Screenwriters Melvyn Bragg and Lotte Colin therefore eschew conventional genre wisdom—provide a likeable protagonist whose aims and sentiments are in line with the imagined commonsensical beliefs of the audience—in favor of a perverse kind of experiential authenticity. As Paul Fussell points out in *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (1989, a study based on as much his survey of war writing and culture as his own experiences as a soldier):

> Bringing to bear their instinct for civilized irony the most intelligent contemporary writers have perceived in blunders, errors, and accidents something very close to the essence of the Second World War. To disclose the way someone blundered then is to hint at the crucial imperfections built into the normal or Cold War modern world, a world dependent on predictability, technology, and bureaucracy. The world survives only by assuming that error is not going to launch the rockets or detonate the hydrogen bombs. This is to say that wartime blunders, awful as the worst of them are, constitute a thematic gift to the satirist and moralist intent on exhibiting instructively the uncertainty of the human situation.[65]

Play Dirty is not necessarily a moralistic film. It provides no positive counterexamples to the selfishness and boneheadedness it documents. Nor—with the exception of the ending and the bittersweet reveal about the targeted depot (upon closer inspection, it is a decoy built out of flimsy materials)—is it an especially ironic film. It is, however, zeitgeist-defining in its almost unwavering opinion that war is a series of blunders, near-misses, and instances of bad timing. *Play Dirty* is war as serious farce, its seemingly free-thinking participants expertly manipulated by hierarchically dominant puppet masters like Colonel Masters (Nigel Green) and Brig. Blore (Harry Andrews), the officers who disingenuously lead all the other men to their deaths and then

[65] Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), 26.

celebrate the end of their blunders with whiskey and cigars. The anti-heroic angle of existential war drama, therefore, is expressed through accidents (whatever the intentions of those events might have been) that combine with a pervasive cynicism in personal motivations, which together question the moral and collectivist spirit of previous conceptions of war.

The Block House is among the grimmest World War II films ever made. The movie is based on a novel by Jean-Paul Clebert, itself based on an almost impossibly unlikely news story. A German man and his five companions were trapped for five years in an army food and supply warehouse deep underground near the town of Babie Doly in Poland. The men, who were looting, were trapped after retreating Nazi troops blasted the entrance shut.[66] Only two of the men survived their several years underground, with one dying almost immediately upon rescue.[67] Clebert's novel and Rees' film retain many of the details from this strange historical event, yet change the particulars to suit different audiences. In book and film, the men are an international group of prisoners of war who are working at a camp by the Normandy coast. While not explicitly about a British experience of war, the movie features a mainly British cast. As the allies start the large-scale D-Day assault, a group of prisoners take refuge in the camp's block house. Bombs seal them in this lightless cave, but their initial despair is alleviated when they find that they are entombed with nearly unlimited supplies of food and wine (though only as much water as seeps through the walls, and a store of candles that is eventually exhausted). The movie was shot entirely on location in Guernsey, with the majority set in dark, claustrophobic interiors (such is the film's commitment to dank hopelessness that its many candlelit scenes have only the minimal in additional lighting, so that many of the film's moving moments are an unintelligible muddle). Michael Starr does not mince words when he writes that "this eventful effort was

[66] "Buried Alive for Six Years," *Eugene Register-Guard* 18 Jun 1951, 1.
[67] "In Babie Doly," *Time* 57.26 (6/25/51), accessed 14 Oct 2014, Academic Search Premier.

underscored by poor direction, dismal cinematography, and a horrendously butchered soundtrack that obliterated most of the film's dialogue."[68] With the exception of its premiere at the Berlin Film Festival in 1973, *The Block House* was not released for general distribution, and therefore does not figure heavily into histories of the war film.[69] As with its subject, the film itself was all but buried until it made its way to home video formats.

Peter Sellers plays Rouqeut, one of the imprisoned men who staves off his lingering existential crisis by writing poetry on the walls of their prison. A former teacher, he uses the memory of culture and art to stay sane for as long as he can. Even so, he eventually commits suicide. On the other end of the spectrum is Aufret (Peter Vaughan), formerly the P.O.W. camp kapo, who becomes a raving, paranoid drunk. The most dynamic character is Grabinski (Jeremy Kemp), who initiates a gay relationship with one of the other prisoners (this may well be the first straightforwardly homosexual relationship in a British film about war that is not played for laughs). Beyond the film's pervasive darkness—even the exterior sequences stress the overwhelming cloudiness of the skies—the movie cultivates an unrelentingly stultifying mood, a feeling borne out both in shot selection and through camera movements. An early tracking shot shows men walking through a prison yard, but does so from behind barbed wire. The main characters first appear on screen in their prison barracks. The scope of the narrative is such that the film moves from comparably open, visually legible spaces like barracks and a prison yard to darker, more confined spaces. The final shots of the film take place against walls with only the faintest illumination. Starr describes the film as nurturing a "suffocating atmosphere" (in this way, it contrasts with the endless desert wasteland of *Play Dirty*).[70] Ed Sikov reads the film

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[68] Michael Starr, *Peter Sellers: A Film History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Pub 1991), 170.
[69] Graham Stark, *Remembering Peter Sellers* (London: Robson Books, 1990), 156-157; Ed Sikov, *Mr. Strangelove: A Biography of Peter Sellers* (New York: Hyperion, 2002), 330.
[70] Starr 171.

against its historical failure, situating it into that strange place between art cinema and genre product: "It's a social drama, cerebral but raw—part Samuel Beckett, part Samuel Fuller."[71] *The Block House* is so mired in the depressing effects of war that it fails to even show the few happy aspects of its ending. While undoubtedly a tragedy—most of the trapped die, only one survives to tell the tale—there is no triumphant rescue, no cathartic emergence back into daylight. The film ends with scrolling text recounting the events just witnessed.

This serious strand of war cinema uses military culture and the state of war to examine related social issues that are often sidestepped or ignored in dominant cultural artifacts. As hinted by *The Block House*, this tragic, existential type of war film frequently turns to issues of gender and sexuality, using the basic conceit of placing deviance against the normative form of sexuality historically associated with the martial masculinity of war heroism. Although war films have historically been dominated by stories by and for men, the culture of critique suggested by these new existential war movies suggests that tragedy is not totally uninterested in women, and in fact provides a structure well suited to pointing out sexism and inequality.[72] Both *The Triple Echo* (1972, Michael Apted) and *Conduct Unbecoming* (1975, Michael Anderson) are about the military's struggle to regulate masculinity and femininity. Of the two, *Conduct Unbecoming*, a film adapted by Robert Enders from a play by Barry England, has more of a pedigree of quality costume drama. This movie, which was produced by Michael Deeley and Barry Spikings for British Lion, is the story of the military trial of a junior officer called Millington (James Faulkner) accused of sexually assaulting the widow (Susannah York) of a deceased regimental officer called Scarlett at an outpost on the North-West Frontier between India and Pakistan. Millington, who wants to leave the imperial service anyway, and who was exceptionally drunk

[71] Sikov 319.
[72] Foley and Howard 627.

when the alleged event took place, at first admits his guilt. Fellow junior officer Drake (Michael York) is charged with defending Millington, and in the course of his investigation becomes disillusioned with the code of honor that governs the regiment. Drake uncovers a cascading series of lies (in which even Marjorie Scarlett, the victim, is complicit) in which officers enact ritualistic revenge and sexual humiliation on women who do not remain true to their marriages (even if their husbands are dead). Sue Harper and Justin Smith argue that the film's revelations go beyond a critique of military doublethink, in the process exposing deeper gendered anxieties about the place of women in society. The scandal, in which Major Lionel Roach (Richard Attenborough) acts in vengeance for his dead comrades and makes women behave like pigs while prodding them with a sword,

> is figured rather as clandestine, ritualistic male abuse in which the wounded females are complicit victims who undergo symbolic 'correction' in acts of vengeful compensation for male impotence. Ultimately, the tension between this psycho-sexual violence and the codes of military honour destabilises the whole narrative, for it reveals a deep-seated anxiety about the potential of female sexual power to undermine male camaraderie. The film is ambivalent in the conflict it presents between regret for the passing of the old order and fear of the female principle which threatens it.[73]

What happens to the regiment—the sexual abuse, the cover-up, and Lionel's forced suicide upon exposure—is framed as a tragedy in that the film signals the symbolic death of the ethical code of British military. *Conduct Unbecoming* has two cynical characters, Millington and Drake, who at different times voice strong dissent of the institution to which they are about to be initiated. Millington begins the film at odds with the ritualistic life of the officer class, but learns a sense of honor through Drake's ceaseless pursuit of the truth. Drake begins the film wanting to do good by the military, but over the course of his investigation into its entrenched silences and selective sense of right and wrong, becomes angry with its duplicity to the point of resigning his

[73] Sue Harper and Justin Smith, *British Film Culture of the 1970s: The Boundaries of Pleasure* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2011), 149.

post. The movie, whose principal photography lasted a scant four weeks, begins with the opulent, period-correct interiors of the officer's mess, but as the film's conspiracy is revealed, director Anderson shifts the look of the set to accentuate the darkness and stultifying overtones of the space.[74] Harper and Smith chalk this up to the speed with which the film was made, claiming that "the film's economy of style, and almost unrelievedly claustrophobic interiors, are a tribute to Michael Anderson's experienced directorial efficiency, rather than any investment of creative flair."[75] Despite this, the film accentuates the embodied physical and psychological terrors of some of its characters: Mrs. Scarlett's frantic recovery from her assault is captured through a point-of-view camera that regards the monstrous faces of the men in the regiment, while Lionel's realization of defeat is shown through flashbacks and agonizing close-ups (a credit to Attenborough's ability to act mental instability as much as Anderson's flair as a filmmaker). Ultimately, though, Harper and Smith's sense that the film does not go far enough suggests that it is a residual cultural artifact whose devotion to some of the pomp and circumstance of military life contrasts with the contemporary urgency of its warnings about misogyny in the context of war.

The Triple Echo is another stylistically conservative film that examines sexual assault in a military context, but its narrative dwells even more acutely on the fine points of the gendered experience of a culture at war. The movie follows the short romance of Alice (Glenda Jackson) and Barton (Brian Deacon), which begins in the summer and ends in the dead of winter. Alice is a married farmer who runs a farm in rural Wiltshire, but her husband is in a Japanese prison camp and she lives a lonely, hardscrabble existence. Barton is a soldier who initially meets Alice while on leave, but he deserts the army as he falls into a passionate affair with her, instead

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[74] Michael Deeley with Matthew Field, *Blade Runners, Deer Hunters, and Blowing the Bloody Doors Off: My Life in Cult Movies* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2009), 108.
[75] Harper and Smith 148.

moving in and helping around the farm. At first, Barton plays it safe by staying at home, but as the increased rations and possible gossip become an issue, Alice suggests a radical means to keep their relationship intact: Barton is to dress as Alice's sister, which will hopefully keep him safe from the army and from nosy townsfolk. This works at first (Deacon seems to have been cast for his elfin features, which make him appear plausibly as a woman once made up), but a local Sergeant (Oliver Reed, in a smugly exuberant performance) becomes smitten with him. Barton's boredom and resistance to being regarded as a woman strains his relationship with Alice, but the Sergeant, and his invitation to a dance, tempts Barton back to civilization. This proves a mistake: the Sergeant attempts to rape Alice, and just as he initiates sexual contact, Barton fights back, whereupon he escapes back to the farm. The Sergeant and the other soldiers identify Barton as a deserter and proceed to the farm to arrest him. Before he can be taken, Alice shoots Barton with her hunting shotgun, killing him in plain sight of the other soldiers.

The central existential conceit of *The Triple Echo* is over the importance of freedom and identity during wartime. Looked at this way, it is a thorough rethinking of the restrained passion of *Brief Encounter*. In order to pursue his love and his disillusionment with army life, Barton has to dress and live as a woman (although this trope is normally played for comedy, here it is presented as a serious way to hide one's identity). The film presents this as an ultimately unworkable compromise, since it damages the power dynamic in his relationship with Alice (whereas he was once a useful, handy protector, suddenly Alice must shield him from the rest of the world). Apted and screenwriter Robin Chapman take great care to show Barton's change, by writing key scenes early in the film that "prove" Barton's masculinity to both Alice and the spectator. Barton fixes Alice's tractor, helps her hunt, and steps into the sexual role once occupied by her husband. With the arrival of the incessantly virile and insistent Sergeant, Barton

begins a gradual emasculation. He cannot act freely, has to hide who he is, cannot be assertive with Alice, and generally loses his sense of identity. The film achieves this by constructing Alice as an exceptionally logical and sensible woman who takes the initiative when necessary, a fact that plays to Glenda Jackson's actorly persona as developed over *Women in Love* (1969, Ken Russell) and *Sunday Bloody Sunday* (1971, John Schlesinger), two films in which she plays strongly against sexually ambiguous men. Melanie Williams writes that with the *Sunday Bloody Sunday* and *The Triple Echo*, Jackson "has the unusual distinction of playing the sole woman in two films centered on a bisexual love triangle," but in *The Triple Echo* her increasing masculinization offers an interesting point about the experience of all women during wartime: even in the absence of working directly for the war effort, the culture of a nation at war demands that men and women both adopt traits (decisiveness, practicality, rugged survivalism) traditionally associated with masculinity.[76] Despite *The Triple Echo's* bold commentary on sexual performativity, it ultimately displays the unfeasibility of feminized masquerade, and therefore comes across as in soft endorsement for conventional gender roles.

Sue Harper and Justin Smith note that director Michael Apted's films are "precisely structured and showed strong empathy for the female characters," a claim borne out in *The Triple Echo* by its focus on Alice's double tragedy.[77] As much as the film is about Barton and his exposure by the Sergeant, Alice is the character who has already experienced one loss, and is compelled to experience a second that she must (tragically) execute herself. Barton is a prototypical wartime cynic who, almost in the tradition of the 1960s counterculture, "drops out" of his social milieu only to lose his life as he tries to reintegrate into it. The failure of Barton and

[76] Melanie Williams, "Staccato and Wrenchingly Modern: Reflections on the 1970s Stardom of Glenda Jackson," *Don't Look Now: British Cinema in the 1970s*, ed. Paul Newland (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2011), 50.
[77] Harper and Smith 131.

Alice's romance is literalized many ways in the film, not least of all by the landscape around Alice's farm, a properly idyllic rural retreat that becomes increasingly grim, muddy, and inhospitable as the film (and the seasons) progress. The isolation of where they live accentuates the movie's existential subtext, where the act of going to the base just to be around other people becomes Barton's final undoing. Apted's camera stresses a difference in scales, by showing the claustrophobic interior of the farm's house (this location is stuffed with lots of furniture and clutter to increase its perceived smallness), contrasting this with the grounds outside, which seem to stretch for miles in all directions.

Cross of Iron contains, in concentrated miniature, most of the tonal and genre trends discussed in this chapter. Shot in Yugoslavia, *Cross of Iron* was a joint production of Britain and West Germany, featured an American star (James Coburn as Steiner) and an American director Sam Peckinpah, with other lead and supporting roles filled by prominent British and German actors. The bulk of the film's financing came from German producer Wolf Hartwig, who, as David Weddle reports, "was financing *Cross of Iron* with cash from his porno movies and advance money from a number of distributors."[78] The movie was rapturously received in Germany, but was critically bashed in the United States and in Britain, where distributor Avco/Embassy released it without much fanfare.[79] This may have to do with the ways in which the film focuses on German anti-heroes, a group more pre-ordained to failure than immediately tagged as irredeemably villainous. *Cross of Iron* is about the German retreat out of Russia in 1943, one of the most desperate phases of the war. Though an adaptation of a novel by Willi Heinrich, the finished produced is an extensive rewrite of its source, one suited to Peckinpah's strengths.

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[78] David Weddle, *"If They Move...Kill 'Em!": The Life and Times of Sam Peckinpah* (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 506.
[79] *Ibid*. 512-13.

Steiner (Coburn), an enlisted German soldier disillusioned by Nazi ideology, is the nominal leader of a group of war-ravaged men charged with stopping the Russian advance. Well regarded by his brothers in arms, his leadership and unorthodox methods are challenged when Captain Stransky (Maximilian Schell) arrives at the front, instituting his own sense of order. Stransky, a Prussian aristocrat himself at odds with the Nazi regime, nonetheless craves an Iron Cross, a token that will prove his bravery to his family. In order to get it, he gives rash orders, is sadistic towards the men in his charge and, during the inevitable Nazi retreat, goes so far as to prevent Steiner and his men from receiving their orders, a failure that causes them to fight their way back through enemy lines, only to have Stransky's men open fire on them just as they approach safety. By the film's end, Steiner and Stransky reach a temporary truce, where the two participate in a German counter-attack on Soviet troops. By this point, most of Steiner's men have been killed, but he derives some satisfaction when he learns that Stransky is an incompetent soldier who does not even know how to reload his gun. The film ends ambiguously, with a return of the opening music—a chorus of children performing an eerily upbeat take on "Hanschen Klein" ("Little Hans"), a German folk song—as the main diegesis becomes a series of freeze frame images, around which stills of Nazi war atrocities flash into view. Steiner ends the movie laughing at Stransky (and the world, and perhaps his audience). Although the implication is that all the German men face certain death, this proves untrue. *Breakthrough* (1979, Andrew V. McLaglen), the German-produced sequel to *Cross of Iron*, resumes the adventures of Steiner (now played, oddly, by Richard Burton) for another series of failed missions on both fronts.

Stephen Prince characterizes *Cross of Iron* as a "nihilistic no-man's-land of unceasing violence," an incoherent narrative that manages to make bold aesthetic claims about war.[80] The

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[80] Stephen Prince, *Savage Cinema: Sam Peckinpah and the Rise of Ultraviolent Movies* (Austin: U of Texas Press, 1998), 154, 215.

grey, muddy landscapes of Eastern Europe compliment the many dismembered and exploded bodies, together merging with frustrations of the central characters to create a mood of unceasing pessimism. Bernard F. Dukore describes Steiner as "alienated existential man, a flawed hero, a professional whose exceptional skill virtually everyone acknowledges."[81] Steiner is good at killing, but his psyche is wracked with guilt over the deaths of his friends and the innocent lives that have been put in his charge. His ambivalent status is suggested by the scene in which he is almost killed, a moment that Peckinpah treats poetically, wrestling this war story from the realistic-if-heightened images of battle that have so far been offered, instead veering into the spaces of the unconscious. As he nearly dies, Steiner's psyche flashes back (to images of his comrades, and the Russian boy whose death weighs on his soldiers), indulges in fabricated dream images, and even flashes forward to his encounters with Eva (Senta Berger), the nurse with whom he will share a brief romantic liaison. In addition to complicating the film's evident consistency of tone and aesthetic register (from dour realism to kinetic fantasy, and back again), this sequence gives some sense of the film's ethical position, a post-1945 indictment of Nazism that combines Peckinpah's own dislike of fascism with Germany's collective guilt over its past. Stephen Prince writes that "by intercutting the battlefield and hospital imagery with the images of Steiner from prior incidents, the montage disassembles the time-space relationships of the narrative, blurring the distinctions between past, present, and future and implying that all of these coexist within the mind and through its ability to recollect the past and project a future."[82] Thus, in the cynical, existential figure of Steiner, there is a whole tradition of German self-doubt and historical awareness, a sense of shame and new priorities that also map onto Britain's self-conception in the wake of World War II (the old stabilities like the validity of the national

[81] Bernard F. Dukore, *Sam Peckinpah's Feature Films* (Urbana: U of Illinois Press, 1999), 54.
[82] Prince 92.

mission, or the submission to the logics of the outgoing social order, prove pervasively inadequate in the face of new histories and political formations). The tragedy of *Cross of Iron* is not necessarily the death of Steiner's Nazi cohort, or Steiner's inability to make territorial gains for his side of the war effort, but rather the notion that a conscientious man cannot stop, reconfigure, or redeem the war effort in the name of something productive.

4. Joseph Losey and the Rethinking of War

Joseph Losey cut his teeth with progressive social theatre, including The Living Newspaper and the initial U.S. staging of *Galileo* (in 1947, the first authorized staging of Brecht in the US). He preemptively fled Hollywood before he could be called in front of HUAC, worked in exile in Britain throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and was venerated by French film critics to the point of hero worship. The director was given a thoroughly existential biographical treatment in Caute's *Joseph Losey: A Revenge on Life* (1994), in which his flaws, as well as frequently uncaring critics and producers, constructed a man who would rage against institutions even as he was occasionally desperate to please them. For Caute, Losey's "revenge on life" is not just his gradual undoing through drink, marital infidelity, or the squandering of promised success. Losey can be studied as a tonally consistent artist. Despite not writing his own screenplays, his movies have remarkably similar themes, delivered through a gradually perfected style that, at its best, could expertly visualize unsettled internal states. Losey is himself tragic. Had production circumstances, his critics, and his own impulses been different, he would be

known as widely today as he was during his early 1960s heyday, when he graced the cover of *Cahiers du Cinema*.[83]

Born in Wisconsin in 1909, Losey is one among several American expatriates to thrive in a British production context. Although some of his 1950s films had to be made under pseudonyms, his reputation became such that by the early 1960s, he routinely worked on prestigious projects at the intersection of popular cinema and the art house.[84] Along with Stanley Kubrick, Richard Lester, and Terry Gilliam, he is a major American film director whose outsider sensibilities proved a boon for parsing some of the finer points of British life. Unlike some of these men, Losey's films amble between realism (not just as conventionally conceived, but also as theorized by Brecht, as a social unmasking that alerts its audience to its status as art even as it says something about the way the world works) and fantastic artifice (thick and decadent imagery, a kind of gilded opulence that would probably have angered Brecht as Losey knew him).[85] He began working in a milieu of social realism but really found his calling through haute-European encounters with baroque excess and decadence. Although Losey remained at odds with the U.S. over his near-blacklisting, his expatriate status was spun to benefit his reputation as a filmmaker. A *Variety* article from early 1970 puts him into context: despite living in and working out of Britain, his current film *Figures in a Landscape* was made in Spain, but he finds himself in the United States both to deal with Cinema Center Films on the details of that film's release and to teach at Dartmouth, his alma mater.[86]

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[83] *Cahiers du Cinema* no.111 (Septembre 1960).
[84] Wheeler Winston Dixon, "Losey, Joseph (1909-1984)," *BFI Screenonline*, accessed 21 Oct 2014, http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/451136/
[85] For a discussion of Brecht's realism, see Dana B. Polan, "Brecht and the Politics of Self-Reflexive Cinema," *Jump Cut* 17 (1978), accessed 22 Oct 2014, http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC17folder/BrechtPolan.html.
[86] "Losey Sums Up: Blacklisters on Coast Helped Him." *Variety* 258.5 (18 Mar. 1970): 5.

Losey's *King & Country* and *Figures in a Landscape* are often regarded as minor works in an uneven oeuvre, without the *élan* of the Pinter collaborations (*The Servant* [1963], *Accident* [1967], and *The Go-Between* [1971]) or the verve of some of the experimental art films of his later baroque period (*Don Giovanni* [1979]). Improbably, the two films (despite being almost total opposites in every way) offer remarkably consistent comments on the effects of war on the individual—that the situation will bring a tragic end, that a world at war is bleak and uncaring, and that the individual can never prevail against systemic forces and hierarchies. What is fascinating about Losey is that he brings a set of sensibilities to the discussion of war that are reflected elsewhere in his works. For instance, *The Servant* and *Accident* are key export documents in British existentialism, while a movie like *Mr. Klein* (1976) represents the grim prospects that faced French Jews under the Vichy regime, bring existential experience out of the context from which it originated. Losey's *Assassination of Trotsky* (1972) plays up themes of imprisonment, boredom, and national disillusionment in a manner similar to King & Country. Despite his American birth and his reputation as an international director, he emphasizes trends in war representation that hew close to a British social context.

King & Country, a multi-source adaptation (a screenplay by Evan Jones that adapts James Landale Hodson's book and radio script *Hamp*, with nods to John Wilson's television play and theatre play versions of the same sources), is about the court martial of a young working class soldier who deserts his unit by walking away after the accumulated effects of stress, shell shock, and the inhumanity of the front render him temporarily catatonic. This dialogue-driven film—with no battle scenes, set almost entirely in a trench—focuses on the relationship between Hamp (Tom Courtenay) and his legal defender Hargreaves (Dirk Bogarde), a superior officer who originally dislikes this confused enlisted man, but who he comes to realize is the victim of the

inhuman situation of which he is a part, and who is at the mercy of an uncaring, prejudiced, and inflexible officer class. Hamp is a tragic figure, one whose background (an Islington-based cobbler) makes him an unlikely candidate for this modality. The working script describes Hamp's eyes as having "the vacancy of age, of shell-shock, and of innocence."[87] As Edith Hall reminds us, tragedy has historically omitted working class subjects, as most authors prefer to narrate the fall of the mighty (often aristocrats, or pseudo-divine and nearly invincible beings).[88] In some ways, the Hamp-Hargreaves dynamic is especially indicative of the political and theatrical context of early 1960s Britain, when socially committed drama deliberately elevated the working class, even if it meant having an interlocutor like Hargreaves to mediate class differences.[89] The tragedy of *King & Country* is Hargreaves' inability to save Hamp: despite Hargreave's transformative humanistic enlightenment, Hamp is found guilty of desertion, and, as an example to the other soldiers, is ordered to be shot just before the unit goes up the front and to their probable slaughter. The firing squad does not definitively kill Hamp. It falls to Hargreaves to shoot him in the head.

Figures in a Landscape, adapted by Robert Shaw from Barry England's novel, focuses on two escaped soldiers (who are never called soldiers outright, as they are in the book, but whose dialogue gives hints of their past) as they make their way through an unnamed South or Central American nation, avoiding their previous captors as they make for an adjoining nation.[90]

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[87] Evan Jones, *King & Country* Working Script, 2. BFI File JWL/1/12/1

[88] Edith Hall, "To Fall From High or Low Estate? Tragedy and Social Class in Historical Perspective," *PMLA* 129.4 (2014): 780-781.

[89] I understand commitment in terms similar to Raymond Williams, who writes: "Commitment still meant, at its best, taking social reality, historical reality, the development of social and historical reality, as the centres of attention, and then finding some of the hundreds of ways in which all those processes can be written." See Raymond Williams, "The Writer: Commitment and Alignment," *Marxism Today* (June 1980): 22-23.

[90] The shooting script for the film describes the P.O.W. column from which they escape, a detail that is not preserved in the film, in which we are introduced to the two men as they run on the beach. Robert Shaw, *Figures in a Landscape* Shooting Script, 1969, 1-2. BFI File SCR-7904 s4703.

MacConnachie (Robert Shaw) and Ansell (Malcolm McDowell) fight as much with each other as with the harsh environments through which they trek. As Britain had no official military engagements in Spanish-speaking nations during the 1960s, the implication is that the two are mercenaries, whose vision is tainted by selfishness and toxic masculinity. The two fight and sneak their way through countryside, mountains, scrubland, towns, and snow covered mountains, always hounded by a vengeful helicopter. In *Figures in a Landscape*, safety and relief are the most obvious goals. At one point in the shooting script, Ansell yells "For Christ's sake, we're surrounded," a maxim that typifies both the lack of options facing the two men and at the same time offering a nice encapsulation of the tonal register of this type of war film: desperate, suffocating, hopeless.[91] James Palmer and Michael Riley characterize the film as offering a "fierce landscape [...] against which the characters play out a drama of hostility that yields to dependence."[92] At various points, MacConnachie and Ansell come close to separating, but the asymmetrical nature of their conflict—two against many, the poorly armed versus the well-equipped army—keeps them together, to the extent that, in their exhaustion (and despite their differing personalities), they function as one existentially threatened dyad. Mere steps from freedom, MacConnachie makes a last stand against the chopper, indulging in his Ahab-like obsession with this menace, and is killed by high caliber bullets. Though Ansell remains alive, his future promises nothing more than rootless ambiguity.

King & Country is a black & white film made on a low budget (£86,000) and a tight schedule. Caute says that "total confinement to the studio reined Losey in to an awesome display of discipline."[93] *Figures in a Landscape* is a sweeping, full-color, Panavision film that features three cinematographers, aerial photography, and location filming in Spain and the United States.

[91] *Ibid*. 69.
[92] James Palmer and Michael Riley, *The Films of Joseph Losey* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 12.
[93] David Caute, *Joseph Losey: A Revenge on Life* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), 143, 144.

Losey's director's fee alone was $250,000.[94] Caute reports that on *Figures*, Losey hated the producer, disliked the novel, did not get along with Shaw, and was drinking heavily when the film was made: it is, in other words, practically his least disciplined film.[95] *King & Country* illustrates the specific reasons for Private Hamp's existential crisis, explaining in great detail where he broke the law, and showing specific reasons for Hargreaves' change of heart and for the cultural factors that produced the film's injustice. The film's tragedy derives from the needless death of Hamp. *Figures in a Landscape* is the most minimally motivated kind of art house allegory, where beliefs, histories, contexts, and stability cling to only the smallest morsels of potential meaning. In *King & Country*, war produces registers of human experience that it cannot adequately treat, cure or manage (Hamp, still a nationalist, is abandoned by the country for which he fought). In *Figures in a Landscape*, war itself is a vague concept, with experience no longer able to distinguish the boundaries of conflict (as the surprisingly mobile helicopter illustrates, no place is safe for long, no space off limits to violence), and MacConnachie and Ansell's Britishness no longer a motivating factor in their sense of self-worth. In *King & Country*, Losey offers a few tracking shots, expressionistic lighting, and occasionally destabilizing overhead camera placements, but most of its aesthetic innovations are bound to its theatrical predecessors. Hamp's fellow privates are a Brecht-inflected Greek chorus, whose capture and mock-trial of a trench rat mirrors Hamp's own predicament. *Figures in a Landscape* is a surprisingly empty film of long shots, sublime natural settings, and occasional bursts of kinetic action, but at the cost of diegetic expressivity (were it not for the film's scale and ambiguity, or its occasionally awe-inspiring eye for location, it would offer the worst kind of drabbly unreflexive realism). Evan Calder Williams observes that

[94] *Ibid*. 233.
[95] *Ibid*. 234.

> the film's style is primarily one of long takes and establishing shots, followed by relentless triangulation between the relevant materials in the shot's space: rocks, copters, men. The film holds its ground with rigor, both spatially and temporally. No flashbacks, no crosscuts to other characters, no parallel storylines, no tough decisions being made by the forces of the "good guys" to get their men out alive, no other locations glimpsed, not even in memory.[96]

If *King & Country* is referential—of past and parallel events, and the war in general, as evidenced by the film's opening sequence, where the camera begins of images of war memorialization, showing sculptures of agonized death and agony that are revealed through slow, mainly horizontal camera movements—then *Figures in a Landscape* is textually and thematically isolating, as if to suggest that the world is totally indifferent to MacConnache and Ansell. *Figures in a Landscape's* general lack of affect is best shown in the closing sequence, where the border guards barely react to the shabby sight of two armed, approaching men. Instead, these immaculately uniformed soldiers remain nearly frozen, arranged in an artful tableau that almost suggests that they are cardboard cut-outs.

The differences do not end there. *King & Country* garnered rave reviews in the US, France and Britain, and was nominated for the Venice Film Festival Golden Lion.[97] Stanley Reed, then director of the British Film Institute, wrote Losey a letter of appreciation upon the film's exhibition at the 1964 London Film Festival, noting that the movie was "very well received and widely praised."[98] *Figures in a Landscape* opened to unanimous bafflement and some outright derision: its release in the US was withheld two years, until Losey's international success with *The Go Between*.[99] It was refused a showing at Cannes.[100] Read thematically, *King*

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[96] Evan Calder Williams, "Figures in a Threatscape," *La Furia Umana* 17 (2013), accessed 21 Oct 2014, http://www.lafuriaumana.it/index.php/29-archive/lfu-17/33-evan-calder-williams-figures-in-a-threatscape.
[97] *Ibid*. 145-146; BFI File JWL/1/12/2 *King & Country* Production File, D File.
[98] BFI File JWL/1/12/2 *King & Country* Production File, F File.
[99] Caute 236.
[100] *Ibid*.

& Country stresses tragedy over cynicism, as Hargreaves is moved into caring about a man's life over the course of a film, thus all but guaranteeing that the audience will do the same. As Hamp's body lies in the mud, we have just witnessed a good and decent man (Hargreaves) do something terrible (shoot an unarmed, helpless man) because of an institution (the military, and its flawed code of ethics). By contrast, *Figures in a Landscape* stresses cynicism to the last, with MacConnachie so self-absorbed and vengeful that he forsakes the opportunity for social-reintegration, instead dying as a form of symbolic revenge. His sacrifice is meaningless, a fact that underscores the film's larger sense of ambiguity. War films typically operate on a concrete logic of motivation: national interests in conflict (or the individuals struggling against national interests); missions with endgames; goals; hierarchies; uniforms that differentiate and communicate their own ideological meanings; orders; technical rationalizations. *Figures in a Landscape* removes, reduces, or reverses all these things. What is left is empty allegory, an existential struggle for the unexamined life.

I am drawn to *King & Country* and *Figures in a Landscape* as much for their provocative engagements with their genre context, their oppositional political modifications to a generally conservative subject, as for their uneasy relationship to Losey's already unsettled auteur status. I am inclined to agree with Robin Wood, who has argued that ideological tensions in film mainly become interesting when there is an artist behind them.[101] Losey's recognition as an artist is all over the production and reception of both films.[102] His desire to control each film's final cut is one such indication. The BFI production file on *King & Country* reveals his discussions with censor John Trevelyan, who doubted the film's ability to get an "A" rating (it was eventually released with an "X" certificate, probably because of the degree to which it implicates the

[101] Wood 82.
[102] Caute 319.

military in uncaring brutality).[103] Some of Trevelyan's recommendations for cuts amount to artistic suggestions, as the censor clearly prefers war-as-realism to war-as-allegory: "I am not sure about the rat-symbolism, which strikes me as being a bit too obvious. By all means have rats in mud, but once you make the things symbolic you take it out of the background and give it a different function."[104] The County of Bedford in Bedfordshire wrote saying that they would only allow exhibition of the film if the final shots of Hamp's corpse were removed.[105] Caute reports that Losey was invited to cut *Figures in a Landscape* so that it could be shown on double bills, but he removed his name rather than participate.[106]

For Losey, his films about war were not only tragedies on the level of their narratives, but themselves tragic, as neither were as rewarded for their innovative engagement with the subject as they deserved to be. *King & Country* is a near-masterpiece overshadowed by *Paths of Glory*. The film, which was critically praised and made on the cheap, was (through creative accounting) written off as a financial failure.[107] *Figures in a Landscape* is a *film maudit* angrily fascinated by the frustration of life on a human scale. It was barely released. Arguably, the two films' relative failures illustrate a paradox in the construction and reception of genre films: innovation and new ideas are tolerated only insofar as they stay, as if by psychic magic, within a set of tacit and imaginary boundaries.

[103] BFI File JWL/1/12/2 *King & Country* Production File, C File.
[104] BFI File JWL/1/12/2 King & Country Production File, C File. Letter from John Trevelyan to Joseph Losey, 28 April 1964.
[105] BFI File JWL/1/12/2 *King & Country* Production File, C File. Letter to Joseph Losey, 8 March 1965
[106] Caute 236.
[107] *Ibid*. 145-146.

4. Conclusion

The confluence of tragedy, cynical characters, bleak setting, and existentialist ideas proved a viable genre modality for British war films for a nearly twenty year period (1956-1976), yet even the most heavily promoted and highly pedigreed of these movies failed to find much widespread, sustained public recognition. These films remove the sporting, triumphant overtones from war, turning to tragedy for a narrative model that shows the isolation and ultimate defeat of the individual. By contextualizing this sense of loss in films whose tones trend towards grim, downbeat, and pessimistic, their makers reference the sense of national decline that was everywhere in British life by the late 1970s.

Even though films like *The Long, the Short, and the Tall*, *King & Country*, and *Conduct Unbecoming* offer unflattering portraits of military ethics, they nonetheless give a contemporary urgency to historical moments whose experiences had been codified through decades of sentimental glorification. The turn from 1950s “pleasure culture” heroism to existential anti-heroism is not just a reflection of some widespread cultural tropes, but also a new direction within the internal history of the war film genre. That is, the turn to this strand of tragic, cynical, and, grim representation and narration illustrates the tendency for genres to follow different production cycles (even when financially risky), and to explore similar ideas and thematic notions with obvious variations and differentiations. Hard-to-classify films like *The Triple Echo* and *Figures in a Landscape* are outliers, representing the fringes of what it feels like to be at war, yet the very fact that they were made (with major stars and ample budgets), and can be related to other films of their moment, suggests that war remained a live topic well after its momentary dominance of the British film industry in the mid-1950s. Virtually every film discussed in this chapter occupies a position somewhere between the mainstream war film genre and the more

nebulous territory of "art cinema." These movies illustrate that war provides something beyond by-the-numbers genre entertainment. Their turn to heavy and contentious themes, as well as different kinds of stylistic experimentation, unsettles dominant assumptions about what war means during a period of acute ideological instability.

Chapter 4

On Screen and at Arm's Length: Social Class and the Simulation of Combat

All fictional feature film representations of war are, on some level, simulations (a statement that is, baldly, true of other genres as well). They re-create military culture and the experience of battle through actors, props, and planned shots, even if they aspire to verisimilitude and attempt to capture the factual essence of actual events. On an ontological level, even documentary footage of war works as simulation of a sort, since, as it is projected or played back, it offers only the ghostly traces of lived experience. However, by the 1960s, a number of British films principally represented war *as* simulation, overtly depicting their conflicts as mediated experiences well in advance of later 20th century mainstays like commercial videogames, the rise of recreational wargaming, table-top role-playing games, and technological marvels like unmanned drones. Tapping into cultural traditions like the British public school (confusingly, what for an American would be closer to "private school") system, the history of sports, and a wide lineage of games, these movies connect new conceptions of warfare to a history of education and training that distances the elite from combat danger.[1]

Films like *You Must Be Joking*, *if….* (1968, Lindsay Anderson), *Oh! What A Lovely War*, *The Magic Christian* (1969, Joseph McGrath), and *The Gladiators* variously showcase Britain's increasing reliance on a virtual conception of war. With an end to National Service (compulsory military duty for young men), a decline in Britain's prominence in world-historical affairs, a

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[1] A British Public school is a "fee-paying secondary school" that is controlled by the public (as opposed to the Crown or the government), as laid out by the Public Schools Act of 1868. See "public school, n. and adj." *OED Online*, September 2014, accessed 29 Oct 2014, Oxford University Press, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/154070.

technocratic Cold War fought largely at arm's length, no active wars to match the conventional nature and scale of World War II, and an unsettled film industry at once obsessed with nationalistic themes but suffering from inconsistent investment and infrequent cinemagoers, such a revisioning of Britain's visual culture of war bespeaks a radical response to looming crises in militarism and the entertainment industry. A focus on training and maneuvers (*if....*), the choice for the army to resort to games in place of war (*You Must be Joking*), the depiction of war games and combat simulations as a substitute for war itself (*The Magic Christian*, *The Gladiators*), and the illustration of combat or battle via virtual and metaphorical substitutes (*Oh! What a Lovely War*) typify this shift. This chapter argues that the turn to simulation is consistent with a general trend in postwar British cinema that moves representations of war away from the heroic, serious, nominally realistic, and emotionally melodramatic regime with which it is most frequently aligned and towards an emerging counter-tradition concerned with fantasy, existential dread, absurd comedy, and a general willingness to criticize institutions of war and war-mongering.

More specifically, this chapter presents an apparent paradox: despite the leadership imperative of upper-middle class and aristocratic men in the British army (and despite a tradition of distinguished combat service), the simulation trends discussed further expose the hierarchical value of life in the military by illustrating the cultural and technological ways that the elite are at once placed in positions of strategic military importance and removed from the direct threat of danger. Ideas of simulation in this period stress this remove (often as a critical gesture), thus exposing the limits of the discourses of egalitarianism and meritocracy that circulated during the later 1960s and early 1970s. While aspects of this tension between leadership and distance will be discussed throughout, it is best illustrated through a comparative case study of two films that are explicitly about simulation and absence: *Oh! What a Lovely War*, Richard Attenborough's

adaptation of the Joan Littlewood Theatre Workshop's radical play about World War I, and Peter Watkins's *The Gladiators*, a near-future science fiction film in which the world wages its wars through a computed-aided gladiatorial game.

1. War, Technology, Simulation: The Historical Context

Even though the development and use of the atomic bomb was the definitive turning point in 20th century warfare (a legacy assessed in Chapter 5), the transition from World War II to the Cold War marked a generally widespread shift in war strategy.[2] As Joshua S. Goldstein notes, in practical terms, the Cold War saw a worldwide reduction in combat deaths as compared to previous decades, a trend which continues through to today.[3] With the exception of wars of liberation throughout the empire (including the long and bloody Troubles in Northern Ireland), Britain's military exploits from 1945 to the limited engagement in the Falkland Islands are largely defensive, more concerned with preventing large-scale world war or speculative panics. For those still bound to National Service in the 1950s and early 1960s, to be in the military meant occupation, peace-keeping, and maintenance, even if such activities would later be redundant with the gradual shrinking of the empire. The connection between military might and defense is best illustrated in Britain's resistance to the Blitz and invasion, a fortress mentality that John Keegan reads into a longer history of war:

> For enormous periods of time, even in Western Europe, crucible of the conquering impulse, warfare was not triumphalist but a cautious, local, piecemeal, protracted and indecisive business. The urge to fortify, defend, and deflect in that continent, and even more so in others, was quite as strong as that to campaign, make expeditions or win victories. Indeed, if it were possible to quantify military history—no doubt it is, but few

[2] Van Creveld 168.
[3] Joshua S. Goldstein, *Winning the War on War: The Decline of Armed Conflict Worldwide* (New York: Plume, 2012), 21-22.

> have made the effort—it would probably be revealed that altogether more money and human labour had been expended, over the whole period of collective military effort before the two world wars, in fortification than in fighting.[4]

In the abstract, Britain's main concern in the Second World War was engineering a distance between civilians and the Axis powers. Fortification and the creation of buffer zones between combatants were at once a safety measure and a luxury that came to distinguish different types of soldiers (as well as soldiers and the citizenry).

Paul Virilio has famously argued that speed of movement and ubiquity of sight are two determining factors that gain urgency in the later 20th century, such that deterrence is as much a technological metagame as the actual use of force.[5] Notions like speed, distance, and visual mastery over the field of battle have long been part of the history of war, encompassing a whole world of weapons and techniques that move war away from hand-to-hand combat: the invention of the longbow, the musket, the use of the spyglass in naval battles, and the development of radar.[6] One strand of military technology, therefore, tries to practically remove lives (especially high ranking lives) and equipment from the immediate zone of battle. A great example of this, albeit through abstracting from a very real engagement that resulted in the loss of many lives, is the Battle of the Coral Sea (May 4-8, 1942), a naval operation in which Japan attempted to capture a foothold from which to invade New Guinea, en route to Australia. Today, this battle is remembered as much for its role in the U.S. victory at the Battle of Midway as it is for its theoretical importance in this history of warfare. Mark E. Ellis writes that "the Coral Sea was the first naval battle where opposing ships could not see each other and were over 200 miles apart,"

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[4] John Keegan, *The Mask of Command* (New York: Viking, 1987), 7.

[5] See Mark Lacy, *Security, Technology, and Global Politics: Thinking with Virilio* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 78-79.

[6] These technologies gain cultural cachet beyond their status as weapons. For instance, in *Family Portrait* (1950), filmmaker Humphrey Jennings ties the development of radar to the famous luck and tactical mind of Sir Francis Drake. See Flanagan, "Humphrey Jennings at the Festival Audience" 367-368.

meaning that it was a naval battle in which ships did not directly fire upon one another, but rather served as conduits from which to launch fighter planes and provide cover.[7] By the end of World War II, the possibility of war waged at a distance was as important as the brutal battles of proximity that were being fought as the Allies closed in on Berlin. Germany's V-2 rocket and the United States's atomic bomb, taken together, provide the ironic blueprint for the coming decades: weapons capable of untold destruction from a distance, so powerful, in fact, that by the mid-1960s, the combined nuclear stockpile of the world meant mutually assured destruction, the almost total annihilation of the human race (thus proving, morbidly, that distance is no guarantee of safety).

Technological, industrial, and munitions innovations pioneered in the 1940s provide other roadmaps for the changing face of war in subsequent decades. Conventional leaders refined and innovated older traditions from within, as did the "hands-on" British Army general Bill Slim, the man whose soldiers staved off the Japanese invasion of India in 1943, and who found decisive success in further battles in South-East Asia later in the war (his success is credited to his no-nonsense style and his willingness to retrain his troops for local conditions).[8] Slim gave tactical finesse to infantrymen and his multi-national conscripts, in the process building on the accumulated knowledge of hundreds of years of military tactics. That is, his approach to soldiering was somewhat old fashioned in that it depended on tactics and training that relied on nearness and proximity. But, of more widespread and lasting importance is the shift in operations during the Second World War to conceptions of war as a specialist's preserve. Martin Van Creveld cites research and development, the creation of complex weapons systems, operations research (macro-level statistical analysis), and military intelligence as being crucial to the war

[7] Mark E. Ellis, "Coral Sea, Battle of," *Historical Dictionary of the 1940s*, eds. James G. Ryan and Leonard C. Schlup (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2006), 91-92.
[8] For an overview of Slim's tactics, see Robert Lyman, *Bill Slim* (Oxford: Osprey, 2011).

effort, a litany of areas that were arguably more important to British defense in the post-war period than having troops on the ground.[9] War became as much about supply-chains, predictive patterning, and spycraft as about amassed forces.

War came to be understood as a series of abstract figurations with eventual, real world consequences (fighting at a remove, theoretical training, statistics, and populations). Thus the post-war period was an especially ripe moment for reassessing, representing, and critiquing Britain's long-standing traditions of military metagaming. Of course, it is worth unequivocally recalling that playing at and simulating war is not an exclusively a British preserve, nor is it an especially new pastime. Philip Sabin notes that longstanding relationship between war and games, citing Greek athletic contests, Roman gladiatorial bouts, and medieval European tournaments and pageants are as much related to displaying war prowess as to playing into wider understandings of courtly decorum.[10] On some level, these precedents have as much a practical function (they allow contestants to practice skills related to the waging of war) as a representational one (conceived differently, these symbolic engagements with war can be classed with paintings, novels, and ballads as representations of war and warfare). Ancient games like Chaturanga, Go, and Chess symbolically encapsulate aspects of war as well. In all three games, players eliminate pieces and capture territory on a board. Sabin summarizes the connections further:

> The key characteristic uniting war and games, and which sets them apart from most other human activities, is their competitive and agonistic nature. In games, this competition is mainly artificial, while in war it is mainly situational, but the effect is the same. Both war and games pit humans against one another in a dynamic interactive contest of wits and resources, as the opposing sides struggle to prevail.[11]

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[9] Van Creveld 148-149.
[10] Philip Sabin, *Simulating War: Studying Conflict through Simulation Games* (New York: Continuum, 2012), xv.
[11] *Ibid*. xvi.

This is the teleological side of play, where what counts is not exploration, but the development of actionable skill. Practice, in games and sports, predicts later survival and success.

Games were used in later centuries to interface with war in more detailed and tactic-specific ways. The *kriegspiel* (war game) by Georg von Reisswitz (later expanded by his son), developed in Prussia in the early 19th century, used true-to-life maps, ornate pieces depicting different types of troops, and dice ("the element of chance in war").[12] According to Andrew Wilson, this mode of wargaming had an unofficial following in Britain, an interest not totally codified until the publication of *Rules for the Conduct of the War-Game*, a favorite among British officers interested in Prussian methods.[13] This pamphlet-sized book closely resembles later commercial war and role-playing games, both in the terseness and attempted systemization of its rules, and in its investment of lots of power and discretion in the games' "umpires," the non-competing arbiters of rules.[14] In the 19th century, war games reflected codes of gentlemanly conduct and fair play amateurism still important to the waging of war.

H.G. Wells's *Little Wars* (first published 1913) is probably the most historically important British contribution to the history of wargaming. As a set of rules to allow players (almost incredibly, defined as "boys from twelve years of age to one-hundred and fifty and for that more intelligent girl who likes boys' games and books") to turn their collection of toy soldiers into a game, this stands as one of the world's stranger contributions to what Andrew Dawson deems the "pleasure culture of war."[15] Like Guy Debord's later *Game of War* (conceived in 1965), *Little Wars* is that rarest of things: an elaborate war simulation created by a

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[12] Andrew Wilson, *The Bomb and the Computer: Wargaming from Ancient Chinese Mapboard to Atomic Computer* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1968), 3-6.
[13] *Ibid*. 8-9.
[14] See *Rules for the Conduct of the War-Game on a Map* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1896), 9.
[15] H.G. Wells, *Little Wars* (London: Frank Palmer, 1913); Dawson 3-4.

bona fide leftist with no actual background in military affairs.[16] *Little Wars* and *Game of War* typify the explosion of war games in the 1960s, a moment that sees a sharper divide between wargaming as a commercial hobby and wargaming as a key component in military training and strategy. Wells admits as much in the appendix to *Little Wars*, where he describes his games's relationship to the *kriegspiel*, a professional-grade pursuit ("not my proper business") which he characterizes as "a very dull and unsatisfactory exercise, lacking in realism, in stir and the unexpected, obsessed by the umpire at every turn, and of very doubtful value in waking up the imagination, which should be its chief function."[17]

In constructing a technocultural history of war in the 20th century, Patrick Crogan reminds us that the Cold War moment is as significant for its blurring of definitions of war (a permanent state of readiness and preemptive strategy replaces the embodied deployment of pre-1945 war) as it is for the blurring of technological intentionality (innovations pioneered in military think tanks eventually become common in consumer products, and vice versa, such that most of what counts as contemporary material advancement has some basis in military research and development).[18] For Philip Sabin, the Cold War leads to a simultaneous flourishing: the consumer market is flooded with board games, figure games, and computer war games, just as worldwide military spending on war games, simulation, modelling peaks.[19] The U.S.-based company Avalon Hill began publishing war games in the 1950s. From *Little Wars* and Avalon Hill's historical, map-based games, it is only a small step to Gary Gygax's fantasy-themed *Chainmail* (1971) and *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974), games that combine the tactical, statistics-

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[16] McKenzie Wark, "The Game of War: Debord as Strategist," *Cabinet* 29 (2008), accessed 2 Nov 2014, http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/29/wark.php.
[17] Wells 101.
[18] Patrick Crogan, *Gameplay Mode: War, Simulation, and Technoculture* (Minneapolis, MA: U of Minnesota Press, 2011), xvii-xviii.
[19] Sabin xvii-xix.

based elements of war games with acting, improvisation, and storytelling. Gygax and his friends played war games, and helped shepherd gaming from a hobby to an all-encompassing lifestyle.[20] These mainly American-developed and -distributed games did find their way to Britain in the 1970s. In later decades, British games like Dave Morris and Oliver Johnson's *Dragon Warriors* (1985) found players on both sides of the Atlantic.

Britain's military context is important to commercial computer games about war. In the early years of home computers and game consoles (years that roughly correspond to Thatcher's time as Prime Minister), British exploits in World War II proved a popular basis for games developed and published around the world. *Computer Bismarck* (1980), a landmark war strategy game developed by U.S.-based SSI (Strategic Simulations Inc.), allows the player to control British naval forces in pursuit of Germany's flagship battleship. Japanese developer Kemco's *Desert Commander* (1989) is a land-based strategy simulation that pits allied forces (Montgomery and Patton's armies) against Rommel and the Afrika Korps. Like many war games of the decade, this is a turn taking-based representation of war from a "god-like" perspective, where players control units that move around a grid-based map. British developers like Durrell Games created war games too, with titles like *Harrier Attack* (1983) showcasing the latest in naval aviation. A rare computer game engagement with the campaign in the Falkland Islands is *Yomp* (1983), a U.K.-based Virgin Games's variant on *Frogger* (1981), in which the player controls a kitted-out soldier and navigates him across a dangerous Argentine-controlled highway.[21] *Yomp* is an example of how the genre traditions and constraints of a medium elicit a radical change in the representation of war. Here, war and soldiers are forced into an almost

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[20] Brad King and John Borland, *Dungeons and Dreamers: A Story of How Computer Games Created a Global Community* (Pittsburgh, PA: CMU/ETC Press, 2014), Prologue: The Tabletop Game. eBook.
[21] "Yomp," *World of Spectrum*, accessed 4 Nov 2014, http://www.worldofspectrum.org/infoseekid.cgi?id=0005832.

wholly unrelated style of game, the idea being that developer Virgin Games was capitalizing both of the success of an earlier games's style of play and on the extensive international coverage of the campaign in the Falklands.

Commercial simulations of war became available to hobbyist and casual player alike just as the military's own war games became more and more complex and occluded. The most well-known kind of metagaming pioneered by the allies in World War II was "systems analysis," described by Andrew Wilson "as analysis from an economic viewpoint in which the word 'economic' has a special meaning: not that of the budgeteer or comptroller who wants to reduce expenditures all round—though it is often accused to serving this end—but that of the planner seeking the best allocation of limited resources among a variety of competing military demands."[22] The "game" of systems analysis involves running scenarios using available data and contingencies in order to predict different outcomes. It is the statistical and mathematical equivalent to the professional historian asking "what if?" in a counter-factual study. Operations research (decision-making through mathematical models), the Marine Corps' Landing Force War Game (a game that allows players to test out contingency scenarios for amphibious landings), and tactical simulations (like those played at Britain's Defence Operational Analysis Establishment, wherein officers commanded men in a controlled environment, usually in a competition between forces of vastly different sizes to rehearse the asymmetry between the armed forces of the United Kingdom and those of the Soviet Union) are but the tip of a very big iceberg.[23] The U.S. Air Force pioneered "the management and control of eventuality through virtualization" through projects like SAGE, a computer simulation interface constructed in

[22] Wilson 60.
[23] *Ibid*. 84-86.

cooperation with MIT and the Rand corporation.[24] Using radar, constantly updating screens, and drawing on large amounts of computing power, SAGE monitored for nuclear threats. As these different simulations show, the Cold War dream was real-time, electronically-aided control schemes that could both simulate possible threats and neutralize those threats from afar.

Heavily technologized and representational war games pioneered in the 1950s and 1960s supplemented, but never totally overtook, conventional training and maneuvers. Maneuvers not only allowed soldiers to get a feel for equipment, but also familiarized new recruits with the spaces and experiences of battle. In *Operation Attack* (1951), a British Pathé newsreel documenting maneuvers at the infantry school at Warminster, Wiltshire, the camera is at a remove, filming the effects of troop movements and various types of ordnance (bombs dropped from planes, shells from tanks, and so on) over the course of several set-ups.[25] With smoke and explosions obscuring some of the spaces of battle, and the attendant noises and smells of combat, these war games function as an exercise in what war feels like.

The idea of training remains important in two competing but interlocking ways. Throughout the twentieth century, the British military maintained a sense of codification that tried to ensure that its troops had at least basic practical knowledge. In films about National Service like *Carry On Sergeant*, this is illustrated in the premium put on the assured display of technical skill, as demonstrated by the graduation competition, in which the previously shambolic recruits showcase their new competence. The idea is that these men are now combat-ready, having practiced the tools necessary for survival. This sequence simultaneously underscores the other sense in which training is key: the soldiers have learned to accept the

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[24] Crogan 6.

[25] See "Operation Attack - War Games," *British Pathé*, accessed 11 Nov 2014, http://www.britishpathe.com/video/operation-attack-war-games-1/query/18th.

culture of the military, in which teamwork, loss of individual will, and willing subordination ensure that the machine functions.

Stories of war training and enculturation are as divided as Britain's general conception of class. If films discussed in Chapter 2 like *Carry on Sergeant* or *Adolf Hitler: My Part in his Downfall* show what training is like for the rank and file (mainly of working or lower middle class backgrounds), then the public school tradition similarly illustrates how the wealthy and aristocratic turned their schooling into officer commissions and positions of leadership. I suggest that historical representations British public school life (and, later, the sports and games so crucial to that kind of education) are a place where the simulation of war and militarism happens on an everyday basis. Britain had an institutional means of training its young men in the culture of war and of simulating and replicating its feelings and effects long before the deep and widespread connections forged in the 20th century. A relevant digression into the culture of Britain's schools will demonstrate the depth and variety of these modes of simulation.

2. The Public School Ethos and Officer Class Militarism

Since the 19th century, Britain's officer class has been disproportionately drawn from soldiers of similar background. In practical terms, officer training schools like Royal Military Academy Sandhurst recruited from public schools (often boys who excelled at physical activities and leadership, as opposed to those with academic or scholarly interests), producing officers for the military through further education that mixed theoretical and practical instruction, games (sports as well as maneuvers and war games) and what Lawrence James calls "Spartan character

building."[26] Even with the gradual disappearance of purchased commissions, military leaders continued to be drawn from a narrow pool of wealthy men. In surveying the composition of the British army at the beginning of the Second World War, Jeremy A. Crang writes that "certainly the aristocratic dominance had been lost as recruitment reflected the changing fortunes of social classes and occupational groups; but the army still relied on an exclusive upper and upper middle class circle to fill the commissioned ranks, characterised almost entirely by those with a public school education."[27] James sees the connection between this background and commissioned rank in a longer view, noting that "whatever their parentage, officers were invariably the products of post-Arnoldian public schools," continuing that "it would be impossible to overestimate the influence of these institutions which shaped the thinking, not only of generations of army and naval officers, but of the entire ruling elite of Britain from the late nineteenth century to the mid twentieth."[28]

The Arnold to which James refers is not Matthew Arnold (though the sense of cultural snobbery is fitting), but his father Thomas, an educator and scholar whose reforms at Rugby School in the 1830s set the curriculum for the wealthiest and most influential public schools of the 19th and 20th centuries. While the Public Schools were not officially recognized as such until well after Thomas Arnold's death, his influence on their structure remained strong. According to Lytton Strachey, Arnold's charge was to both change how the schools were run and make them better at what they already did: "on the one hand, there was a desire for a more liberal curriculum; on the other, there was a demand for a higher moral tone."[29] A.J.H Reeve describes his improvements to the curriculum as consisting of a reorganization of how boys lived and were

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[26] Lawrence James, *Warrior Race: A History of the British at War* (New York: St. Martin's, 2003), 433.
[27] Jeremy A. Crang, *The British Army and the People's War, 1939-1945* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000), 21.
[28] James *Warrior Race* 431.
[29] Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (New York: Garden City Publishing, 1918), 212.

overseen, in concert with increased focus on mathematics and modern languages (although the classics remained dominant).[30] The new moral tone emanated from Arnold's own beliefs. Combining devoted Anglican Christianity and a sense of moral righteousness, Arnold ensured that religious instruction, compulsory chapel attendance, and a sense of duty were tied to the identity of his school. Arnold's high-minded, seemingly benevolent instruction had its dark side, as innumerable commentators and memoirists have noted. The schools produced nearly as much coercive, violently paternalistic collateral damage as life-affirming benevolence. But the collusion of official religion, money, privileged class background, and opportunity meant that the ideas of leadership and masculinity that arrived out of the public schools were, in the words of Jeffrey Richards, "the dominant image of the national character."[31]

As Britain's empire expanded in the 19th century, the purpose of the public schools came into sharp focus: less an education that would prepare some boys for further academic or ecclesiastical schooling, but instead an increased focus on training soldiers and administrators of overseas holdings. This was especially true for boarding students whose whole lives were connected to the school. John R. Reed notes that by the 1880s, there was a markedly increased sense of regimentation in the life of a public school boy, a standardization that throws the limitations of this type of schooling into relief.[32] The schools were increasingly good at producing group-minded, consensus-building graduates: "Boys went to school not to learn the Greek particles and the digamma but to meet other young boys of their class and form connections which would profit them in their later lives; and they went to be trained as leaders of

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[30] A.J.H. Reeve, "Arnold, Thomas (1795–1842)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2014, accessed 6 Nov 2014, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/686.

[31] Jeffrey Richards, *Happiest Days: The Public School in English Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1988), 298.

[32] John R. Reed, *Old School Ties: The Public School in British Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1964), 6.

men, as preservers and extenders of the great British Empire."[33] Freethinkers, true individualists, the physically sickly, or boys of different backgrounds did not thrive. For these students, "the regimentation, perpetual constraint, and continual tyrannization demanded by such formalized systems made what should have been education seem like incarceration."[34] It is not surprising that these schools (often represented and experienced as prisons), had strong associations with the military. Ascetic living conditions, the forced acceptance of rank and blind deference, compulsory participation in games, sport, and cadet exercises, and the solemn observance of the sacrifices of old boy army heroes meant that public school life was always partially about tacit military training.

George Orwell was one writer to push back against the traditions and retroactively recognized the true meaning of this mode of education. A former student of the now-closed St. Cyprian's School in Eastbourne, Sussex, Orwell's scathing "Such, Such Were the Joys" (published posthumously in 1952 after a long gestation period) extracts cultural critique from personal experience. Orwell (then Eric Blair, a scared and scrawny little boy) does not recollect in tranquility, but painfully revisits a formative period in life that, if anything, left him with an even more acute sense of social justice. Life at St. Cyprian's was full of bullying, shame, and deprivation. Students lived in constant fear of beatings.[35] As a poorer boy (his family was solidly middle class, despite wealth several generations back), Orwell was well aware of how the headmaster, indeed the whole culture of the school, blatantly favored the rich.[36] Contradictions

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[33] *Ibid*. 8-9.
[34] *Ibid*. 53-54.
[35] George Orwell, "Such, Such Were the Joys," *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell IV: In Front of Your Nose, 1945-1950*, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 331-332.
[36] *Ibid*. 335-336.

abounded. Officially, the school stood for fair play and the ethical high road. In practice, it acted through favoritism and savage punishments. He best summarizes it thus:

> The various codes which were presented to you at St Cyprian's—religious, moral, social, and intellectual—contradicted one another if you worked out their implications. The essential conflict was between the tradition of nineteenth-century asceticism and the actually existing luxury and snobbery of the pre-1914 age. On the one side were low-church Bible Christianity, sex puritanism, insistence on hard work and respect for academic distinction, disapproval over self-indulgence: on the other, contempt for 'braininess', and worship of games, contempt for foreigners and the working class, an almost neurotic dread of poverty, and, above all, the assumption not only that money and privilege are the things that matter, but that it is better to inherit them than to have to work for them.[37]

The public school ethos is, with slight variations, the synthesis of Arnold's high-mindedness, novelist Charles Kingsley's "muscular Christianity" (defined by Kurt W. Peterson as an ideal that "celebrated physical exertion, comradeship, and determination and emphasized manliness, morality, health, and patriotism"), and the inheritance of the elite, itself a fraught combination of *noblesse oblige* and pure snobbery.[38] From here, it is only one step to consolidated power and conquest. Jeremy Black reminds us that muscular Christianity and its cult of heroism provide the dominant discourse for Britain's 19th century imperialism.[39]

In *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), Richard Hoggart dwells on his own experience as a "scholarship boy," in the process unraveling some of the social contradictions of school life and culture as a whole. Hoggart writes about class mobility at a time when that concept is still unproven, noting that a sense of loss inevitably attends the financial and social benefits of expanded horizons. Scholarship boys, that is, working-class boys whose intelligence grants them entry into the public school system despite their parent's inability to pay for such an education,

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[37] *Ibid*. 355-356.
[38] Kurt W. Peterson, "Muscular Christianity," *St. James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture*, Vol. 3, eds. Sara Pendergast and Todd Pendergast. (Detroit: St. James Press, 2000), 457.
[39] Jeremy Black, *A Military History of Britain: From 1775 to the Present* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 98.

experience change in an acute way: “with them [scholarship boys] the sense of loss is increased precisely because they are uprooted from their class, often under the stimulus of a stronger critical intelligence or imagination, qualities which can lead them into an unusual self-consciousness before their own situation (and make it easy for a sympathiser to dramatise their ‘*Angst*’).”[40] The working-class boy who enters the world of the public school—think, as a parallel phenomenon, of the working class enlisted soldier who achieves officer rank—is cut off from his home background, but not fully at ease with his new lot in life, where attitudes, spending habits, and expectations chaff against his own. For Hoggart, the difficulty for boys like himself and Orwell/Blair (although these two men are clearly intellectuals whose personal narratives are not typical) is that what is lost cannot be regained, and what is provided as a new, better alternative is seen for all its flaws.[41]

The ideological effects of public school education on prospects and outlook are well represented in British literature, films, and television shows about this milieu. Famously, Thomas Hughes’s *Tom Brown’s School Days* (1857) and *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861) contrasts the straight and narrow path eventually chosen by protagonist Tom Brown (the ethical high road, Christian charity) with the more militaristic, opportunistic traits of bully Flashman (he uses force, is ruthless, and is now regarded as almost a stereotypical embodiment of as nasty rich person). Hughes’ pro-Arnoldian sympathies grate against Michael Palin’s and Terry Jones’s parodic *Ripping Yarn* “Tompkinson’s Schooldays” (1976), the pilot episode of their television series of Victorian and Edwardian stories that runs rampant on the sensibilities of school fiction. Andrew Pixley characterizes the basic conceit of “Tompkinson” (and the rest of the *Ripping Yarns*) as achieving humor through “the exaggeration of the cliché” and “the inversion of the

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[40] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (New York: Oxford UP, 1970 [1967]), 239.
[41] *Ibid*. 246-247.

cliché."[42] In "Tompkinson's Schooldays," Greybridge School is the embodiment of Orwell's vision of school as prison (Tompkinson, played by Michael Palin, spends most of the episode trying to escape). At Greybridge, the most important person is not the headmaster, but the officially recognized school bully. The initiation rites verge on the extreme, and include being willingly crucified and fighting "the school grizzly bear."

The critique at the heart of "Tompkinson's Schooldays" is over how a resistant boy like Tompkinson comes to be claimed by the system that he tries to escape. Upon winning the regional one-leg hopping competition for the school (thanks to cocaine supplied by the outgoing school bully), Tompkinson arrives back at school hailed as a hero. Rather than seize the moment to escape once and for all, he accepts his promotion, and begins his reign as the new bully by kicking a weedy little boy. Tompkinson therefore goes from pushing back against all that the schools stands for to embracing his new introduction into the elite.

In fact, one of the key themes in British public school stories since those of Hughes is the degree to which these schools promote a controlled form of insubordination and resistance that ends up strengthening the position of the institution. Recall that this is precisely the same mechanism at work in the films discussed in Chapter 1. War films made during the Second World War like *King Arthur Was a Gentleman* show how military institutions always profit from their seeming weak links, turning liabilities into boons. In Rudyard Kipling's *Stalky and Co.* stories, Stalky, McTurk, and Beetle use the adventuresome, industrious ideal of the public school ethos to rebel in a minor way against restrictions put on them. In "In Ambush" (1898), the boys sneak out of school, ingratiate themselves to a local landowner (Colonel Dabney, who lets them use his grounds for reading and play), and later hear Dabney tell off school housemasters who

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[42] Andrew Pixley, "'Plucky' Palin Marches On: A Ripping Tale of BBC 2 Comedy Adventure," *The Complete Ripping Yarns DVD Booklet* (Silver Spring, MD: Acorn Media, 2005), 6.

followed Stalky and his friends in hope of getting them into trouble.[43] In adventure after adventure, Stalky and his chums game the system, using their smarts and privileges to gain freedoms, pull pranks, and confuse and enrage school officials. Stalky reads like a maverick military general, leading his troops on special missions (Kipling courts such readings, as Stalky was based on the witnessed exploits of Lionel Dunsterville, whom Kipling knew from United Services College, Devon).[44] One presumes that Stalky, like Dunsterville, grew up to be a war hero and pillar of the establishment.

Some school stories explicitly engage the tension between the school as a nominally egalitarian, nurturing place of self-discovery and its function to train students in the violence necessary for the defense of the nation. This seems to me to be a longstanding narrative trope. To take two filmic examples, separated by over half a century, consider messages embedded in *The Guinea Pig* (1948, Roy Boulting) and those in the culminating sections of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* stories, especially as represented in the film *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part II* (2011, David Yates). In *The Guinea Pig*, working class student Jack Read (Richard Attenborough) attends a public school. He mirrors Hoggart's claims about scholarship boys almost verbatim: displaced from his family thanks to his cleverness (though fiercely loyal to his mother), Jack does not fit into the culture of the school, is bullied, transgresses the rules of the institution, and makes enemies of most boys and faculty (save Nigel, played by Robert Flemyng, the sympathetic young teacher who eventually marries the headmaster's daughter and takes over as head of the school, in the process promising a more modern and fair-handed place). Even as Jack starts to acclimate himself to the school—by making some friends and excelling at sports—

[43] See Rudyard Kipling, "In Ambush," *Stalky & Co.* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1920), 1-44.
[44] Samuel Pyeatt Menefee, "Dunsterville, Lionel Charles (1865–1946)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2011, accessed 9 Nov 2014, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/58774.

he considers leaving, as his mother has to return to work in order to support his education. Jack feels guilt over his disruption of his parent's stable life.

The film's solution to reconciling the traditions of the school and the non-traditional presences of the Read family is offered in military terms. When Jack's parents visit the school for the Founder's Day celebration, Jack's dad (Bernard Miles) has a candid talk with the headmaster (Cecil Trouncer). This happens as the two walk the grounds of the school, the camera framing them at middle distance so as to emphasize the impressive age and size of the buildings around, in the process giving the impression of the school as a permanent, historically timeless place. This encounter between Mr. Read and Mr. Hartley encapsulates both the incrementally liberalist concerns of many of Boulting's social comedies and what Alison Light calls the "conservative modernity" of British culture, where life "could simultaneously look backwards and forwards; it could accommodate the past in new forms of the present; it was a deferral of modernity and yet it also demanded a different sort of conservatism from that which had gone before."[45] These two socially and temperamentally different men bond over the ability of the institution of the public school to give its students a sense of courage, fair-play, and gallantry. Mr. Read, who served in the Second World War, admits to liking the way that the school gives his son access to a similar set of skills and values what he learned in the military. After the exchange, headmaster Mr. Hartley no longer objects to Jack being at the school, but sees, in their mutual patriotism and desire to uphold national traditions, a way to accept working class and lower middle class boys. Thus, the kind of progress offered by *The Guinea Pig* is deeply confused, as the acceptance of a new way of framing conservative values makes the school more socially inclusive.

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[45] Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1992), 10.

The *Harry Potter* stories contain the same gesture, albeit differently realized. In these books and films, Harry and his close friends are at once true outsiders and to-be-envied celebrities. Harry, Ron, and Hermione do not fit the historical profile for attending Hogwarts and, most of the time, resist the school's traditions and in-built snobberies. Aristocratic bully Draco Malfoy does fit within, and even seems to embody, the old order. He is the Flashman of the school, channeling high Tory beliefs, fascist and sadistic tastes, and duplicitous behavior into a mean package. Yet, Harry and Co. are like Stalky and Co.: they learn to live within the culture of the school, bending and breaking rules, which paradoxically undermines some aspects of their education (punishments and detentions get in the way of lessons) but strengthens others (their practical knowledge and ability to game the system proves as important to survival as book learning). For all the ways in which Hogwarts projects its ideal as a multicultural, inclusive place—as much a true vision for 21st century Britain as a consideration courting the franchise's international fan base—its narrative arc still invests a nationalistic militarism as an important part of attending school. Throughout, "Defense Against the Dark Arts" is the equivalent to cadet corps training.

By the final film (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Pt. II)*, Hogwarts has to defend itself in the context of what is basically a magical World War between Voldemort (Ralph Fiennes) and his forces, and people and creatures supportive of presumptive messiah Harry Potter (Daniel Radcliffe). The major set piece of the film is a battle that takes place at the school, thus showcasing the deep vein of martial training that the school had provided over the previous years. This movie channels other war films, (or, films principally categorized by other genre designations that also visualize war). Aerial attacks on Hogwarts, visualized with digital cinematic compositing, channel popular representations of the Battle of Britain; the multiple

vignettes juggled by editing between different spaces that all contribute to the larger sense of this "final battle" recalls the parallel editing used to great effect in such epic finales as *Star Wars: The Return of the Jedi* (1983, Richard Marquand) and *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003, Peter Jackson); and the individual acts of physical heroism, such Neville Longbottom's (Matthew Lewis) charge into almost certain death, embody the same type of fighting at close-quarters found in moments of films like *A Bridge Too Far*. The whole film literalizes the "Fortress England" mentality that characterized British national defense in the 1940s, a notion thoroughly critiqued by former *Harry Potter* director Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* (2006), in which the evocation of this siege mentality suggests a nation that has given up on the world. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part II* teaches tolerance, goodness, honesty, and open-mindedness, but couches these values in older systems and institutions whose values do not always align.

The British public school, even in its more egalitarian forms, still trains leaders of a sort. The linkages between war and the Harry Potter stories illustrate the degree to which ideas about war, military prowess, and strategy get figurative and symbolically displaced onto a whole world of complementary, coded activities. In no realm, however, is this movement so evident as it is in the historical and textual connections between war and sports. Sports provide the physical realization of war simulation, even if they lack the overt visual trappings of war and militarism found in table-top strategy games or in formally organized maneuvers. Moreover, sports and games provide different (that is, explicitly classed) kinds of training that translate, as I demonstrate in discussions of specific film examples, into different physical relationships with the danger of warfare.

3. Sports and War: Training and Control at a Remove

In *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal*, J.A. Mangen writes that for 19th century public school boys and their teachers, games had a "moral" purpose, nothing less than the "inculcation of 'manliness'."[46] A primary "ethic" of instruction in this period, one that continues to today, are games (especially team games), "and by means of this ethic the public schoolboy supposedly learnt *inter alia* the basic tools of imperial command: courage, endurance, assertion, control and self-control."[47] In the three film and television texts just analyzed, games provide a sense of training and normalization: Tompkinson's athletic skill allows him to accept his position as head bully; montage scenes in *The Guinea Pig* showcase snippets of Jack Read's ability at rugby, a detail offered to explain his coming-to-terms with the culture of the school; and, most famously, Harry Potter's abilities on the Quidditch pitch (a kind of broomstick-aided polo game) not only make him a folk hero to skeptical students, but give hints at his martial skill.

Team sports and games hold a particular appeal to public school boys and the nascent officer class. In the postwar years, sports were often clearly demarcated along class lines (although the internationalization and commercialization of all sports, along with a decline in cultural traditions of amateurism, softened these distinctions somewhat). While rugby in all forms is based on Rugby Football (that is, on the football game pioneered at Rugby school in the early 19th century), Rugby League (the faster, more commercial form of rugby pioneered by teams in the north of England) is coded as working class, as are physical contact sports like

[46] J.A. Mangen, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal* (New York: Viking, 1986), 17-18.
[47] *Ibid*. 18.

boxing.[48] By contrast, polo and cricket are coded as sports for the wealthy. They are equipment intensive (and therefore expensive) sports that were, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, visibly deployed as tools of empire. While physically demanding, polo and cricket reward restraint, poise, and calculation in more obvious ways than outwardly physically brutal sports like both forms of Rugby.

The ruling class has often suppressed working class access to group assembly, athletics, and games. When outright suppression was not tenable, leaders and institutions promoted an ethos of emulation, where proper behavior was modeled by the upper middle and aristocratic classes in hopes of setting a sympathetic example. In the 16th century, legislation was twice enacted in parliament banning middle and working class spectators from sporting events, both as a means of baldly maintaining class privilege and as a means of averting potential mob violence and unruliness.[49] On the other hand, according to Tony Bennett, the museum was opened up to all classes as a tool of moral and social reform, and was explicitly modeled as an alternative to, say, the pub or to sporting events:

> The museum, that is to say, explicitly targeted the popular body as an object for reform, doing so through a variety of routines and technologies requiring a shift in the norms of bodily comportment. This was accomplished, most obviously, by the direct proscription of those forms of behaviour associated with places of popular assembly by, for example, rules forbidding eating and drinking, outlawing the touching of exhibits and, quite frequently, stating—or at least advising—what should be worn and what should not. In this way, while formally free and open, the museum effected its own pattern of informal discriminations and exclusions. Perhaps more distinctive, however, was the constitution of the museum—alongside public parks and the like—as a space of emulation in which the working classes, in being allowed to co-mingle with the middle classes in a formally undifferentiated sphere, could learn to adopt new forms of behaviour by imitation.[50]

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[48] Yet even boxing was fashionable amongst the elite in the later part of the 18th century. See Lawrence James, *Aristocrats: Power, Grace, and Decadence: Britain's Great Ruling Classes from 1066 to the Present* (New York: St. Martin's, 2009), 281-282.
[49] Derek Wilson, *Tudor England* (Oxford: Shire, 2010), 68.
[50] Tony Bennett, "The Political Rationality of the Museum," *Continuum: The Australian Journal of Media and Culture* 3.1 (1990), accessed 11 Nov 2014, http://wwwmcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/3.1/Bennett.html.

A series of negotiated encounters by men and women of different backgrounds upholds Britain's class system. For Lawrence James, the links between class, school, and ideological transmission are unmistakable, if somewhat contradictory:

> What was taught in the public schools was disseminated to the lower-middle and working classes through the Boys Brigade and, in the early 1900s, the Boy Scouts. There was a paradox here: the Gothic moral revival was resuscitating and elevating the values of the medieval aristocrat at a time when its successors were gradually forfeiting their political and social eminence.[51]

War hero Robert Baden-Powell's scouting movement thus synthesizes the elite's desire to control the behavior of the masses, while simultaneously modeling ethically and morally ideal instruction, through an ethos explicitly based on muscular Christianity. Pathé's 1916 newsreel *Baden-Powell Inspects Boy Scouts* manages to capture the whole spirit of the endeavor into a scant minute of screen time. The short opens with a veritable mob of boys running, from off in the distance, toward the camera, where Baden-Powell and other scouting officers stand in the foreground. Miraculously, they form somewhat orderly ranks, and soon raise cheers to their leader. This short vignette ends with Baden-Powell greeting leaders, briefly showing the formal lines and sense of discipline that scouting promotes. On the one hand, this is scouting as useful, practical, and (presumably for the boys) a fun alternative, or at least adjunct, to formal education; on the other, the uniforms and protocols neatly show how military hierarchies and values come to be transmitted to children from a young age.

As Jeffrey Richards reminds, at public schools, "games mania" coincided with the peak of empire and the introduction of officer training and cadet corps programs.[52] As much as the collusion between school elitism, sports, and the military remained a dominant image and a

[51] James *Aristocrats* 288.
[52] Richards 11-12.

desired outcome, critical voices began to call out the flaws in the system, beginning in the 1930s and continuing into the postwar period.[53] John R. Reed weighs both sides of this culture of control when he writes that "sports, in addition to keeping young boys occupied and too weary to indulge in sexual abuses, created a greater sense of community, though within that artificial community many boys remained lonely and friendless."[54] Sports ideally built strong, upcoming citizen-soldiers.

Orwell was one such commentator who remained apart from the community. His description of football from "Such, Such Were the Joys" might as well be in reference to the trenches of the Ardennes: "the daily nightmare of football—the cold, the mud, the hideous greasy ball that came whizzing at one's face, the gouging knees and trampling boots of bigger boys."[55] In a newspaper column called "The Sporting Spirit" (written during the war), Orwell took issue with the supposedly unifying meanings of international competition. For him, "serious sport has nothing to do with fair play," but is rather "bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard for all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence: in other words, it is war minus the shooting."[56] Orwell's bad memories, and J.A. Mangen's claims about the real meaning behind public school sports, meet in Orwell's most extended meditation on football:

> Football, it seemed to me, is not really played for the pleasure of kicking a ball about, but is a species of fighting. The lovers of football are large, boisterous, nobbly boys who are good at knocking down and trampling on slightly smaller boys. That was the pattern of school life—a continuous triumph of the strong over the weak. Virtue consisted in winning: it consisted in being bigger, stronger, handsomer, richer, more popular, more elegant, more unscrupulous than other people—in dominating them, bullying them, making them suffer pain, making them look foolish, getting the better of them in every way. Life was hierarchical and whatever happened was right. There were the strong, who

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[53] Reed 12.
[54] *Ibid*. 59.
[55] Orwell, "Such, Such" 345.
[56] George Orwell, "The Sporting Spirit," *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell IV: In Front of Your Nose, 1945-1950*, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 42.

> deserved to win and always did win, and there were the weak, who deserved to lose and always did lose, everlastingly.[57]

Games and sports built empire. For decades, they generated and consolidated power, skill, and confidence for the ruling class, using simulation and the trappings of war as a means of glory, and as a guarantee for leadership. Thanks to television, by the late 1950s, sports of all sorts achieved even more widespread, and even more egalitarian, appeal. For David Kynaston, "the time was ripe for a new, non-public-school approach to covering sport," a promise fulfilled through prominent players of more diverse social and cultural backgrounds, commentators who did not speak in posh accents, and unexpected success in international contests.[58] By 1966, England had won the World Cup final (having once again defeated Germany).

4. School, Sports, and Games: Some Key Films About Simulated War

4.1 School

Andrew Roberts writes that the stock story of British boarding school fiction is as follows: "an exploration of how our hero, a potentially recalcitrant individual, could be brought to accept the wisdom of the traditional value system."[59] These stories are mainly dedicated to legitimizing the old order. Literary explorations of the school experience up to the period around the Second World War (of the "quality" sort, like *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, and of the popular variety like the Greyfriars stories in *Magnet*) are marked, to use Orwell's phrase, by "no political development whatever," a strange sense of being out of time, unreflexive in the face of

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[57] Orwell "Such, Such" 359.
[58] David Kynaston, *Modernity Britain: Opening the Box, 1957-1959* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 200.
[59] Andrew Roberts, "Back to School," *Sight & Sound* 17.8 (Aug 2007): 47.

momentous world-historical events.[60] This curious inertia changes in the postwar period. For instance, Geoffrey Willans and Ronald Searle's subversive Nigel Molesworth stories (published between 1953-1959) track the school exploits of a somewhat monstrous boy seemingly birthed out of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu* plays, using an uncompromising first-person mode of address that keeps his peculiar opinions and terrible spelling intact. For Kevin Jackson, the contemporary references to books and culture, combined with Molesworth's deep skepticism and cynicism towards school life, redeem Willans and Searle books like *Back in the Jug Agane* (1959) in the face of staid tradition.[61] Molesworth is worlds away from Tom Brown. He is beyond the pale of corrective instruction.

Ronald Searle was a key figure in both celebrating and critiquing boarding school life. His *St. Trinian's* (1941-1953) cartoons imagined a girl's boarding school that upended all preconceptions about ladylike behavior. Searle's sinuous, exaggerated drawing style creates a world in which the young women of St. Trinian's school thrive in the face of social and cultural norms. The girls fight, murder, and seduce, all while unrepentantly destroying their own school. Searle's creation was adapted into a long-running series of films, including an initial sequence of five from 1954 to 1980 that engages the girls in everything from horse-racing to trade-unionism, and two recent re-boot titles from 2007 and 2009 that re-purpose the concept for contemporary audiences. Lesley Speed argues that the *St. Trinian's* franchise parodies the established genre of girl's school fiction (a type of school fiction set apart from the literature focusing on boy's education) by violating that genre's discourse of insularity and social isolation (the apartness that, on the one hand, allows young women to learn and live in an environment without the direct

[60] George Orwell "Boys' Weeklies"
[61] Kevin Jackson, "Whizz for Willans," *Independent* 12 Sept 1992, 11 Nov 2014, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/humour—whizz-for-willans-molesworth-is-back-kevin-jackson-doffs-a-grubby-school-cap-to-the-genius-of-his-creators-1550901.html.

social enforcement of patriarchal norms and, on the other, removes them from social spheres of action typically associated with masculine education).[62] Speed further argues for the significance of the series in that “the institutional waywardness of St. Trinian’s involves a convergence of social ignominy with disorderly female behaviour,” in other words a world in which young women push back against all the codes of decorum and acceptable presentation that govern their status in the cultural imaginary.[63]

The first film in the series, *The Belles of St Trinian’s* (1954) establishes the formula, where a nominal plot—in this case, the school’s attempt to stave off debt and Ministry of Education enforcement through one big horse racing bet—is mainly an excuse for scattershot satire on the nature of school life and popular conceptions of adolescence. That said, Bruce Babington also characterizes the mode of criticism as dulled enough for public consumption and the conservative filmgoing climate of the 1950s. Of *The Belles of St Trinian’s*, he writes that “the film displays a world upside down where changes are burlesqued in a form as stripped of tendentiousness as possible, but the very suppression of tendentiousness, which probably guaranteed the film’s success, leaves them tame for later viewers.”[64]

Despite their suggestion of unruliness, the *St. Trinian’s* films unexpectedly bring the girls of the school into contact with conservative cultural institutions typically experienced as domains of male privilege. Street writes that “the St. Trinian’s films envisage a female community that benefits, albeit haphazardly, through adopting business tactics that revise the traditionally cloistered image of the girls’ school,” an upstart fiscal sensibility in which the girls seize the

[62] Lesley Speed, “Reading, Writing, and Unruliness: Female Education in the St. Trinian’s Films,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 5.2 (2002): 222-223.
[63] *Ibid*. 234.
[64] Babington 172.

economic initiative by doing things like distilling their own gin.[65] Most tellingly, Speed finds that "all of the St. Trinian's films envisage collective female action in military terms, from the girls' use of weaponry in *Blue Murder at St Trinian's* and the tank in *The Pure Hell of St Trinian's* to their military-style organization in *The Great St Trinian's Train Robbery*."[66] *Blue Murder at St Trinian's* best explores the series' connections between school life and militarization. The film opens with soldiers who are garrisoned at St. Trinian's, apparently there to contain the girls in advance of their probable mayhem. Previous troops have been lost to the girls (the film mentions a whole "radar unit" of men and artillery), with the suggestion being that their disappearance is somewhere between the girl's capacity for violence and their burgeoning sexual appetites. Speed suggests that the girls "pacify" the troops by dancing with and seducing them. In its own limited way, then, *Blue Murder at St Trinian's* upends the usual collusion between the military and (male) boarding school education.[67] Here, the young women's aggression, sexual assertion, and willingness to defy authority suggests a school culture in which hierarchical militarism is foregone in place of a differently defined female capacity for caprice and violence.

A persistent theme in postwar school films is the precarious balance between discipline and the official culture of the school on the one hand, and the Hobbesian capacity for the students to resort to anarchy and violence on the other. This basic struggle can be presented in many different ways: as a youthful mode of wish fulfillment, as a conservative warning against a decline in traditional civilizing values, or as a dramatization of tensions that exist outside of the school, in the culture at large. All three of these ideological claims overlap in Peter Brook's adaptation of William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* (1963). The film follows the inevitable

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[65] Speed 231.
[66] *Ibid*. 223.
[67] *Ibid*. 224.

shift from order to disorder in the wake of disaster, in the process illustrating the essential brutality of humankind when faced with scarcity and isolation.[68] The basic plot—an airplane full of boys crash-lands, washing most of them ashore on a tropical island, where they first emulate the rules and codes of their public school educations before resorting to tribalism, hunting, and murder—is suffuse with military considerations, a sense of discipline and a code of ethics that surrounds the whole film. The movie is curious in that it scrutinizes British culture while being somewhat removed from the mainstream of British cinema. Michael Kustow relates that the *Lord of the Flies* was filmed on a private island off the coast of Puerto Rico that was owned by the Woolworth retail company, and that the cast of nonprofessional boy actors was cast from expatriate families living in America.[69] The film was produced by American Lewis M. Allen on a tight budget, and was distributed by British Lion.

Jackson Burgess suggests that "Brook has superimposed the titles on blurry halftone stills suggesting a nuclear war, an evacuation of children from Britain (to Australia?), and a crash."[70] Like *La Jetée* (1962, Chris Marker), this is a European art film that evokes the specter of the atomic bomb as an invitation to explore issues of desperate living. As the boys flee a new kind of war, they encounter struggle of the oldest sort. Although they are lucky to have survived in the first place, they face a savage struggle for resources that escalates because of their inability to agree on a social contract.

Tellingly, the film begins from a position that emphasizes the hierarchical discipline that the school. Jack (Tom Chapin), formerly head of a school choir, asserts his right to rule based on his previous leadership role, combined with his size and willingness to hunt (a desire for violence that later gives him no qualms about hurting other boys). Jack, who first appears in immaculate

[68] Jackson Burgess, "Lord of the Flies," *Film Quarterly* 17.2 (Winter 1963-1964): 32.
[69] Michael Kustow, *Peter Brook: A Biography* (New York: St. Martin's, 2005), 120-121.
[70] Burgess 31.

uniform, represents the devolution of the school military tradition, as his character forsakes militaristic honor in favor of violence. Ralph (James Aubrey) is actually elected leader first, showing how reason and charisma—classic public school charm—contrast with assertion and bullying, yet his is a losing battle, a quiet voice of composure that is almost murdered by Jack and his tribe of killers.

The film ends by reasserting its military themes. Ralph is chased by Jack and most of the remaining boys through smoky, densely planted landscapes. These shots stress obscured vision, thereby putting them in deliberate conversation with combat sequences in war films. On his last legs, Ralph stumbles onto the beach, whereupon he encounters a man. The camera tilts up (simulating Ralph's field of vision and giving the audience a "reveal"), in an important shot that introduces a Naval officer, part of a rescue team that discovers the boys at their most savage. Edward Trostle Jones suggests that the film's sense of reciprocal violence and "permanent warfare" is embodied by this officer, whose seemingly happy appearance presents the possibility that life outside the island has similarly become a place of ceaseless struggle.[71]

The film that carries the consequences of school militarization the furthest is Lindsay Anderson's *if....* (1968), a movie structured around "a year in the life of a school" that uses the conflicts embedded in the English educational system to comment on wider issues of nation and identity.[72] Far from imagining the public school as a place that solely produces a unanimously accepted form of nationalism and warmongering, *if....* illustrates how the school officially teaches a set of attitudes and values that simultaneously create their own counter-balance, an attitude to violence and war that seeks liberation and radical change over tradition. In *if....*, the "Crusaders" are lead by Mick Travis (Malcolm McDowell, who reprises a version of the role in

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[71] Edward Trostle Jones, *Following Directions: A Study of Peter Brook* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985), 141.
[72] Interview with Paul Sutton, Grantchester, 17 Mar 2014.

subsequent Lindsay Anderson films that make oblique references to the character's past), a consummate adolescent rebel who charismatically and spontaneously rejects authority. Mick and his group construct their identity in direct opposition to the whips of College House, a gang of prefects who embody all the snobbish, hypocritical, and elitist attitudes of the establishment. The whips represent the ideal subjecthood of the public school, licensed bullies who keep order and maintain tradition through fear, naturally assuming their right to rule thanks to the longstanding hierarchical culture of this sort of education.

The film is organized with the school year, and thus begins with the first day of term, and the introduction of Jute (Sean Bury), the new boy who learns the specific culture of the school along with the audience. As with so many war narratives, Jute's specific journey is one of institutional triumph. He begins as a small weakling, very much an outsider, who is nominally tolerated and frequently threatened by the other boys. Paul Sutton perceptively notes that he moves from being a main focus of the narrative to being swallowed up by the school, such that by the end he has become part the establishment, with a place of pride in the Founder's Day ceremony.[73] In their construction of the film, Anderson and screenwriter David Sherwin dwell on the various ways in which a boy can endear themselves to the whips and to the official culture of the school: "scumming" (acting as a servant to one of the whips, with the expectation that one will have "scum" of one's own later on); excelling at rugby and other sporting events (before a match, the students of College House are warned that their spirit is lacking, but by the end of the film, College House has won the Bigley Memorial Marathon Chalice, an achievement which garners wild applause); and adapting the official vocabulary of the school (Jute is quizzed on the master's names, adopted slang, and on the word-perfect delivery of the code of conduct). As illustrated by the smooth talking, business-oriented headmaster (Peter Jeffrey), the school has a

[73] Paul Sutton, *if….* (London: IB Tauris, 2005), 49.

face of benevolent paternalism that is able to swallow up most forms of dissent, either by appealing to tradition or to future job prospects.

Mick and his Crusaders reject Jute's journey, remaining resolute outsiders as they are beaten, punished, and humiliated before taking symbolic revenge on their tormentors. The character traits associated with Mick, Johnny (David Wood), and Wallace (Richard Warwick) develop in parallel to their interactions with environments. Many of their most important scenes of bonding take place in Mick's study chambers, which are adorned by increasingly dense and radical collage clippings (images from magazines and newspapers) that document their awakening into political action. The film thus shows how imagination and simulated identification form their violent, revolutionary stance. In decorating his room, Mick singles out dangerous images (man-eating lions), politically romantic images (pictures of Communist Chinese generals), and conventional icons of revolution (Che Guevara). The brutal actions of the school establishment—punishments like forced work, cold showers, and flogging—cause Mick and friends to enact escalating forms of revenge. In a scene added to the film to enforce this thematic coherence, Mick's long flogging at the hands of whip Rowntree (Robert Swann) results in him sitting in his room, shooting darts at his collage images, a foreshadowing of his desire to strike back.[74]

Earlier in the film, after a gym class for the younger students has ended (a course taught in a regimented, militaristic fashion, with the instructor shouting orders), the Crusaders take to the space, picking up épée swords and engaging in a spirited, parodic, mock heroic battle more reminiscent of a movie swashbuckler than the sport of fencing. Here, the boys use violence, but wretch it out of the solemn, purposeful world with which it is usually associated. They create a

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[74] Isabelle Gourdin-Sangouard, "Creating Authorship? Lindsay Anderson and David Sherwin's Collaboration on *if….* (1968)," *Journal of Screenwriting* 1.1 (2010): 141.

bonding ritual out of their critique the establishment use of force. Their form of war corresponds to anti-colonial struggles, to the Malayan Emergency and the war in Vietnam: Mick and the Crusaders use some of military tools given by the establishment, but repurpose the meaning of those tools for their own revolutionary ends.

Mick and the Crusader's adoption of war techniques is best illustrated in the "Forth to War" sequence of the film, towards the end of the film, by which time the institution of the school has seemingly broken, incorporated, or managed all other dissenting voices. This sequence focuses on the compulsory military training that remained a mainstay at British public schools long after the end of National Service. The boys—young and old alike—don military uniforms, carry actual weapons (most of which do not contain ammunition), and go on maneuvers, capturing land and enduring environmental roadblocks (dense foliage) and simulated danger (flash-bang grenades thrown by the masters). Officially, the exercises teach the boys about duty, give them some sense of what a battlefield feels like, and act as a site of heroic wish fulfillment. The war game is immediately preceded by chapel, where the Reverend (Geoffrey Chater) links national duty to the church: "Jesus Christ is our Commanding Officer." As the hypocritical center of church and state, he represents the worst of the establishment.

Mick and the Crusaders push back against this purpose, slackly going through the motions until the tea break at the end of the war games. Using "real bullets" that Mick had previously displayed to the Crusaders, the hide in the brush and open fire against the tea trolley, causing all to take cover. At this, the incensed Reverend approaches the group, demanding that they stop. This prompts a confrontation that incites the surreal events to come, a moment that Mark Sinker highlights for its singularity:

> In *if....*, real terror is glimpsed this solitary time, during a revenge we should probably applaud. Is this the reason we forget: that we project our grown-up war-maps back onto

> these bitter battles for the formation of the self—and in the process, mix up the real and the game? Yelling with hate, Travis rams the bayonet home.[75]

After Mick's apparent murder of this man, the boys receive a strong talking-to in the headmaster's office, at which time they apologize to the Reverend, who rises, as if undead, from a larger drawer affixed to the wall. The Crusaders' punishment is to clean the school hall, where they discover a cache of weapons (likely left over from the civil defense of Britain during the Second World War). Thus armed, they wage an ambiguous, highly symbolic war on the attendees of the Founder's Day ceremony, luring them out of the hall with smoke, whereupon they open fire. In *if….*, the Crusaders are produced by a mix of an oppressive paternal establishment and their own youthful, often naive and misguided, idealism. The end, which kills and revives people multiple times and uncovers the bloodlust of military-trained men and seemingly benign old ladies alike, strategically repeats its final shot, where Mick robotically sprays bullets on the crowd, caught in the violent loop produced by the military-educational culture from which he comes.

4.2 Sports

Sports are a major part of most public school films, where physical prowess and moral forthrightness become equivalently positive traits in an ideal education. That said, war/military life and sports frequently merge outside of the context of school. A pioneer in connecting a state of war to the possibilities of personal growth and fulfillment, Robert Baden-Powell's *Sport in War* (1900) recounts his adventures (especially in the Boer War), where reconnaissance,

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[75] Mark Sinker, *if….* (London: BFI Publishing 2004), 71.

scouting, and hunting become forms of personal improvement that also aid the war effort.[76] In other instances, sports become a war-like pursuit that symbolically contains physical energies that could be put to other forms of liberation, conquest, and aggression. According to Barbara J. Keys, this is a crucial function of sports in a Cold War context. She writes that "The German Democratic Republic, for example, turned to international sports as a vehicle for achieving recognition as an independent country when it was unable to use more orthodox means such as trade, diplomacy, or war."[77] Regardless of how they are positioned, sports contain symbolic power that effortlessly extends the remit and stakes of war.

As discussed in Chapter 2, *How I Won the War* is an exceedingly ironic film that uses an absurd idea about the centrality of sports to British culture as a plot device that puts Goodbody and his men into the heat of battle. Goodbody is charged with going behind enemy lines and building a cricket pitch in order to impress a higher up. This maniac task eventually leads to the deaths of many of his men, who remain in the film as unspeaking toy soldier revenants who follow the unit even after they have expired. In general, the centrality of sport suggests a basic doubling that informs the toy soldier device, the advertising sequence where a woman poses for glamor shots on a battlefield, and the script's focus on puns: the essence of war is not as important as its mediation, its centrality to many different discourses of communication.

The sequence that best illustrates these ideas comes towards the beginning of the film. After the brief opening sequence in which Goodbody is captured, the film introduces most of its characters and much of its style on a cricket pitch (presumably somewhere in England, yet filmed so as to suggest a sense of timelessness and a disconnect from the main events of the movie). This set piece works like an airing on Goodbody's subconscious. His allegiances and

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[76] See Robert Baden-Powell, *Sport in War* (New York: Frederick A. Stoakes, 1900).
[77] Barbara J. Keys, *Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2013), 7-8.

interpretation cricket is clear: "what is, without a doubt, the noblest of games…," yet his sense of self-worth is questionable. When Goodbody addresses the camera, admitting "what they [the soldiers under his command] thought of me, I shall never know…", his reverie is interrupted by Transom and Juniper, who regard the camera and admit how terrible he is. The feeling throughout is of Goodbody's false sense of leadership: he is positioned to advise and lead his men (even in a sports competition), yet they seem to be doing better when left to their own devices. The pristine cricketing uniforms (immaculately off-white) make the men seen less like people and more like ghosts. Lester's most telling detail connects the logistics of war to games: Hitler is in charge of the scoreboard at this cricket match, acting as an abstract symbol and agent of destruction from afar. As success in the Second World War had as much to do with logistics, economies, and the management of numbers—for instance, the United States's General Dwight Eisenhower never saw combat firsthand, yet is one of the most celebrated military minds of the century because of his tactical ability to juggle all other aspects of war—Lester takes care to aestheticize the way in which men like Hitler are simultaneously removed from and a vital part of the war.[78]

Yet films also relate sports to war in much more literal ways. The early Thatcher-era film *Escape to Victory* (1981, John Huston) is based on an historical event in which prisoners of war used soccer as a means of escaping captivity whilst simultaneously maintaining composure in the face of oppression.[79] This historical event, the so-called "Game of Death," saw a Ukrainian team defeat a well-fed team of Nazis (like Jesse Owen's victories at the 1936 Olympics, this proved

[78] For overview of the future president's military career, see Steven J. Zaloga, *Eisenhower* (Oxford: Osprey, 2011).

[79] For more on the actua event—a match between Allies and Nazis in Kiev in 1942—see Tony Taylor, "The Game of Death: Playing Soccer with the Nazis," *The National Centre for History Education*, accessed 30 Nov 2014, http://www.hyperhistory.org/index.php?option=displaypage&Itemid=714&op=page.

yet another example of the trouncing of the racist ideology at the heart of Nazism). *Escape to Victory* recasts this famous game as a wider group of Allied prisoners (including real soccer players and certifiable movie stars) humiliate the German oppressor. This U.S.-U.K. co-production pits soldier-footballer Captain John Colby (Michael Caine) and his international team against German players. The film naturally equates the Allies' democratic and egalitarian morals with athletic skill such that resistance on the field connects to political and ethical rightness. Here, the larger political concerns of war are displaced onto another kind of physical contest, one that stands, in proxy, for the wider competition for world influence.

4.3 Games

Finally, non-sport games appear more and more frequently in post-Suez war films. Most commonly, games miniaturize the larger philosophical and moral questions raised by war into smaller set pieces that provide further thematic resonances. Games do not provide an immutable symbolic shorthand with universal legibility, so much as a variable placeholder whose doubling enriches representations of war. Games can illustrate the frivolity of war and the excesses of military culture; can make overt reference to war's function as a site of repeatable mastery for the powerful; and can even serve as level-headed engagement, to warn the absentminded about the dangers of escape into pure fantasy. Games in British war films speak to young and old alike, in the process drawing our attention to the explicit representational constructedness of military life.

You Must be Joking! (first mentioned in Chapter 2) presents military training as a game, ostensibly in order to test out the new paradigms of warfare. Once the recruits—a representative ensemble of "types" ranging from a timid working class soldier to a dashing American—are

gathered and vetted, they are briefed: in spite of the world-wide shift in strategy to nuclear defense, the “soldier of today” still has a place, but he has to prove himself to be adaptable and self-sufficient. The game of *You Must be Joking!* has these men retrieve symbols of the British way of life, thus ensuring that these soldiers only act like soldiers at select moments (such as when they are being chased by assailants). Otherwise, they must use their wits to change identities, blend-in, and generally beg, borrow or, steal their way to success. *You Must Be Joking!* offers its game as a narratively motivated form of maneuvers, but also uses this treasure hunt to provide narrative structure. All told, the film is little more than a collection of encounters and comic sketches motivated by the game.

You Must Be Joking! equates the ideal form of soldiery with comic anti-authoritarianism. The film’s once-subversive-but-now-commonplace suggestion is that rule-bound traditionalists need to make way for enterprising new blood. In this way, it thematically prefigures director Michael Winner’s next film T*he Jokers* (1967), in which a pair of mischievous brothers plot to steal the Crown Jewels, a material object like *You Must Be Joking’s* Lutine Bell that embodies the *ancien regime*. In *You Must Be Joking!*, Liet. Tim Morton (Michael Callan) acts as the prototypical Michael Winner protagonist, a youngish man-on-the-make who acts out independent fancies and fantasies to the point of recklessness. As this character type is found in most of Winner’s independently produced films of the period—*The Jokers*, *I’ll Never Forget What’sisname* (1968), and *Hannibal Brooks*—this social type arguably stands in for Winner himself, the impish thorn in the side of the establishment who (like any diligent director-producer) nevertheless remains prepared to profit from exploitable opportunities.

Games function very differently in *The Magic Christian*, an adaptation of Terry Southern’s novel that has been transported to a British setting, with Guy Grand played by Peter

Sellers in expectedly manic fashion. Described by Charles Champlin as "eccentric, irreverent, impudent, starry, much-anticipated" but ultimately "disappointing," this is the story of how one rich man takes it upon himself to show the world how easily money and power corrupt.[80] As I have argued elsewhere, *The Magic Christian* is a film concerned with subjecting the body to various tests, games that illustrate that money supersedes the sanctity of the self in the face of pain, humiliation, embarrassment, and violence.[81] While this is another film in which the narrative is a string of comic encounters motivated by Guy's "game" (his outrageous attempts at conning people to expose their greed), *The Magic Christian* features a sequence in which he and ward Youngman (Ringo Starr) play a game of artillery warfare over a miniaturized map. Coming roughly halfway through the film, this simulated war takes place just after the an insert of the now-famous footage of General Nguyen Ngoc Loan executing Viet Cong officer Nguyen Van Lem in front of NBC cameraman, an incident that became a rallying point for the anti-war movement. This extraordinary sequence has Guy and Youngman intently playing a game where they shoot small, but apparently real, ordnance onto a circular approximation (set onto a round table the size of a room) of the Northern Hemisphere. Guy and Youngman take turns firing, apparently at random, while Guy's sister (Isabel Jeans) talks with them, in a mostly unrelated exchange about how the cook has ruined their grouse dinner. The sequence winds down with Guy suggesting that they go to a restaurant, whereupon Youngman interrupts with references to the game they're playing: "Can't we settle our differences amicably?" Guy aims, and uttering these words with sudden gravitas: "No son, no. Not while there's a cathedral standing." Guy begins to shoot at the remaining cities of the map, most of which are represented by a small, white cathedral figurine (seemingly designed after the iconic profile of St. Paul's Cathedral,

[80] Charles Champlin, "Sellers and Ringo Featured in 'Christian'," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 Feb 1970: c1.
[81] Kevin M. Flanagan, "The Road to Excess Leads to *The Magic Christian*: Comedy, The Grotesque, and the Limits of the Body," *Proteus* 29 (2013): 29-37.

London). The camera shifts from its conventional position by the table to an overhead shot that strangely accentuates the space of the room through a fisheye lens. Guy lets loose on the table, firing a barrage of shots from his hand-held cannon, setting the table ablaze and filling the room with smoke. Seen from this angle, Guy's rampage attains an otherworldly quality: mass destruction as imagined by Busby Berkeley. The war game of *The Magic Christian* is an anarchic power fantasy in which a rich man and his impressionable son imagine an abstracted revenge on the world. The god-like perspective enjoyed by Guy and Youngman, which allows for privileged surveillance of the battlefield, arguably comes from the off-site maps that allow generals to test movements and strategies away from the front lines, an experience of war that became the default manifestation of control in table-top wargaming over the next decade.

Guy and Youngman regard the world as a site of play: spaces and people to goad, mold, and confound. While visibly adults, they behave as children. The war-play fantasies of children is the explicit subject of the almost impossibly strange *Apaches* (1977, John MacKenzie), a Central Office of Information film that was broadcast on ITV channels in rural areas for over a decade in a youth-scare capacity.[82] *Apaches* is a public information film about the dangers of careless behavior around farm equipment, argued not with statistics, but through the gruesome outcomes of a group of children's extended play session of cowboys and Indians. It follows a curiously somnambulant logic, where this group of kids witness the deaths of their peers, yet continue to play games that put them at risk of suffocation, dismemberment, or being trapped and crushed, all while adults apparently ignore or turn a blind eye to their dangerous exploits.

The film is framed as a war movie, where a group of imagined Indian braves wages a campaign against the U.S. Army. Narrator "Geronimo," the last of the children to die, provides

[82] Patrick Russell, "Apaches," *BFI Screenonline*, 2 Dec 2014, http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/1402624/>.

some structure to the film, as he describes his parents preparing for a party (more on this later) and provides descriptions for the conceits of play that lead to the individual deaths. For instance, the opening sequence has each of the children identify as an Apache (an idealized Native American warrior, as constructed through innumerable film and television representations), before launching his raid on the "Fort of Long Knives" (actually a farm), wherein one of the children jumps aboard a moving tractor, but is thrown from his perch and is crushed to death. This sequence also illustrates the film's frequent technique of representing death through abstraction and absence. MacKenzie does not dwell on corpses, but shows the traces of the victims. The first boy to die is memorialized through his broken toy gun, now a crushed object splattered by blood. After this shot, the film cuts to the cloakroom at the local school, where a teacher removes the child's name tag from his coat peg. The ultimate "reveal" of the film is that "Geronimo" (whose casket lists his real name as Danny Perry, aged 11) is actually narrating the events that correspond to his own death. The cross-cuts to the preparation for the "party" scene are, like in the film *Don't Look Now* (1973, Nicholas Roeg), actually flash-forward premonitions of his own wake. The film effectively ends with Danny providing a nondiegetic narrative of his wake, where he seems to grasp the consequences of his ring-leading so much irresponsible play: "I wish I were there for the party. Honest. Honest." *Apaches* ends with footage of the somber party, where text scrolls to one side of the frame, listing the real names, ages, and causes of death of many children killed as a result of farm-related accidents.

Director MacKenzie (who was soon to helm the ultimate thriller of the early Thatcher era, *The Long Good Friday* [1979]) and writer Neville Smith suffuse *Apaches* with an uncommonly sharp sense of genre awareness. Patrick Russell writes about it as a movie as much in tune with currents in world cinema as with the mandates of public information propaganda:

"Viewed again through adult eyes, it is *Apaches'* cut-price cross-breed of filmic forms that most intrigues: one part documentary to two parts drama and fable, a Children's Film Foundation caper injected with heavy doses of B-western, B-horror and hints, even, of Bergman and Buñuel."[83] Writing about a whole range of C.O.I. safety films from the 1970s, Jude Rogers finds stylistic conceits found elsewhere in European art cinema, such as "stretches of space and silence" that remove these stories from purely actualized reality, instead focusing on an internal sense of affect and experience.[84] Rob Young pursues this sense of formal and tonal expressivity even further, aligning movies like *Apaches* and John Krish's *The Finishing Line* (1977, a film about the dangers of playing on train tracks, as presented through the mind of a child who views train tracks as the perfect location for military-style games, including one in which participants lob rocks at a moving locomotive like an artillery barrage) with Freud's *unheimlich*: "What links all this material is a propensity for the morbid and the uncanny, and the discomfiting sense—as in classic British sci-fi/horror such as the *Quatermass* films, *Village of the Damned* or *Night of the Demon*—that unruly forces are bursting to break through the veil of modernity."[85] In many ways, *Apaches* is the sub-30 minute distillation of many of the trends that this dissertation has argued are central to a new kind of war representation: a strange film about war discourse and military action that looks utterly different from what came before, a genre-bending movie as hamstrung between conventional notions of realism and fantasy as it is between the stated intentions of public information documentary and the creative wellspring of child's play.

Despite it all, *Apaches*, as a British fantasia on the American Western, is structurally recognizable as a war film of a somewhat traditional kind. Geronimo/Danny leads his friends on

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[83] *Ibid*.
[84] Jude Rogers, "Consider Yourself Warned: Public Information Films," *The Guardian* 25 Nov 2010, accessed 3 Dec 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/nov/25/stop-look-listen-public-information-films.
[85] Rob Young, "Cautionary Tales," *Sight and Sound* vol. XXI no. 2 (Feb 2011): 12.

adventures barking orders as he goes. The children wear ersatz uniforms. Sometimes they are Apaches, in other moments they are U.S. Army soldiers or cops. At one point the gang raids a settlement as an organized squad; at another, they treat that same farm as a fort, to be defended at all costs. Understood as a meditation on violent conflict, and not just as a movie meant to scare children into safety, *Apaches* is quite an achievement: a war film totally engrossed in play, by turns graphically violent and abstract to the point of resorting to non-visual representation (sometimes, only sounds connote death, as when Sharon imbibes poison and the camera respectfully lingers outside of her house as she screams her last remaining breaths), at-once realist (non professional actors, location shooting with low lighting, grimy, naturalistic in its delivery of dialog) and imaginative (this is a world of articulate children and virtually mute adults, where the dream of playing at war continues despite several deaths in rapid succession).

5. Distance and Absence: *Oh! What a Lovely War* and *The Gladiators*

Like *Apaches*, *Oh! What a Lovely War* and *The Gladiators* comprehensively embody most of the ongoing tensions in war representation teased out in this chapter (indeed, in the project as a whole). Unlike *Apaches*, these two films are directly concerned with war. They are about soldiers, military life, combat, and the philosophical implications of warmongering. Both films are explicitly about how society models its conflicts, yet both reject conventional cultural constructions of what war should look and feel like. Curiously, *Oh! What a Lovely War* and *The Gladiators* are at once suffused with the typical features of war films—uniforms, squad movements, visualizations of strategic command, set pieces illustrating the impact of technologies of death—and at the same time removed from the sense of immediacy cultivated in conventionally heroic representations of war, where camera and narration remain close to

protagonists, rendering their actions, hopes, and even neuroses legible to audiences. Instead, *Oh! What a Lovely War* and *The Gladiators*, two films that visualize war as a simulated experience grounded in the trappings of games, compartmentalize and mediatize war, rendering it abstract, displaced, and even dispassionate. In addition to clearly echoing Vietnam-era concerns about the public consumption of war (reportage and news coverage had brought immediate images of war into the lives of civilians the world over, on an unprecedented scale), these two films seem acutely aware of hierarchical injustices in military life, and as such go to great lengths to show the spatial and experiential divide between officers and the common soldier.

5.1 *Oh! What a Lovely War*

Richard Attenborough's film adaptation of the Joan Littlewood Theatre Workshop's *Oh What a Lovely War* (first staged in 1963) is, in some senses, a failure.[86] The ways in which it does away with many of the novel ideas of its source at first seems like a missed opportunity, but in fact opens the film up to a representational regime of its own design. When the Joan Littlewood Theatre Workshop staged this wartime comedy revue in 1963, critics and audiences were quick to realize that its satirical targets went beyond the stereotype of the jolly and gentlemanly, if naïve, British war hero. This was the era of a "satire boom" in film and television, when establishment figures, the remnants of the aristocracy, policy-makers, the unthinking majority, and the lingering vestiges of the highbrow intelligentsia were all targets for a younger, increasingly affluent, and increasingly less class-bound cultural sphere.[87] For Barbara

[86] Much of this section of Chapter 4 is adapted from my essay "Displacements and Diversions: *Oh! What a Lovely War* and the Adaptation of Trauma," forthcoming in *South Atlantic Review* (Summer 2015).
[87] For a discussion of the "satire boom," see Roger Wilmut, *From Fringe to Flying Circus: Celebrating a Unique Generation of Comedy, 1960-1980* (London: Methuen, 1980).

Korte, "the culture-critical 1960s, for instance, deaccentuated the 'great' war's patriotic values in the new context of a sceptical national self-examination and emphasized the suffering and pity associated with the soldiers' experience to convey a strong anti-war message."[88] With its use of gestural acting and distantiating devices—projected images, abstract costumes, non-naturalistic ensemble songs—it came to be regarded as a comic indictment of the very representational stakes of war itself.[89] For Littlewood and her troupe, a highly intertextual, profoundly fantastic, and politically aware production was the only way to unearth the remnants of popular wartime memory that had otherwise been laid to rest in the trenches (and later, in the rubble of the Blitz). This stage production, although avowedly Leftist and transparently anti-war, nonetheless excavates the mindset of the wartime experience. It uses popular song, vaudeville/music hall tropes, and lavishly choreographed dance numbers to revisit and defamiliarize a bittersweet historical period. Although eschewing a directly causal narrative, the play stages a general history of the War (from an explicitly British perspective), necessitating a kind of abstract assemblage of documents mixed with mime and *commedia dell'arte*, as told through actual songs, photographs, memoirs, journalistic and eyewitness accounts, and official statistics. It is that rare play whose script contains a list of its scholarly and history sources in an appendix.[90] According to Derek Paget, the stage production succeeds as an experimental in historical exercise:

> Like Walter Benjamin's Angel of History, the 1963 show was being blown backwards into the future. It looked back at an old "official", conservative historiography which had failed to heed the warnings between the two World Wars; forward to the nuclear

[88] Barbara Korte, "The Grandfathers' War: Re-Imagining World War I in British Novels and Films of the 1990s," *Retrovisions: Reinventing the Past in Film and Fiction*, eds. Deborah Cartmell, I.Q. Hunter and Imelda Whelehan (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2001), 121.
[89] The Bibliothèque nationale de France has made available a series of photographs of a late 1963 production of the show (featuring the original cast). See http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb40964845d. More production photos can be found throughout Metheun's text of *Oh What a Lovely War*. Theatre Workshop, *Oh What a Lovely War* (London: Metheun, 1965).
[90] Theatre Workshop 110-111.

> nightmare which could be seen all too clearly as humankind's greatest threat in the Cold War 1960s. Part of the show's appeal was, and is, its foregrounding of the voice of the Common Soldier.[91]

In the stage version of *Oh What a Lovely War*, the setpieces, most of which feature low-ranking enlisted soldiers, are largely acted out by an ensemble of men who appear in Pierrot costumes. Although individual scenes use props, the characters rarely appear in fully differentiated costume. Eschewing conventionally naturalistic scenography, the play takes place in a predominately black space with slides projected onto a screen behind the actors. The oscillation between pity/conviviality, and moments of outright horror suggested by the performance of these themes helps illustrate what Paul Fussell points to as the curiously ironic tone of the war, in which an initial sense of hope and national togetherness gives way to almost unimaginable death and destruction.[92] The net effect of these choices—abstract gestural style, forthright audience awareness, a privileging of structurally oppressed workers and soldiers ("ordinary" people), and the juxtaposition of real documents with empty spaces—showcases the continued relevance of Brechtian flourishes during the cresting of what was then called the "New British Drama."[93]

As adapted to film, *Oh What a Lovely War* loses much of its overtly Brechtian content. The American finance of British feature films was dropping off from a mid-1960s peak, but the last years of the decade had room for a few more follies before the years of massively heterogeneous and famously inconsistent film production in the 1970s.[94] To mount this exploration of the Great War was risky, given the contemporary focus of the most internationally

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[91] Derek Paget, "Remembrance Play: *Oh What a Lovely War* and History," *Acts of War: The Representation of Military Conflict on the British Stage and Television Since 1945*, eds. Tony Howard and John Stokes (Suffolk, UK: Scolar Press, 1996), 85.
[92] Paul Fussell *Great War and Modern Memory* 18, 35.
[93] For a general account of Brecht's scenographic choices, see Eric Bentley, "The Stagecraft of Bertolt Brecht," *The Brecht Commentaries* (New York: Grove Press, 1987), 56-71. Brecht's ideas influenced the more politically "committed" playwrights and directors of the New British Drama (Lindsay Anderson, Peter Barnes, Arnold Wesker).
[94] See Walker 441-465.

successful British films of the decade (barring the still-youthful adaptation of a costume drama/comedy like *Tom Jones* [Tony Richardson, 1963]), but the strength of the material and the promises of an all-star cast of cameo players seemed a safe bet for Paramount Pictures (who distributed the film in the States and in Britain).

That said, Attenborough's lavish feature film adaptation *Oh! What a Lovely War* (note the exclamation point) could have had a more expansive cultural canvas. Released during the height of the Vietnam War, it was even better poised than the play to take into account the lively spirit of protest that coalesced around a conflict that had jettisoned all the conventional trappings of the two World Wars. With major studio backing and major stars (Corin and Vanessa Redgrave, Edward Fox and Dirk Bogarde are some of the younger actors, with heavy-hitters John Gielgud, Kenneth More, Laurence Olivier and Ralph Richardson connecting to a national theatrical heritage), it could have linked the experimental theatre of the Littlewood's East End with the commercial viability of the West End. As a lavishly budgeted film, it could have infinitely expanded upon the multi-media experimentation of the stage revue.

Instead, in one of the great ironies in the history of British cinema, Attenborough took his film in almost exactly the opposite direction. A wholly fantastic musical largely set in the studio and in outdoor locations, it both displaces direct representations of conflict and disowns the radical inheritance of its stage counterpart. Despite the aspirations of the stage show, this *Lovely War* wants to single-handedly address the prevailing moods, dreams, and escapist diversions of the British public during the most technologically reliant and brutally dehumanizing conflict that the nation had ever seen.[95]The script, which was "reconceived for the screen" by writer Len

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[95] Arthur Marwick lists 745,000 British dead, plus 1.6 million wounded (nearly 9% of the male population under 45). This "Lost Generation" of necessarily disrupted the uptake of trades, the missions of schools and universities, and took a massive toll on individual families. See Marwick, T*he Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (New York: Norton, 1970), 290-291.

Deighton, was, in Attenborough's assessment, "not only extremely complicated, but a totally original, surrealistic and highly-stylised film subject."[96]Despite the change in direction, the film's revisionist return to the "primal scene" of World War I, and its attempt at indirectly working through one of the main traumatic catalysts of the century, suggests that Attenborough's *Oh! What a Lovely War* is doing serious historical work, even as it seemingly eschews naturalistic representation and many of the intelligible tropes of the war film genre. It may fail as an adaptation of a dynamic source text, but it curiously succeeds at documenting the traumatic absences of the national experience of World War I.

Attenborough's *Oh! What a Lovely War* is comprehensively concerned with revisiting national and collective experiences from The Great War, but does so through conspicuous absences. Much of the film feels conventional, yet what is avoided is just as important as what is dwelled upon. In terms of its characterizations, *Oh! What a Lovely War* attaches itself to a central narrative element that pervades most sequences of the film. The "Smith" family—presented as an ordinary kinship group whose sons are recruited into war, are injured, and eventually die—punctuate the more impressionistic and even surrealistic sequences in the film. Their saga grounds the movie's narrative in relation to the chronological sequencing of the phases and battles of the war. Moreover, this film's *style* is largely based on a hyper-accentuated version of "golden age" Hollywood tropes, ported to Britain's wartime experience (in this sense, the film is as far from modernistic as one can imagine). But in terms of *content*—that is, in terms of what the film is willing to show us and what it isn't, what it deems representable and what it insists on maintaining as an absence, and in view of when it uses explicitly escapist glamor and wryly ironic humor in place of violent or affectively shocking imagery—*Oh! What a Lovely War* is a

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[96] Richard Attenborough and Diana Hawkins, *Entirely Up to You, Darling* (London: Hutchinson, 2008), 237.

singular text. The film's careful construction is just as instructive about the truly unthinkable collective anxieties of the war because it systematically avoids showing its material realities. These missing images, I suggest, emerge (thanks to this deferred moment) as the probable diagnoses of Britain's traumatic memory. Though these structured absences certainly have something to do with *Oh! What a Lovely War's* marketing and circulation—the film was given an "A" certificate in Britain and a "G" rating in the United States, which means that it could reach a potentially wide audience—they should primarily be read as creative decisions. *Oh! What a Lovely War* sits at the crossroads of lavish commercial entertainment and critical art cinema, where it uses its hybrid genre identity (war-comedy-musical) to dwell differently on the consequences of armed conflict.

Attenborough's film often offers a verbatim recapitulation of the script of the stage version of *Oh What a Lovely War* while simultaneously fitting a key set of genre tendencies of the period. It is an early exercise in what Dick Hebdige has called an "End-of-England" allegory, whose purpose is to chart the British national imaginary in relation to the waning of empire, dissolution of the old rigidities in class, and the pessimism of the post-Vietnam era, in which the promise of the Welfare State gradually gives way to the national re-definition of Thatcherism.[97] *Oh! What a Lovely War* attempts to maintain the stage play's privileging of documentary images by showcasing pictures of actual artifacts from the war over the film's opening credits. The film uses the same popular songs as the play, maintains the "official" statistics of casualties (they are shown on constantly updated scoreboards that are housed at the main military headquarters), and

[97] Dick Hebdige, "Digging for Britain: An Excavation in Seven Parts," *Come on Down? Popular Media Culture in Postwar Britain*, eds. Dominic Strinati and Stephen Wagg (London: Routledge, 1992), 368.

generally covers the same cornucopia of narrative ground as the play—discussions amongst enlisted soldiers are set against more caricatured vignettes from famous historical personages, home front concerns like the growth of the Women's Suffrage movement and the perils of the citizenry engaged in material production provide counterpoint to scenes that take place on the ground and in the field. In these respects, both play and film are part of a trend in British war representation from this time (the flipside of the dominant cultural form, which mixes serious war adventure narratives with fetishisitic attention to weapons and technology) that privileges simulation and abstraction over direct presentation. In the film *Oh! What a Lovely War*, the true cost of battle is delivered as the residue of other cultural fragments. The big set pieces are not sequences of violent action, but choreographed song and dance. Charts, newspapers headlines, and memorial objects relay the visual memory of the War.

Some of the radical ideas in the play do not translate to the screen. The original Joan Littlewood staging of *Oh What a Lovely War* used an ensemble of actors, each of whom played multiple roles (the film has different actors for each part). This Brechtian tradition occasionally flourishes in movies, especially in ambitious productions like *O Lucky Man*!, where popular actors like Arthur Lowe and Rachel Roberts appear in vastly different moments in nominal hero Mick Travis's (Malcolm McDowell) journey.[98] In a less theoretically-inflected vein, such multi-persona performances were central (as mentioned in Chapter 2) to the comedic personae of stars

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[98] John Izod et. al, "What is There to Smile At?: Lindsay Anderson's *O Lucky Man*!," *Don't Look Now: British Cinema in the 1970s*, ed. Paul Newland (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2010), 219.

like Jerry Lewis and Peter Sellers. Sellers takes on multiple roles in two war films, *Dr. Strangelove* and *Soft Beds, Hard Battles*, in each case embodying a multinational stable of characters of various ages. Such opportunities are lost to *Oh! What a Lovely War*. Given that the film uses a somewhat naturalistic sense of period costuming, the *commedia dell'arte* references of the play are lost. Moreover, the play's pervasive use of projected photographs covers a broader range of subjects—that explicitly draw audience attention to mediatized nature of the presentation (through the use of "living newspaper" type agit-prop, as developed in U.S. theatre in the 1930s) while simultaneously showing battlefield casualties in uncomfortable detail.[99]

This last difference is the most telling. Attenborough's *Oh! What a Lovely War never shows a British soldier directly engage with, battle, and kill (let alone be killed by) an enemy combatant.* The film only offers one sequence of British soldiers directly interfacing with their opponents, and then only to stress the truly miraculous nature of the temporary battlefield armistice of Christmas 1914, in which German, French, and British soldiers held impromptu religious services and fraternized. The major generals on each side interact in the curiously palatial space that is later dressed to double as military HQ (call it a pavilion for lack of a better word), but only then to abstractly broker the start of the war and to end it. In fact, this distanced, highly symbolic treatment of actual fighting typifies the film's primary aversion. *Oh! What a Lovely War's* first battle sequence shows troops preparing to defend the line, allows the first few shots to be fired, but then resumes in a train station, as injured troops are transported further

[99] Nadine Holdsworth, *Joan Littlewood* (London: Routledge, 2006), 81.

behind the lines for medical treatment. Later, when a group of Irish-British troops are advancing toward the German trench, their squad leader sends the men off screen. The audience's only sense of their fate is cued by the sound (presumably diegetic) of a gunshot. This decision to empty the field of battle is most obvious at the end of the film, when Jack Smith (Paul Shelley) leaves a bunker and is lead from a scorched, muddied, and ruined battlefield (albeit one without corpses, let alone other soldiers) into the pavilion, where he witnesses the representatives of the four major powers signing the final armistice. As this common soldier watches, his body disappears (by way of a dissolve), whereupon the dignitaries look in his direction and see nothing. In the next shot, Smith once again appears, but remains an anonymous specter who cannot interact with what he sees. Thus, rather than display the spectacle of a dying or dismembered body, the film simply shows the obliteration of the soldier's body against the monumental pull of history. Karen Randell and Sean Richmond have theorized the importance of disappearance as a mode of giving meaning to the war body on screen, but this soldier's disappearance suggests a mode of representation with little interest in the visceral nature of war.[100] Claire Sisco King writes that "as the bodies of male soldiers are defiled and dismembered, the community of onlookers and supporters is revitalized, making use of the trauma and loss of the fallen soldier—whose ultimate sacrifice marks ideal citizen-subject—for

[100] Karen Randell and Sean Richmond, "Introduction: Setting the Screen," *The War Body on Screen*, eds. Karen Randell and Sean Richmond (London: Continuum, 2008), 8.

the reconstitution of the body politic."[101] In contrast to King's claim about the inherent meaning of the destruction of the body, *Oh! What a Lovely War's* one nod to dismemberment comes in the form of a gag, where the offending arm is talked about (it is used to prop up a fallen part of the wall) but never shown. The redemptive potential of such sacrifice is lost.

Other matters surrounding the human toll of the war are similarly abstract. The film does not show the process of dying, but rather only hints at it. The corpses that do appear are only in scenes featuring medical crews and hospital facilities, and only then with blankets covering the faces of the deceased. With the exception of the few sequences of soldiers discussing their fears just before the initiation of battle, what audiences get is the displaced sense of the sorts of tactics clung to by the officer class. The gulf between officers and men is greatly accentuated in the film, with those of highest rank removed from the front, spending most of their time on tactics. While this certainly has a basis in actual military protocols, the divide is thematically accentuated by the film. Haig (John Mills) and other Generals are associated with the almost otherworldly HQ pavilion, a studio-bound construct whose architectural details resemble the Brighton sea-side pavilion, but whose interior suggests a remove from any real-world space. This setpiece most closely resembles the many crypto-supernatural places created by Federico Fellini and production designer Dante Ferretti who, in films like *The City of Women* (1980) and *And the Ship Sails On* (1983) accentuate the artificiality of some locations (in the former, Dr. Xavier

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[101] Claire Sisco King, *Washed in Blood: Male Sacrifice, Trauma, and the Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2012), 32.

Katzone's house, and in the later, the deck of the ship) so as to stress their remove from the diegesis, thus associating certain character with different regimes of time and space. In *Oh! What a Lovely War*, the suggestion is that the world of the elite is so experientially different from that of the rank and file that they almost do not occupy the same plane of existence.

This exchange between Field Marshal Douglas Haig and another officer (virtually the same in both play and film) reveals the retrospective attitude—and probably the source of the film's aversion to the confrontation of war as a bodily matter:

> Haig: […] We must grind them down. You see, our population is greater than theirs and their losses are greater than ours.
>
> British General: I don't quite follow that, sir.
>
> Haig: In the end they will have five thousand men left and we will have ten thousand and we shall have won. In any case, I intend to launch one more full-scale offensive, and we shall break through and win.[102]

This dialog reveals one of the great compromises of the size, scale, and accumulated rationalizations of modernity: the turn toward managing bodies as populations, rather than on an individuated scale. In this exchange, *Oh! What a Lovely War* reveals the perverse math underwriting the conflict, while at the same time accounting for the absence of the wounded or dying body. This is sublimation, of a sort. In place of battling bodies, we have a sort of civilizing and infrastructural logic that displaces the threat of individual death into a set of numbers that cannot be fully comprehended. Instrumental rationality trumps the human scale. Even though no characters die on stage in Joan Littlewood's play, Attenborough's film puts the officers at an

[102] Theatre Workshop 91-93.

even greater remove from the material realities of war than does Littlewood, whose characters are in closer proximity to traumatic material.[103]

The film is full of suggestions that war is really something else. Most famously, early recruitment sequences accentuate but truthfully convey the near-hysteria surrounding the optimism of joining up. Music hall performances, neighborly opinion, posters, and films stressed that war was an opportunity, a chance for travel, a means of economic advancement, even a lark; notably absent from these pitches is the sense that death, dismemberment, trauma, the loss of one's friends, toil, and boredom are sure to follow.[104] Even once the narrative of World War I progresses within the film (that is, once the war gets underway and begins to follow its general historical course), *Oh! What a Lovely War* does not really show the nitty-gritty of combat, so much as suggest that the experience of war is a lot of other things: thoughts for one's far-off family, pacifist protest, endless waits for transport, day-dreaming.

But even visual representation occasionally falters. With its strenuous disavowal of visible scenes of war violence, *Oh! What Lovely War* makes exceptionally strong appeals to other senses. Given that popular song and musical traditions are so important to this film, it comes as no surprise that the soundtrack occasionally assumes a privileged interpretive register. The film showcases several sequences that mirror the war's capacity to stifle comprehension by

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[103] "Did *Oh What a Lovely War* Shape Our View of WWI?," *BBC iWonder*, accessed 21 Jul 2014, http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/zws9xnb.
[104] A good summary of the drive to join is in Kate Clements, "Transcript of Podcast 3," *Imperial War Museum*, accessed 10 Dec 2014, http://www.iwm.org.uk/history/podcasts/voices-of-the-first-world-war/podcast-3-joining-up.

drawing attention to the failure of our perceptual apparatuses. In one instance, the camera pans across a long line of recently injured troops who await further transport. As the shot begins, the lively atmospheric conversations and ambient noises of the space are muted, and the tracking shot carries on in silence, drawing attention to the absently staring (dare one say traumatized?) faces of soldiers forlornly regarding the distance. Later, a mother watches her recently recruited son ride a miniature train (one of the skillfully deployed popular amusements from Brighton Pier that serves the home front sequences of the film). As she reaches out her hand, a cut reveals the absence of the train—presumably her son has been shipped to the front and has been killed—and all elements of the soundtrack once again give way to total silence. During a sequence in which a rather clueless superior officer visits men in a long-inhabited trench, he notes that the "damn place still reeks of decomposing bodies," despite the total lack of visible corpses. We are to imagine a lingering smell without the usual visual referents.

So what do all these displacements mean? I suggest that the collective trauma that *Oh! What a Lovely War* belatedly and indirectly attends to is the primary disjuncture between the logics legitimating the war (the rhetoric of national unity, the need for a mass population to overcome another, the desire to think about the whole "game" in the abstract sense of strategy and maneuvers) and the actual facts of combat (the pain, disease, starvation, death, brutality, and fear that happen on the ground). As a film actively working to construct war as a collection of substitutions, absences, numbers, songs, and imaginative flights of fancy, it is notable for its many abstractions away from the war-damaged body, and for its general sublimation and

displacement of aggressive violence. The importance of *Oh! What a Lovely War's* failure—its failure, I should qualify, as an adaptation of an artistically and politically coherent play, though tempered by its success at revealing the latent source of trauma that other texts do not reveal—is that it does not live up to the dominant idea of what a war film is, and is instead a conscious attempt at genre innovation.

The film's final shot cements the promise of trauma through memorialization. This sequence picks up with the spectral Jack Smith leaving the pavilion, wandering through a dense fog, and appearing in an incongruously idyllic field. The camera tracks Smith to the right as he runs through a field of poppies. The camera eventually settles on the remaining women of the Smith family (including the young daughter's "Granny, what did Daddy do in the war?" line), which gives way to a shot of men, lounging on the ground in apparent languor. These men fade out of the shot, and in their places appear several crosses. The extent of this cemetery of anonymous war dead is revealed through the camera's flight. As it pulls back, perspective shifts to a distanced, overhead long shot, which reveals a massive frame whose near-infinite horizon that shows identical rows of such crosses. This belated reveal of the casualties of war, only made possible through a mounted camera that relies on recent technology, connects old iconographic markers of death to the new scale of populations. In addition to showing audiences the ramifications of the "lost generation," this sequence also draws attention to that which cannot be shown: the dead themselves.

5.2 *The Gladiators*

The Gladiators (also called *The Peace Game*) is Peter Watkins' last film to be conceived out of a British production context before working (briefly) in the United States and then in Scandinavia for most of the rest of the 1970s. Nominally a science-fiction war film that imagines a world in which nations voluntarily channel their aggression into internationally televised gladiatorial military games, *The Gladiators* doubles as a history-of-the-present slice of social commentary, where the "types" of the world-historical moment—the Cold War powers, hippies, student activists, military representatives of non-aligned nations—are put into simulated conflict. Although it ended up being filmed in Sweden and produced under the auspices of Sandrew (a Scandinavian film company), *The Gladiators* was conceived as a British picture, a follow-up to the director's Universal-released *Privilege* (1967), which, a critique of the cult of celebrity, is likewise set in a pseudo-science-fictional version of the present, starring bona fide pop star Paul Jones.[105] At the time, John Heyman, essentially Universal's head of production in Britain, maintained offices in London, and Watkins began collaborating on a script for what was to eventually become *The Gladiators* with Nicholas Gosling, a writer contracted to Heyman.[106] Despite the initial plan to film in Britain, the consequences of costly films by another auteur temporarily stopped the film's production. According to Alexander Walker, the financial and

[105] After *Privilege*, Watkins briefly worked on *Proper in the Circumstances* for Universal, which was to have been his version of the General Custer at the Battle of Little Bighorn (a kind of expose on the U.S. Army's brutality to Native Americans). See Peter Watkins, "*The Gladiators*: A Self-Interview by Peter Watkins," *The Gladiators* DVD Booklet (Toronto, CA: Project X, 2006), 3.
[106] *Ibid*. 4.

critical failures of two expensive flops by Joseph Losey—*Secret Ceremony* (1968) and *Boom*! (1968), both collaborations with Elizabeth Taylor at the height of her excesses—prompted Universal to pull out of the British film industry altogether, effectively ending Heyman's stable base of operations.[107] Something of a *persona non grata* in England thanks to the continued controversy over his suppressed BBC film *The War Game* (1965; see Chapter 5), Watkins wisely moved the film to Sweden.

The Gladiators maintains some centrality to the British experience of war. In the film, allied forces (capitalist nations) compete against the communist bloc, and for all of the cultural centrality of the United States and the Soviet Union, the main rivalry in *The Gladiators* is between a Chinese Colonel (Kenneth Lo) and a British General (Arthur Pentelow). On the allied side, combatant B-1 (Jeremy Child), a petty officer who speaks in an upper class accent (received pronunciation), is the designated group leader. When asked by the documentary interview crew at the beginning of the film why he is participating in the games, B-1 speaks from a position of dominant military ideology: "I see this as an excellent opportunity to put my country back on the international map." So much for declinism!

The Gladiators is Watkins's first explicit foray into internationalist media criticism. The "Peace Games," in which officers slackly oversee life-and-death military exercises between opposing teams, are broadcast internationally, enjoying (it is stated at one point) an 83% viewership. Comically, a pasta company sponsors the broadcast. At its most abstract, *The*

[107] Walker 355-356.

Gladiators is a critique of how the mass media (as well as being aligned with interests like big business, the military-industrial complex, and so on) profits from and exploits killing. For Watkins, the capitalist West is just as guilty of the oppressive maintenance of populations as communist nations (whose main social beliefs are here, rather crudely, represented as Cultural Revolution-era asceticism and constant recourse to Mao's Little Red Book). In a practical sense, too, Watkins's *The Gladiators* is a film of rare international stature. According to John R. Cook, "In keeping with the subject matter, Watkins employed an international cast, including professional and non-professional actors from the range of countries represented in the film, alongside the Polish-born cinematographer Peter Suschitzky and the Canadian-born art director William Brodie, who had worked with him on *Privilege*."[108] In line with military trends discussed earlier in this chapter, *The Gladiators* explicitly explores how war necessitates the management of populations. The pressbook for the film even characterizes the movie in darkly comic terms, signaling the ways in which the attempt it portrays to divert human bellicose instincts is doomed to failure: "A bleak satire set in the near future, in which the major powers of the world, East and West, aligned and non-aligned, recognise the possibility of a major world war within our life-time, and try to forstall [sic] it by channeling off man's aggressive instincts in a more controllable manner."[109]

Watkins very much regards his films as part of the *oeuvre* of an artist who works to make

[108] John R. Cook, "Gaming the System: Peter Watkins' *The Gladiators* and *Punishment Park*," *Science-Fiction Film and Television* 2.1 (2009): 106.
[109] *The Gladiators* Pressbook. Non Paginated. BFI PBS-30949.

social and political statements while maintaining radical autonomy, despite also demanding some sense of continuity (of subject matter, or of frequent work with past collaborators). Thus conceived, *The Gladiators* is a remarkable distillation of recurrent ideas and themes, stemming from his previous (and to this point, almost career-defining) engagements with war. Watkins's amateur films mostly deal with war and its consequences. *The Web* (1956) is a psychologically realistic film about a German soldier in World War II; *Field of Red* (1958) concerns the American Civil War; *Diary of an Unknown Soldier* narrates the trials of a conscript in World War I; and *The Forgotten Faces* (1961) provides a convincing reconstruction of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, filmed entirely in Southern England. These early works use locations, narration, and carefully selected props to provide plausible, if stylistically conventional, historical visions. Occasionally, these works transcend their modest origins. John R. Cook refers to *Diary of an Unknown Soldier* as "a vivid, expressionistic work" that prefigures Watkins's later anti-war messages.[110] Over the next few years, Watkins shifted his focus to a critique of documentary form and genre tropes most closely associated with history. The results, detailed in Chapter 5, are *Culloden* (1964) and *The War Game*, two of the most innovative BBC productions of their time.

The Gladiators features devices and techniques used in Watkins's previous films, some general and some specific. A common Watkins device, used here to great effect, is narration. For James M. Welsh, "the direct communion between Watkins and his audience, the terse, often

[110] John R. Cook, "The Last Battle: Peter Watkins on DVD," *Film International* 1 (2003): 55.

factual, no-nonsense verbal imprint of the Watkins narrator, gives shape and meaning to the stories, histories, fictions, and speculations offered by his films and makes them cohesive."[111] Welsh points out that Watkins often employs multiple narrators (as in *The War Game*), a notion revisited in *The Gladiators*, a film with multiple levels of narration. There is the typical Watkins narrator, who provides nondiegetic comment, facts, claims about the world, and statistics. Then, the various framing devices for the broadcast of the Peace Game have their own narrators: the invisible documentary crew who talks to the combatants before the beginning of the game; the television host who kicks off the event and draws attention to the pasta sponsor; and Captain Davidsson (Hans Bendrik), the Swede who runs the protocols that allow the massive mainframe ICARUS to function (the semi-sentient computer that guides the parameters of the game, described by Welsh as "a sort of demigod," who explains to others how they fit into the ecosystem of the Peace Game).[112] Watkins also relies on certain types of shots: the direct-address interviews at the beginning of *The Gladiators* mimics those found in abundance in *Culloden* and *The War Game*. At one point in *The Gladiators*, the computer dispatches soldiers to deal with escaping dissidents, a group of men who travel by motorcycle, and whose movement Watkins tracks using the same over-the-shoulder traveling camera as the sequence analyzed in Chapter 5 (although the camera in *The Gladiators* is mounted in the opposite side of the driver).

While *The Gladiators* works with aspects of previous Watkins films, it also feels quite a

[111] James M. Welsh, *Narration and Authorship in the Cinema of Peter Watkins* (Dissertation Kansas University, 1996), 7.
[112] *Ibid*. 247.

bit more ambitious. A more detailed plot summary reveals the ways in which Watkins and Gosling simultaneously engage with the Cold War, the current state of wargaming, the mediatization of war, and changing designations of whose body gets endangered during war. The "Peace Games" are a series of isolated war exercises that are staged in facilities built by non-aligned nations. Leaders from the world's military powers assemble a group of rank and file soldiers, whose goal in the game is to capture the control room, a task made difficult by the live ammunition of the opposing side, as well as protocols devised by ICARUS. ICARUS is overseen by members of the Swedish military. It is later revealed that Sweden manages its dissident population by trapping them in the game space (off-screen diegetic sound suggests containment areas full of political undesirables). ICARUS is even able to utilize these people. At one point, the greatest threat to the allied team is a group of hippies, who essentially attempt to pacify, seduce, and otherwise divert these men from their mission. The game is further complicated by the presence of a radical French student who has seemingly infiltrated the game in order to destroy it. In a reveal at the end, Davidsson, who looks after ICARUS, admits to the student (who wants to destroy oppressive systems) that the machine is strong enough to engulf, manage, and process even those who wish to opt out of and destroy the system. The apparatus cannot be dismantled without comprehensive world change.

Neither the allied nor the communist side "win" the game depicted in *The Gladiators* in any conventional sense. An allied soldier falls in love with a young female Chinese soldier whom they have taken prisoner. The officers, commenting from afar, see this as the ultimate

betrayal. The Chinese colonel warns of the “threat of collaboration” between the two sides. Another voice calls the two lovers “young perverts.” For Watkins, the message is clear: the idea of reconciliation remains untenable for both sides. Despite being unable to verbally communicate, the two escape from the game space, causing the system to go into temporary disarray. The Swedes dispatch a contingent of soldiers, who eventually capture the two beating them to the brink of death. This is carried out in an uncharacteristically aestheticized way. Watkins employs Mahler’s Third Symphony (a long work whose various movements are programmatically upbeat, as they are inspired by things such as nature and childhood innocence) as a nondiegetic musical accompaniment, in ironic contrast to the images on screen. The beating is depicted through a series of black and white still photographs that are shown in sequence, cut against the happy and haughty group of generals, who pose in front of the game space for a group photo.

Watkins sets up the conflicts in the film in ways that transcend the stated parameters of the contest. Officially, the film dramatizes the divide between East and West, communist and capitalist, superpower and Third World. For instance, despite being on the allied side, the representative officer from India espouses idea about the need for resources in developing nations that run against the traditions of the older, more highly militarized, nations. The rank and file on the allied side—the British petty officer, a black American, a white American, a South Vietnamese soldier, and others—have idiosyncratic appearances and are torn by internal strife (name-calling, overt racism); the communist side, whose rank and file are all Chinese, are

undifferentiated in uniform and are mostly not given individual identities. The only real exceptions are the woman who escapes and the Chinese colonel, who is in a different representational register altogether. Like the officers from the West, he cracks jokes, indulges in whims, and gives the impression of decadent detachment.

In fact, the discrepancy between the officers and the combatants provides one of the film's biggest critiques of war representation and military culture. The lack of direct communication, the patronizing attitudes of the officers, the gap between their sense of official ideology and the personal motivations of their subordinates, and their physical remove from any space of danger show the classist and elitist direction war has taken. In creating the "Peace Games," the world ensured that only the poor and unconnected would die in battle. But, in general terms, the vast space between the two groups of soldiers mirrors ideas in other films from this period (especially, *Oh! What a Lovely War)*: the duties, concerns, and cultures around war are so different for these divided ranks of soldiers as to be unbridgeable. The officers deal in abstractions, numbers, populations, movements, large-scale ideological statements, and (crucially) abuse their power, are visibly lazy, and behave (when gathered, even around enemies) as plutocrats with little outward animosity. By contrast, the rank and file can only deal in the particulars of a given order or the demands of a given moment, can die at any time, regard war in personal terms of survival, and are not afforded opportunities for slack and dissent (upon trying to leave their lot in life, they are punished, perhaps even killed).

Many of the *The Gladiator's* ideological messages are achieved through the look of the

film, which explicitly captures the vestiges of the old world (the officers watch the game from a palatial mansion house) and the new (the game itself takes place in the anonymous, massively reproducible space of a defunct warehouse). *The Gladiators* is torn between isolated moments of aesthetic flourish—for instance, Peter Suschitzky's sometimes classicist visual compositions of bodies in space—and sequences of dour documentary reportage (large chunks of the film take place in the dark, ill-lit confines of corridors of the battle space). Much like its explicit subject matter, *The Gladiators* weds contemporary and near-future visions of war to aspects of an older tradition of representation. It is the pseudo-documentary presentation of the fantastic. For this reason, *The Gladiators* would never be considered a "quality" film in the 1940s usage of the term, as it lacks a sense of visual unity, or a strictly coherent logic of events. Instead, it is a transitional document that couches war as a controlled game—a simulation whose parameters bleed outside of their official bounds. It is as much a comment on the major ideological battles of the 1960s as it is a critique of the technologicalization of war and the accelerated spread of inequality the world over.

6. Conclusion

As much as war has always been accompanied, accentuated and defined by games, sports, and practice simulations, there is a marked desire in the 1960s and 1970s to use these seemingly peripheral aspects of the culture around armed conflict to probe at the changing stakes

of warfare. In Britain, the culture of the military and the educational system (especially the public school system, which caters to the elite) have long used games and sports to teach military values in nominally entertaining and disinterested ways. Both schools and the military itself simulate war through maneuvers and war games of many sorts (ranging from table-top campaigns played with miniatures to multi-day events in the field), in the process teaching practical aspects of combat and giving experience to grunts and future generals alike. For instance, the maneuvers sequence in *if*.... makes things quite clear: the prefects, already in a position of power, are destined for officer positions, and as such are in charge of other boys. By contrast, Mick and his Crusaders are marked as cannon fodder, and would clearly have been the first sent over the top in the Great War.

The meeting point between war, sports, and games provides a range of responses in this period. As such, the games/war trope arguably becomes a defining characteristic of representation of the Cold War, a conceit rooted as much in traditions and actual training protocols as in a kind of symbolic equivalence. In *Escape to Victory*, sport and war officially reflect a pro-nationalistic sort of military virtue. In *Apaches*, the imagined game of playing at war occasions a genre mash-up that yields an unforgettable warning to its target audience of kids. *You Must Be Joking!* uses a game to show how the military has always been frivolous, in the process arguing that the soldier of tomorrow and the swinging man-about-town are one and the same. *The Magic Christian* uses a military simulation to aid a larger point about the dangers of military might in the hands of a detached eccentric.

Oh! What a Lovely War and *The Gladiators* process many of the implications around depicting war as something other than the unadorned representation of heroic historical events or the individual goals of combatants. In both of these films, the at-risk bodies of individuals are put

at odds with the detached, often abstract worlds of their superior officers. In both, this is achieved through persistent juxtaposition of space and experience. Computer commands, scoreboards, maps, numbers, and disembodied communications technologies are at once necessary for quantifying new modes of warfare and dismissive of individual experience and personal traumas. These films point out that detachment, technological mastery, and the luxury of a safe distance contrast with the at-risk bodies of the frontline of defense. *Oh! What a Lovely War* and *The Gladiators* challenge dominant ideas about war in that they engage with all the misdirections and substitutions that, by the third decade of the Cold War, had come to define the wider culture of warfare for a younger generation, in the process looking at wars past (WWI) and future with a mutual desire to showing how war has changed for the individual when faced with the enormity these systemic and national struggles.

Chapter 5

The Bomb and After: Britain's Cold War, Apocalypse, and Fantasies of Lost Control

In the wake of World War II, Britain emerged as a simultaneously victorious and battered nation. Britain had suffered mass casualties during the war, and while the isles remained geographically intact, morale and finances were beginning to dwindle. With the unconditional surrender of Japan, the war was over. This prompted a temporary end to American money and arms for Britain. It all stopped in August 1945, when "Truman, without proper briefing and in the absence of his principal advisers, signed a piece of paper which discontinued Lend-Lease forthwith and with a heavy debit due from Britain."[1] The loss of this credit created a temporary economic vacuum in Britain that undergirded the worst years of postwar economic austerity. Although a bigger, more comprehensive, and more enduring program of economic aid came with the Marshall Plan (officially the European Recovery Program, 1948) and the North Atlantic Treaty (April 1949), the time between 1945 and 1948 saw a set of subtle shifts in the relationship between Britain and the United States.[2]

In his celebrated speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri on March 5, 1946, Winston Churchill set the geo-spatial agenda for the Cold War. Famously, this is the speech that states "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across

[1] Peter Calvocorsessi, *The British Experience 1945-1975* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 11.
[2] *Ibid*. 17.

the Continent."[3] While the novelty of the curtain separating East and West has since been disputed—Patrick Wright has shown that the "curtain" image was in use by commentators in the 1910s and 1920s, even before the Russian Revolution—the timing of the speech and the situation of address (a British leader making a rhetorical appeal to an American audience) keep the moment memorable.[4] This is a key speech in the public occasioning of the Cold War in that it concretizes a Western, democratic anxiety against the Soviet bloc, using an image (an iron curtain) that is at-once intensely material and entirely imaginary.

But Churchill's speech is also remembered for occasioning another far-reaching claim, one whose status was to affect Western policy (especially nuclear access) throughout the Cold War. For Churchill, this is the main point of his address:

> Neither the sure prevention of war, nor the continuous rise of world organization will be gained without what I have called the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples. This means a special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States. This is no time for generalities, and I will venture to be precise. Fraternal association requires not only the growing friendship and mutual understanding between our two vast but kindred systems of society, but the continuance of the intimate relationship between our military advisers, leading to common study of potential dangers, the similarity of weapons and manuals of instructions, and to the interchange of officers and cadets at technical colleges.[5]

The Fulton speech saw the public declaration of Churchill's continued belief in a special relationship. This was not conceived as just a military alliance, but as two partners working together to create a world after their own image. According to Wright, Churchill's ambition for the "special relationship" was "a formidable nuclear alliance, with capability greater than anything on earth, and yet, as suggested, it would also enable the new organization [the United

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[3] Winston Churchill, "The Sinews of Peace," *NATO-OTAN Online Library*, accessed 12 Nov 2013, http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/1946/s460305a_e.htm.
[4] Patrick Wright, *Iron Curtain: From Stage to Cold War* (New York: Oxford UP, 2007), 17-18.
[5] Churchill "The Sinews of Peace"

Nations] to 'achieve its full stature and strength.'"[6] Despite Churchill's hopes, he was no longer Prime Minister, and his ambitions by this point were more personal and idealist than practical. In fact, this period saw the US-UK alliance morph into something decidedly lopsided, this time strongly leaning toward the power and prestige of the United States. Of course, Churchill's worries map onto a more widespread fear of the spread of communism in the immediate post-war period. Churchill's personal conservatism notwithstanding, the public discourse of victorious Western nations after the war singled out communism as the primary destablizer of world peace. A perceived fundamental incompatibility between economic values, allegiance to the state, and the role of free speech lead to a mutual paranoia that pitted two equally paranoid nuclear blocs against one another.

The primary impediment for a full nuclear alliance for the U.K. was the McMahon Act of 1946, which stated that the US would not share research on atomic energy and weapons with other nations.[7] This was a surprise in part because Britain had cooperated with the US in developing nuclear weapons during World War II, mainly through a British project code-named Tube Alloys that sent British scientists to America, and agreements (in Quebec in 1943, Hyde Park in 1944, and in Washington in 1945) that had promised continued collaboration after the war.[8] Instead, Britain had to use its own resources to develop its own weapons. Worried about defense after the withdrawal of allied forces from much of Europe, and aware of their proximity to Soviet armaments, a secret cabinet meeting of 1947 prompted Britain to start their own

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[6] Wright 41-42.

[7] U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, *Atomic Energy Act of 1946 (Public Law 585, 79th Congress)*, James D. Nuse, Washington D.C.: GPO, 1946. Accessed 12 Nov 2013.

[8] "Cooperation, Competition and testing," *National Archives: The Cabinet Papers, 1915-1983*, accessed 12 Nov 2013, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/co-operation-competition-testing.htm; "Directorate of Tube Alloys," *The A to Z of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Warfare, ed. Benjamin C. Garrett and John Hart* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 65; Winston Churchill, *The Second World War, Volume 4: The Hinge of Fate* (London: Cassell, 1951), 336.

nuclear weapons program.[9] For much of the late 1940s and early-to-mid 1950s, Britain was very much the junior partner in the "special relationship." The passage of the 1958 US-UK Nuclear Defense Agreement, an amendment to the McMahon Act, eventually allowed some cooperation between the two, including the sharing of plans, materials, and resources.[10] But by the late 1950s, Britain had nothing of the world-historical importance of the United States. Keith Robbins puts it succinctly: "Ultimately, Britain's role in the postwar world would be that of a subordinate partner to the United States in the evolving Cold War against the Soviet Union."[11]

1. The Atomic Society: Comedy, Counterculture, Science Fiction

Thus, if the way of life of the postwar world was to largely be dominated in the first instance by the social and cultural imperialism of the United States, it was also to be marked by the long term, often abstract specter of the bomb. For the artist, musician, and historian Jeff Nuttall, this was partially a generational divide. He writes that "the people who had not yet reached puberty at the time of the bomb were incapable of conceiving of life *with* a future."[12] Throughout his book *Bomb Culture* (1968), Nuttall frames many of the youth and countercultural movements of the 1950s and 1960s, including the Beats, the Angry Young Men, protest movements of all sorts, the hippies, and the long front of the drug culture as being inspired by the bomb. Much like the invisible threat of radiation, "living with the bomb had made us all ill."[13] That illness could be productive—through politicization—or passive, a kind of "dropping out" of

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[9] Keith Robbins, *Short Oxford History of the British Isles: The British Isles, 1901-1951* (New York: Oxford, 2002), 144.
[10] Richard Gott, "The Evolution of the Independent British Deterrent," *International Affairs* 39.2 (Apr. 1963): 246-247.
[11] Robbins 143.
[12] Jeff Nuttall, *Bomb Culture* (New York: Delta Books, 1968), 12.
[13] *Ibid.* 119.

the mainstream. But, the bomb did as much to create the mainstream culture of the Cold War as it did to create the counterculture. According to John Swift, "all fields of culture could be mobilised to fight the Cold War," including the Olympic games, fashion, music, and television.[14] Because the Cold War did away with the conventional iconographic trappings of war—namely, uniformed combat on conventional battlefields and direct invasion by ground forces—such a war's representation in film and television would naturally be different. In fact, given the Cold Wars' ubiquity, its dispersal into all aspects of cultural production, it is no surprise that stories of (and allegories and meditations on) war move into several different genres. The bomb became a part of public discourse, polite and otherwise.

One exceptional example that captures a youthful response to the bomb is the Cambridge Footlights May Week Review *The Last Laugh*, staged in 1959.[15] A far cry from the light entertainment of many earlier Footlights performances, this show—an assortment of loosely collected sketches and vignettes—is framed by one of the first comedic bomb satires on the British stage. The show begins with scientists monitoring the immanent launch of a nuclear bomb (including flashing lights and an on-stage explosion to suggest the mounting tension), all of which is broken by the sudden appearance of a woman who comes on stage and asks "Tea, anybody?". The scientists, at first exacerbated, decide that given the looming end of the world, they might as well spend their time singing, dancing, and producing comedy. At the end of the show, this framing narrative comes back, and it is revealed that the tension had been over a "nuclear egg explosion," one that was (in the end) harmless. Their ending chorus shows a healthy distrust for the military-scientific establishment, one that must have resonated with

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[14] John Swift, *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), Map 26.
[15] A complete breakdown of sketches is in *The Last Laugh* program. University of Cambridge Archives. FOOT 2/8/54.

Cambridge audiences, traditionally known for their allegiance to such research: "Mathematic/Calculation/Gives erratic/Information/To err by a touch/Makes corpses of such/People as we are."[16] The show was a debut performance for future stars Peter Cook and Eleanor Bron, the two actor/performers who contributed the funniest material. Cook biographer Harry Thompson notes that the opening night was a disaster—the production was overlong and the tech malfunctioned—but that subsequent nights brought a paired-down performance that was written about enthusiastically in the press.[17] *The Last Laugh* captured something that was soon to find its way into cinema and television: a smart, but often irreverent and comic dissection of the bomb and bomb culture, a diagnosis of this new face of war. For Thompson, the attitude has historical justification: "The bomb was hanging over the world, and there did not seem to be much future in tradition."[18]

The Last Laugh is largely about anxieties related to war, even if it does not bear the usual trappings of war discourse. Of course, some of the great international visual engagements with war in the 1950s through the early 1970s are not even recognizable as war movies. For every *Fail Safe* (1964, Sidney Lumet) or *Seven Days in May* (1964, John Frankenheimer), movies directly about the politics and weaponry of the Cold War that show the new reality of arms-length decision-making by men in suits, there are smaller-scale Espionage thrillers like *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* (1964, Martin Ritt), spy parodies like *Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs* (1965, Mario Bava), and true outliers like *Battle Beneath the Earth* (1967, USA, Montgomery Tully), wherein a renegade Chinese general tunnels bombs underneath the United States in hopes of destroying military bases and taking over the country. British films of this period assess the Cold War in an equally wide number of ways, from the atomic warning

[16] Script for *The Last Laugh*. University of Cambridge Archives. FOOT 2/1/21.
[17] Harry Thompson, *Peter Cook: A Biography* (London: Spectre, 1997), 70.
[18] *Ibid*. 68.

monster film *Behemoth, the Sea Monster* (1959, Eugène Lourié and Douglas Hickox), to serious engagements with the effects of the bomb like *The War Game*, or absurd explorations of life after apocalypse, as in *The Bed Sitting Room*. This chapter first surveys British film and TV engagements with the bomb and its cult of disaster in postwar Britain, with a specific eye toward examining more deeply Watkins' *The War Game* and Lester's *The Bed Sitting Room,* situating them in wider conversations about the function of nuclear weapons.

Despite the fact that Britain's nuclear holdings and general ambitions were known to the public, there was a longstanding media embargo on in-depth discussions of the bomb. Following Peter Goodwin, Mike Wayne points out that a proposed radio program on the development of the H-bomb lead to government interference that meant a tradition of close scrutiny for all broadcasts discussing these weapons.[19] This "close and informal consultation" lead to the disappearance of this radio program, as well as the censoring of a *Panorama* (the BBC's current affairs show) story of the H-bomb that was also designed to act as a commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the A-bomb attacks on Hiroshima.[20] The government's action signals an aversion to scrutiny of official policy and an unwillingness to explore the negative ramifications in a public way. This skittish reaction to the public discussion of the bomb prompted a culture in which most textual explorations of the bomb and its effects are allegorized. Without a direct public discourse that *thoroughly* discussed facts, effects, and concerns, the culture often displaced and subtextualized the bomb.

Thus, science fiction inherited many explorations of what a nuclear bomb could do, of how it would affect society, and how it would test the mettle of the British people. This fantastic,

[19] Mike Wayne, "Failing the Public: The BBC, *The War Game* and Revisionist History. A Reply to James Chapman," *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 42, no. 4 (Oct 2007): 631; Stuart Hood and Thalia Tabary-Peterssen, *On Television*, Fourth Edition (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 55-56.
[20] Wayne 631.

and occasionally juvenile or disreputable genre became a key safety valve in British public life. Dominic Sandbrook refers to sci-fi as "the one literary genre above all that reflected popular fears about the Cold War," noting that it was a flexible enough appellation to include allegorical novels about the structure of society (Golding's *Lord of the Flies*), L.P. Hartley's post-apocalyptic social novel *Facial Justice* (1960), and "novels of individual identity and alienation" like those of John Wyndham, whose *The Day of the Triffids* (1951, filmed in 1962) and *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957, filmed as *Village of the Damned* in 1960) remain prescient today.[21] British sci-fi by J.G. Ballard (*The Drowned World*, 1962) and Michael Moorcock (*The Final Programme*, 1969, filmed in 1973) charted disasters and after, conceptualizing the secular apocalypse for a populace forced to live with the bomb. In the absence of the kind of open discourse that filmmakers like Peter Watkins fought for, science fiction provided a coded, accessible, and not altogether fanciful proving grounds for the devastation potential in contemporary life. Allegorizations of the bomb were fun and exciting, to be sure, but also serve as a flexible creative space for thinking about potential scenarios. They are preemptive therapy, necessitated by the ambiguous status of the nuclear energy in everyday life. Tony Shaw summarizes the notion that science fiction's speculative reach and seemingly irrational facade actually masked its broader social function:

> The signs are that by the mid-1960s, despite (or perhaps because of) the Cuban missile crisis, many people were learning to live with the threat of nuclear annihilation. It might be argued that science fiction played some part in this process of accommodation by making the unthinkable somehow 'knowable', if we see the genre as one, rational way of making sense of the profound irrationalities of nuclear developments.[22]

In this vein, Kim Newman has convincingly asserted that the resurgence of monster movies in

[21] Dominic Sandbrook *Never Had it So Good* 252-253.
[22] Tony Shaw, *British Cinema and the Cold War: The State, Propaganda, and Consensus* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 140.

the 1950s does not resurrect the tired “Nature Run Amuck” theme, but rather gives an acceptable face to displaced tales of nuclear anxiety.[23] These disaster fantasies are coded and generically locatable enough to be acceptable, while at the same time provide a public and popular place to think-through such death on a massive scale. Much like the predicament of the “bomb culture” generation at large, such allegories are as open to prompted real-world political engagement as they are to allowing a fantastic “dropping out,” a kind of insular retreat into the imagination.

British disaster fantasies from the early-to-mid 1960s have a relatively obvious dual function. On the one hand, they commemorate, in however fantastic and displaced a fashion, the visual memory of the London blitz.[24] But, on the other hand, they simultaneously imagine death and destruction on a new scale, one whose obvious basis in reality is the payload of a nuclear weapon. For example, in *Gorgo* (1962), an ancient dinosaur-like creature is raised from the bottom of the sea (found somewhere off the coast of Ireland) and is paraded around London as a curiosity. *Gorgo's* larger and quite reasonably desperate mother proceeds to tear London apart in search of her son. The last part of the film wallows in London's destruction and recreates the panic of wartime. Citizens run in fear, people cower for shelter in the London Underground. But, the spirit of the Blitz prevails in scenes that would not feel out of place in a wartime propaganda documentary. The nation's professionals—its scientists and military—continue to work for their public, never giving up or losing their cool in the face of the monstrous threat. These ancient creatures don't exactly read as allegorized versions of the bomb, but their foreignness and appetite for destruction yield great damage to London. They represent an invasion, and re-confirm a central thesis in science fiction and disaster fiction: when mankind meddles with

[23] Kim Newman, *Apocalypse Movies: End of the World Cinema* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999), 77-78.
[24] Hutchings “The Power to Create Catastrophe: The Idea of Apocalypse in 1970s British Cinema” 110.

forces it does not understand, those forces strike back with a vengeance.[25] The same might be said about the manipulation of atoms.

During the Cold War, British film and television offer a stylistic spectrum of nuclear anxiety, but usually in coded or in overtly generalized terms. The bomb became central to moving image culture, in praise and in protest, in genres as diverse as the newsreel and fictionalized political satire. The possibility of a man-made apocalypse—either in the future tense, or reconsidered from the position of the probable few survivors—is just as central to films based in contemporary current events as it is in the era's biggest fantasies. An overview of select postwar films affirms the astonishing variety of embedded functions that bomb culture plays in contemporaneous discourse in Britain.

2. The Bomb Across Genres

One early work to discuss the bomb in a global context is *World Pictorial News No. 275 (August 12, 1946)*. This Ministry of Information short contains two stories, one an account of the bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem from late July 1946, the other an announcement of the atomic test on Bikini Atoll.[26] The Bikini Atoll report is a condensation of test footage (although some of the surrounding shots, such as footage of an airplane's undercarriage opening, could be from stock sources) that uses voice over to assure that the bomb worked as planned, with no earthquake or tidal wave. For Francis Gooding, that this shows an "incredibly powerful bomb which is being detonated under strict, even scientific, control by Britain's ally" is a

[25] For a useful list of the commonplaces of disaster cinema, see John Sanders, *Studying Disaster Movies* (Leighton: Auteur Publishing, 2009), 18-19.
[26] To view the film and read a synopsis, see "*World Pictorial News No. 275*," *Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire*, accessed 23 Oct 2013, http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/3521.

significant gesture that affirms Britain's deference to the expertise of the United States[27] More striking is the film's reliance on abstract and easily faked footage, the result of which is a news item that informs only at arm's length. The images of takeoff and flight have little to distinguish them from other such sequences in newsreels, and the footage that verifiably shows the detonation on Bikini Atoll is (necessarily, for safety reasons) filmed at such a distance that the plume of the atomic bomb is less a threat than a beautiful abstract shape in the horizon. This short film's message is clear: the United States understands and controls the bomb as a sculptor controls and masters their materials.

Despite Britain's ascension into the nuclear club and its commitment to the United States as an ally, it was never a principle actor in the Cold War. It was, however, a longstanding democratic nation that claimed to rule morally and justly, claims that it used to differentiate itself from the supposed amoral and unjust Soviet bloc nations. As such, its nuclear policy faced intense scrutiny from its citizens. The main anti-nuclear group in Britain, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) was founded in 1958, and was an ethically motivated organization that wanted to define British values of peace and compromise by advocating that the nation give up its nuclear arsenal in favor of diplomacy.[28] This is the British equivalent to SANE (a committee that staged similar anti-bomb protests in the US, starting in 1957).[29] With a membership that included students, the devoutly religious, artists, and the educated middle class, the CND grew rapidly, a fact that Dominic Sandbrook also chalks up to timing: with the international relations fiasco of the Suez Canal crisis and the Soviet invasion of Hungary freshly

[27] Francis Gooding, "Analysis of *World Pictorial News No. 275*," *Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire*, Oct 2009, accessed 23 Oct 2013, http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/3521.
[28] Jodi Burkett, "Re-defining British morality: 'Britishness' and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament 1958-68," *Twentieth Century British History* 21.2 (2010): 184-185.
[29] See Milton S. Katz, *Ban the Bomb: A History of SANE, the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, 1957-1985* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986).

in the rear view mirror, fears of the use of nuclear weapons had reached a fever pitch.[30] By 1960, however, former CND president Bertrand Russell had resigned, in turn forming the Committee of 100, a more engaged protest group that used sit-down presentations and more frequent confrontation to spread its message of immediate disarmament.[31] Stephen Lacey relates how the Committee of 100 became an important emblem for political engagement among artists during the period:

> The Committee was a meeting point between the New Left and the New Wave. Lindsay Anderson, John Osborne, John Arden, Arnold Wesker, and Bernard Kops were all involved from its inception, and were later joined by David Mercer, Robert Bolt, and the actors Vanessa Redgrave and John Neville. Their support was more than moral, and both Wesker and Bolt were arrested in September 1961 during a demonstration in Whitehall.[32]

Participation in the CND and in the Committee of 100 by directors, actors, and playwrights ensured an added level of public awareness of this left cause, and likewise helped see accounts of this protest on screen.

The most famous film to chronicle the CND is *March to Aldermaston*, a collectively authored short (participants included Lindsay Anderson, Karel Reisz, and Derrick Knight) that creates a travelogue narrative out of the first CND protest march, a 4 day trek from Trafalgar Square to a munitions factory in Aldermaston (one of the production sites of bomb components).[33] Conducted over a rainy Easter weekend—which includes what narrator Richard Burton calls "the worst Easter Saturday of the century"—the film valorizes the "ordinary people"

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[30] Sandbrook *Never Had it So Good* 261.

[31] Derry Hanham, "Archives of the Committee of 100 Collected," *University of Bradford Library*, 11 May 2012, accessed 23 Oct 2013, http://www.bradford.ac.uk/library/special-collections/collections/ archives-of-the-committee-of-100-collected-by-derry-hannam/; "Committee of 100," *British Library: Learning: Dreamers and Dissenters*, accessed 23 Oct 2013, http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/21cc/ counterculture/civildisobedience/comm100/committeeof100.html.

[32] Stephen Lacey, *British Realist Theatre: The New Wave in its Context, 1956-1965* (London: Routledge, 2002), 37.

[33] Patrick Russell, "*March to Aldermaston*," *BFI Screenonline*, accessed 24 Oct 2103, http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/533592/.

who gathered and took a principled stand against the possibility of further nuclear war. A key component of the CND's self-representation is the slow amassing of support from people of all walks of life. The film takes care to interview the young and the elderly, the religious and the bohemian. Part of the journey of the film is the continuous snowballing of support, with nearly 6000 participants by Reading and neighborly offers of tea, sandwiches and space to sleep. As much as this is a document of one specific cultural event, it also doubles as a film that shares many of the same concerns as Anderson, Reisz, and Tony Richardson's Free Cinema shorts a group of independently produced, mainly documentary shorts, that screened together at the National Film Theatre in the late 1950s. When narrator Burton intones that "it's no use being against death if you don't know how to enjoy life," he echoes one of the underlying messages of Reisz and Richardson's *Momma Don't Allow* (1955), a film about the pleasure culture of youth in the face of poverty and struggle. *March to Aldermaston* shares the earlier cycle of Free Cinema films' obsessions with popular music. George McKay explains that the film contains 18 shots of marching jazz bands and at least 10 nondiegetic music cues of "trad jazz."[34] The overall impression is of a fun-loving group of people from all walks of life, united together for a common cause. According to Erik Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, who edited the footage shot by several cameramen into a final film, regards this work and his co-signing into the Committee of 100 as his last official association with popular Left causes.[35]

The second CND Easter March, this one in 1959, went instead from Aldermaston to London (effectively reversing the route of the previous year). The "March from Aldermaston" is captured in the ominously titled short *No Place to Hide* (1959). Director Derrick Knight, a producer of *March to Aldermaston* and a contemporary of Anderson and Reisz, creates a shorter

[34] George McKay, "Just a Closer Walk with Thee: New Orleans-style Jazz and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in 1950s Britain," *Popular Music* 22.3 (2003): 268.
[35] Erik Hedling, *Lindsay Anderson: Maverick Film-Maker* (Herndon, VA: Cassell, 1998), 46.

and very different film that in some ways captures the increasing seriousness of the CND as an organization.[36] This film is framed with a comparison between the important time commitment of the protestors and the frivolity of the rest of the population, who are content to spend their Easter weekend on menial household tasks and leisure activities. Such claims rhetorically position the CND as thoughtful and politically aware individuals. If *March to Aldermaston* stresses the fun-loving side of CND—essentially offering an explanation of its appeal to youth—then *No Place to Hide* stresses the dangers of the bomb. Using an animation of the periodic table, it abstractly discusses the aftermath of a nuclear blast, providing some sense of the urgency of the cause. It also manages to capture the critical mass of the CND marchers, with several shots containing large crowds of tightly packed bodies.

The splitting of the CND into moderate and radical factions is encapsulated by *A Sunday in September* (1961), a Granada television special directed by James Hill that documents one of the Committee of 100's most public actions. The Committee rallied nearly 12,000 to protest the arrest of leaders such as Bertrand Russell and further raise awareness for public dissatisfaction against the production of nuclear bombs.[37] While the initial plan was for protesters to meet at Trafalgar Square and march to Parliament Square, they were surrounded by police, who formed human chains and arrested those who broke into the street in hopes of sitting and disrupting traffic. Instead, *A Sunday in September* quite effectively showcases the mass of bodies that turned up for this successful event, showing tens of thousands occupying Trafalgar Square with one considered camera movement (a pan from a camera positioned approximately at the entrance to the National Gallery). The film puts the protesters in direct opposition to the culture of the

[36] Lucian Robinson, "The Film Interview: Derrick Knight," *New Statesman*, 9 Dec 2010, accessed 24 Oct 2013, http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/cultural-capital/2010/12/documentary-film-cinema-heal.
[37] David Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow: Left-Libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* (London: PM Press, 2012), 262.

military: the early moments frame a quiet Sunday morning and contain footage of uniformed veterans celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Battle of Britain, an on-going memorialization given the scars still visible in the London landscape and the relative youth of many World War II veterans.[38] However, this quiet deference to tradition is soon visually and aurally undone by the largely young (and largely Left) protesters, who spend most of the film's 30 minute running time either evading police capture or deliberately bating them into action.

A Sunday in September is especially focused on the celebrity support for the Committee of 100. In a quick shot that deserves to be even more famous (a hand-held pan that lasts only a few seconds), we see playwright Shelagh Delaney, actor Vanessa Redgrave, art critic John Berger, and novelist Doris Lessing sitting next to one another in solidarity. Other parts of the film show Dusty Wesker (wife of playwright Arnold Wesker) and playwright John Osborne. According to James Piers Taylor, such discoveries must have been serendipitous, since "the programme was edited over the Sunday night and broadcast unscheduled on Monday evening in every ITV region—*except* London."[39] This kind of quick production turnaround would become increasingly common with international coverage of the war in Vietnam, which relied both on live feeds and on short film reports.

The CND was so well known that it even served as a plot device and point of moral grounding in at least one fictional film. *That Kind of Girl* (1963, Gerry O'Hara), produced by Tony Tenser and distributed by Compton-Cameo films (the team behind Roman Polanski's British films *Repulsion* [1965] and *Cul-de-Sac* [1966]), is an exploitative melodrama nominally about relationships, but later far more interested in the dangers of promiscuity and venereal disease. Austrian *au pair* Eve (Margaret Rose Keil), young and innocent at 18, begins dating

[38] For another account of this day, see Nuttall 50.
[39] James Piers Taylor, "*A Sunday in September*," *That Kind of Girl* DVD Booklet (London: BFI, 2009), 27.

men and discovers the “dangers” of casual encounters. Over the course of what seems to be a few months, she dates several men, including Keith (David Weston), whose fling with Eve jeopardizes his marriage to mother-to-be Janet (Linda Marlowe). In the course of Eve’s dating, she contracts syphilis and has to contact her former partners, thereby prompting awkward soul-searching and flared tempers. Before her dalliance with Keith, Eve is poised between affection for Max (Frank Jarvis), an earnest young man who she encounters because of his leafleting on behalf of the CND, and Elliot (Peter Burton), an older man who eventually forms an obsession with her and attempts to sexually assault her in front of her house. The CND's standing is upheld in the contrast between Max (young and moral) and Elliot (old and immoral), whose interests and personality traits code onto a similar opposition offered in *No Place to Hide*. Max, who brings Eve to a CND march as a kind of politically committed date, is associated with individual improvement and education (he works at a library and researches sex and health issues as they arise). Elliot's character is a womanizer who works in advertising, haunts gauche nightclubs, and tries to ply Eve with drinks. Max gets angry at Eve for not taking his protest march seriously enough (this prompts him to end his association with her), while Elliot gets angry that she has moved on and begins obsessively stalking her. *That Kind of Girl* uses the backdrop of a CND Easter march to further contrast Max with Eve, and comment on their incompatibility. Eve, while by no means portrayed as a philistine, is clearly uncomfortable in this largely university educated, middle class world, where the other CND marchers debate Greek political systems and regard conversations as university lectures. According to Cathi Unsworth, “actual footage of the event is carefully crafted onto scenes of Max's duffel-coated campaigners,” such that “they march along to Dixieland sounds, arguing about Plato and casting venomous glances at the glamour-puss [Eve] in their midst.”[40] In other words, while the film can reserve the CND as a

[40] Cathi Unsworth, “It's a Man's, Man's World,” *That Kind of Girl* DVD Booklet, 2.

shorthand for morally considered and educated, it maintains its status as a clearinghouse for Left bohemianism and political proselytizing at the expense of fun. The film pokes fun at the left while upholding the seriousness of its cause against unrestrained pleasure seeking.

The specter of the bomb in newsreels, documentaries, and teenage melodrama tout the possibility of nuclear war as a given fact of life. *March to Aldermaston* even contains narration that conceptualizes the possibility of a nuclear attack as a "shadow" under which we live our lives. But, the bomb's presence (either as a direct plot device, or in an allusive frame of reference) retains this distant and vaguely threatening overtone in more speculative genres like comic satire, the spy movie, and science fiction—with only occasional moments of rupture offered in especially comic or traumatic images.

A familiar touchstone is *Dr. Strangelove*, covered at greater length in Chapter 2. While this film emerges primarily out of an American feature film context—it was distributed by Columbia Pictures, and therefore had wide booking at home and abroad—it also takes advantage of expatriate Stanley Kubrick's association with Britain. Filmed at Shepperton Studios, it features sets by Bond production designer Ken Adam and stars Peter Sellers in a *tour-de-force* of transnational mimicry. While best known for his turns as U.S. President Merkin Muffley and the maniacal German scientist Dr. Strangelove (whose speculations about cave dwelling and a new, pseudo-Nazi society are as silly as they are bone-chilling), Sellers' Officer Lionel Mandrake forms the moral core of the film. In *Dr. Strangelove*, national attitudes toward the bomb are encapsulated in individual characterizations, and break forth in momentary instances. Mandrake's hesitant behavior, doubt about the righteousness of General Jack Ripper's orders, and attempts to rectify a catastrophe of world-historical importance give his character—however weak-willed and comically inept—a heroic quality whose obvious antecedents are the gentlemen

R.A.F. Pilots of World War II propaganda films. Mandrake is successful, though this is only really inferred, since the film offers a deliberate ellipsis between the raiding of the Coca-Cola machine for change and the image of the map of the Soviet Union, whose lights power down after receiving Mandrake's “stand-down” code. That said, if Mandrake and Britain attempt to broker a deal for the sake of the world, then to the other side are the traces of the United States (paranoid, machine-gun wielding Ripper, the distracted General Buck Turgidson, and Texan hero-pilot Major King Kong) and the Soviet Union (the Russian Ambassador-spy, and Dmitri, the nagging off-screen voice of the Soviet premiere). The bomb's associations with the superpowers are nicely tied into a single sequence, the famous moment of Major King Kong's ride down the hatch, where he greets the end of the world with the aplomb of a rodeo nut. Mandrake—and Britain's—peace perspective is no match miscommunication, machismo, and nationalism, American style.

Many other British films of the 1960s feature the bomb as an invisible plot device, a set of gestures that create tension, provide the explosive punchline to a joke, or set up the fantastic diegesis of a film. The James Bond films frequently use the possibility of nuclear war as the backdrop to justify the direct actions of Her Majesty’s agent-superhero. While their narratives have more in common with the “soldier hero” war movies of the 1950s (British pluck and ingenuity save the world), their visual opulence and gadgetry, at least in an early iteration, have much in common with many youth-oriented films of the 1960s. Tino Balio relates how United Artists established its production base in Britain through its deal with Albert Broccoli and Harry Saltzman for its first (of many) James Bond films, and with its association with Woodfall Films, especially its production of *Tom Jones* (1963, Tony Richardson).[41] Like *Tom Jones*, the Bond

[41] Tino Balio, *United Artists Volume 2: 1951-1978: The Company that Changed the Film Industry* (Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 237.

films used their source texts for inspiration, but often finessed their narratives to fit current events. For James Chapman, *Goldfinger* (1964, Guy Hamilton) nicely fits into the post-Cuban missile crisis zeitgeist while simultaneously improving upon Ian Fleming's novel (written in 1959): while the novel sees Auric Goldfinger collaborating with the Soviet Union in a break-in on Fort Knox to steal U.S. gold, the film reveals that his plan is a collaboration with China, and their goal is to use an atomic device to irradiate the U.S. supply of bullion, both in an effort to ruin the worldwide capitalist economy and improve Goldfinger's own holdings of gold.[42] This channels the same anxiety present in *No Place to Hide*—the threat of invisible radiation—but maps it not just onto worries over life itself, but also onto the systemic possibility of the American way of life. In this moment where the U.S. dollar and other world currencies were still directly tied to gold, Fort Knox represented the material guarantee of U.S. prosperity and reputation (while "Fort Knox" still has symbolic exchange value, the association with gold and the dollar ended in 1971).[43]

Other films in the series, from *Thunderball* (1965, Terence Young) to *Octopussy* (1983, John Glen) use the threat of the bomb to prompt Bond's action. *Thunderball* is the most direct, as its whole plot revolves around an extra-governmental organization called SPECTRE hijacking two NATO-owned atomic bombs. One fantastic Bond example from outside the canon proper is in the first feature film version of *Casino Royale* (1967, Ken Hughes et. al.)—a spy spoof—in which eventual villain Jimmy Bond (Woody Allen) swallows a capsule-sized atomic bomb. Over the incoherent final sequences of the film, where a fight breaks out between casino-goers, the James Bond surrogate characters (M.I. 6 has deputized all characters as honorary James Bonds!),

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[42] James Chapman, *License to Thrill: A Cultural History of James Bond Films*, New Revised Edition (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 80-81.
[43] M.J. Stephey, "A Brief History of the Bretton Woods System," *Time*, (21 Oct 2008), accessed 28 Oct 2013, http://content.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1852254,00.html.

and stock characters from other films (gangsters, cowboys, Indians, animals, and so on), Jimmy wanders around burping strange gases, animated wisps of color that signal what is to come. While the film's attempts to visualize the threat of a weaponized human being come across as laughable, the finale ends with a bang equal to *Dr. Strangelove*. Jimmy Bond explodes, killing all nearby characters, prompting a final sequence of cherubic music in heaven, with the central characters dressed as angels, serenely playing harps. *Casino Royale* creates a narrative mess so great that it has no choice but to destroy it, in the process inventing in Jimmy Bond a kind of unwilling nuclear suicide bomber.

The psychedelic sketch comedy of *Casino Royale* is close kin to *The Final Programme* (designed, written, and directed by Robert Fuest, the key visual mind behind ITV's *The Avengers*). Based on the novel by Michael Moorcock, the movie uses an unfolding World War III and the ruinous vestiges of a past Europe to explore the misguided creation of a new, more adaptable human, potentially able to withstand the widespread apocalypse to come. The nominal hero is Jerry Cornelius, a secret agent artist-hero who comes across as a combination of James Bond, Thomas from *Blowup* (1966, Michelangelo Antonioni) and Aubrey Beardsley. For Mark Sinker, Cornelius mixes several contemporary wish-fulfillments: "A Byronic bisexual with black fingernails, a family fortune (including personal helicopter and futuristic armory) and a Nobel Prize, Cornelius is played by Jon Finch half as a world saving sex messiah, half as truculently hapless klutz, self-deflatingly at the mercy of every unexpected plot turn."[44] Something similar might be said of the film's director Robert Fuest, who, for Michael du Plessis, was "a dandy in mass culture [who] links Pop, New Wave, and camp: his film and television work record how British visual culture of the 1960s and early 1970s drew upon science fiction itself as style rather

[44] Mark Sinker, "Selling England by the Pound," *Sight & Sound* XX.7 (July 2010): 27.

than genre."[45] Laurie Ede refers to him as a director whose critical neglect has to do with his narrow body of work, but notes that "Fuest was a prime (and rare) example of the designer-turned-director and his work demonstrated a consistent devotion to the power of images."[46] This heavily designed, image-elevating style suits the content of the film, which, like Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville* (1965), creates a sci-fi world out of many contemporary locations and an endless series of interiors. While the most interesting part of the film is the roll-out of catastrophe that acts like white noise in the background—in this *A Clockwork Orange*-like near-future, it is remarked that Amsterdam was recently reduced to dust by a bomb—people live out their days in a medicated and entertained stupor rather than by directly engaging with their demise. This willful "dropping out" ties *The Final Programme* to literary decadence, and to original author Moorcock's own Elric character, whose fantasy civilization has been destroyed by entropic languor.[47] In the film, Cornelius half-jokingly declares that he wants to go home and watch the world end from his television.

The decision to have nuclear war be removed from view for nearly the entire film finds an analog in Fuest's visual style. All is occluded, elongated, exaggerated, or augmented. Fuest designs op and pop art sets that often overwhelm his characters. He prefers to frame people through objects. One good example is a shot of Hari (Olga Lowe) in the home of Major Wrongway Lindbergh (Sterling Hayden, again in Jack D. Ripper mode), where Hari is momentarily shown through the spindle of a wrought-iron decoration as she enters the room to alter Lindbergh to a call. Fuest also relies on mirrors (Cornelius sees via reflections, such as his

[45] Michael du Plessis, "Robert Fuest and *The Final Programme*: Science Fiction and the Question of Style," *British Science Fiction Film and Television*, ed. Tobias Hochscherf and James Leggott (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Pub, 2011), 60.
[46] Laurie N. Ede, *British Film Design: A History* (London: IB Tauris, 2010), 153.
[47] Michael Moorcock, "The Stealer of Souls," *Elric: The Stealer of Souls* (New York: Ballantine/Del Rey, 2008), 19-20.

glimpsing of the lesbian encounter between Miss Brunner [Jenny Runacre] and Jenny [Sandy Ratcliff]) and color saturation, moments (such as the final merging of Cornelius and Brunner , via the "final programme," into a new type of human being) where the characters and the viewer are meant to "feel" the effects of concentrated energy. Thus, *The Final Programme* is a world where the threat of nuclear war is pervasive, yet such war remains off screen, captured only in traces. The best example, probably the film's finest visual moment, is a shot of Cornelius en route to visit Lindbergh in his offices, which appear to be the former site of the National Gallery. Cornelius parks and walks around Trafalgar Square toward Lindbergh's building. Instead of an open vista, he walks by a mountain of scraped and burnt-out cars (achieved through a strategically inserted matte image). Du Plessis' remarks that its "as though heritage and automobile graveyard are simply adjacent," signal the type of complicated image of nation found throughout apocalyptic visions of Britain, from *The Bed Sitting Room* to *Children of Men*.[48] London has not been hit by a bomb in *The Final Programme*, but the image is meant to stand in for the widespread physical destruction in this world, as well as to show the massive inheritance of years of protracted war.

The two films that show the greatest range, and arguably the most contested lineages, of the Cold War in Britain are *The War Game* and *The Bed Sitting Room*. In terms of mood, *The War Game* (a faux documentary), though primarily regarded as an alarmist warning, fits comfortably into the strand of cynicism and distrust of military institutions featured in Chapter 3. By contrast, *The Bed Sitting Room*, with its *Beyond the Fringe* and *Goon Show* lineages, is clearly a movie about the aftermath of nuclear war in the vein of the emergent strand of comedy traced in Chapter 2. Taken together, they contrast the two opposite extremes of dealing with

[48] Du Plessis 67. Here, Du Plessis wrongly identifies the facade of the National Gallery as the facade of St. Paul's (although both work as historical emblems of nation).

nuclear war. *The War Game* is perhaps the only film to convincingly localize the effects of a bomb, showing its damage and physical/psychological fallout in a direct way, while *The Bed Sitting Room* takes place in the ruins and rubble of a catastrophic attack, only alluding to that attack in snippets and isolated moments, often arrived at as the butt of a joke (despite the visual evidence all around).

3. The War Game: Lost Control and the Dialectics of Style

In the BBC's Annual Report of 1965, the Corporation explains why *The War Game*—a film directed by salaried employee Peter Watkins, that had once received internal support, and was made using BBC resources that some would argue amounted to publicly levied funds—was not broadcast as scheduled during the year of its completion. This film depicts the probable destructive effects of an atomic bomb on British lives and infrastructure, and has been called a serious and politically committed work of social fiction.[49] Here is the report at length:

> This is the BBC's own decision. It has been taken after a good deal of thought and discussion, but not as a result of outside pressure of any kind. The effect of the film has been judged by the BBC to be too horrifying for the medium of broadcasting.[50]

That *The War Game* was censored and blocked from transmission is a matter of the historical record. In fact, the film was not shown on broadcast television in Britain until July 1985 (nearly twenty years after its completion).[51] It was only screened at all because the film was "rescued" for the world by BFI Film Services, the distribution and booking branch of the British Film

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[49] James M. Welsh, "The 'Serious' Mockumentary: The Trivialization of Disaster? The Case of Peter Watkins," *Too Bold for the Box Office: The Mockumentary from Big Screen to Small,* ed. Cynthia J. Miller (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 181.
[50] BBC Annual Report 165, quoted in Joseph A. Gomez, *Peter Watkins* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), 45-46.
[51] Tony Shaw, "The BBC, the State and Cold War Culture: The Case of Television's *The War Game* (1965)," *English Historical Review*, CXXI (Dec. 2006): 1351.

Institute.[52] According to Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, so many special interest groups, ban-the-bomb organizations, and (eventually) university film societies rented the movie that a dedicated member of the staff had to be appointed to figure out the logistics of all the bookings.[53]

What has remained up for debate is why the film was not shown in the first place. Briefly, there are two general theories, neither of which has been substantiated conclusively (although one has been codified by Watkins himself and contains more of his testimony). James Chapman is responsible for what might be called the "mundane policy decision" thesis. In his account, "the censorship of *The War Game* was not a political conspiracy to keep the 'truth' of nuclear warfare off British television screens as Watkins and other commentators have alleged, but demonstrates a rather more ad hoc process through which a range of institutional and cultural factors determined the BBC's decision."[54] For Chapman, these factors included Watkins' unwillingness to stick to his originally proposed scenario, his resistance to making certain cuts, and the BBC's remit as a public service institution that did not want to confuse or frighten its viewers with Watkins' genre-transgressing film. We can contrast Chapman's view—which was largely synthesized through reading internal BBC memos—with the view taken by Mike Wayne (which is also endorsed by Peter Watkins). For Wayne, "by any plausible account of what happened, *The War Game* was censored for politically motivated reasons, that it was not done in an open and transparent manner, that the state was intimately involved in the BBC's decision and that there was nothing 'ad hoc' about the process."[55] In this line of argument, the film was not recommended to be broadcast after senior civil servants with ties to Whitehall viewed the film

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[52] Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, "From the 1964 Labor Government to the 1970 BFI Crisis," *The British Film Institute, The Government, and Film Culture, 1933-2000,* eds. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Christophe Dupin (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2012), 107-108.
[53] *Ibid*. 108.
[54] James Chapman, "The BBC and the Censorship of *The War Game* (1965)," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41.1 (Jan 2006): 75.
[55] Wayne 627.

and objected not just to its construction, but to its criticisms of British preparedness for a nuclear attack and to the alarming manner in which the film shares its diligently researched facts.[56] For Wayne and Watkins, the film was suppressed because it scared a conservative establishment that wanted to deliberately withhold important information from the British public (a long tradition of censoring broadcasts about the bomb, dating to 1954).[57]

Censorship controversy aside, what's so special about a film that attempts to seriously chart the local effects of a nuclear bomb? In our age of global disaster cinema, what's so important about a modestly budgeted BBC film that resolutely focuses on the street-level effects of a catastrophe? *The War Game* is central to postwar British cinema, but its longevity cannot be explained away by its initial controversy. The longstanding critical and popular interest in the film has more at stake than its difficult subject matter and its mediated notoriety—rather, we might take a fresh look at *The War Game* as encompassing a kind of ground zero of several debates (historical and cinematic) that characterize Cold War Britain. The film fits into an historical continuum of visual attempts to understand Britain's role in an increasingly post-imperial world, where past markers of national plenty (a standing army, a sense of cultural and political heritage, a colonial empire) were supplanted by a series of economic and ideological revolutions that broke the world into two power blocs, one lead by the United States (of which Britain was steadfastly a part, but in a junior capacity), and the other by the Soviet Union. *The War Game* is an acute expression of a specifically British type of nuclear anxiety, one identifiable on several representational levels. The obvious commonality between all these levels is the continuous realization that the nation lacks control, and is utterly at the mercy of a larger geopolitical situation in which it has little power. In addition to its importance as a film

[56] *Ibid*. 635.
[57] *Ibid*. 631.

that explores a dire issue of key public interest, *The War Game* fits into a tradition of apocalyptic thinking that, while tempered by current events and the stark reality of civil procedures, also connects to a fantastic sensibility. James M. Welsh has briefly characterized one of the difficulties in processing this film as a matter of "generic confusion."[58] Moreover, *The War Game* at once rigorously adheres to concepts common to documentary filmmaking, while at the same time embraces an acute sense of social fiction and a degree of violence so unknown to British cinema of the mid-1960s that it almost seems too excruciating to be true. In short, *The War Game* asks its viewers to consider the boundaries of the documentary format, as well as imagine the uneasy alliance of social realism and the fantastic, in the process questioning the divide between realism and fantasy.[59]

The War Game begins with spoken text about Britain's official retaliation protocol. Over an illustrated map of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, a narrator—presumably a government official, or at least a voice that can be associated with the authority of the BBC—says that we see "more potential nuclear targets per acre of land mass than any other country in the world." The film next shows men meeting about how many local evacuees can be sustained in the event of a nuclear attack. We are informed that communist forces seek to occupy West Berlin unless the United States removes its forces from Vietnam. The situation in Berlin leads to riots, communist forces defeat the U.S. in Berlin, and the U.S. President launches preemptive NATO strikes, which trigger retaliatory strikes on NATO aligned locations. *The War Game* is principally about how Britain responds to such an attack. However, the film does not focus on the probably even more dire situation in London. Rather, most of what the film describes takes

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[58] James M. Welsh, *Peter Watkins: A Guide to References and Resources* (Boston, MA: GK Hall & Co., 1986), 33.
[59] For a discussion of the "lost continent" of fantastic cinema, the general alternative to the mainstream of British cinema born out of the documentary tradition and its stated commitments to "realism," see Petley "The Lost Continent" esp. 98-101.

place in Kent, one of the Home Counties, a less heavily populated area to the South-East of London located by the coast of the English Channel.

This is a rather pedestrian retelling of what happens in the film. *The War Game* is frequently styled both as a mock-documentary (it uses maps and voice-over narration in a matter familiar to us) and as a realist exposé. The film's first extended live action sequence—which begins with an over-the-shoulder shot of a motorcycle messenger that follows him into a local council meeting with one extended take, before cutting and showing the decisions of that meeting—uses diegetic sound, affixes us to the position of this messenger, and lets us experience space in a manner similar to its principle actor. When the camera changes position and zooms in on the principle councilman, Watkins continues to use visual techniques not found in most dramatic feature films. The councilman's view wanders and he regards the camera in a way that would be off-putting in a film that would like to maintain the illusion of the fourth wall.[60] People quickly walk in front of the camera to remind of the generally unsettled atmosphere of the sequence, and to draw attention to the people in the room who are otherwise off-screen. This sequence illustrates *The War Game's* commitment to a constructed naturalness. While aspects of the film approximate the devices of documentary filmmaking, this should be separated this from the typical relationship between a documentary film and the world it describes. Many documentaries regard the world in a present tense ("this is how the world is...") or past tense ("this is how the world was..."). *The War Game* uses the phrase "if there were a war." After exploring the social unrest that would be caused by the possibility of a nuclear attack, a narrator says "such scenes as these would be almost inevitable."

The world of *The War Game* is a product of the Cold War. NATO aligned countries with

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[60] For more on acting in films by Watkins, see John R. Cook, "'Don't forget to look *into* the camera!: Peter Watkins' approach to acting with facts," *Studies in Documentary Film* 4.3 (2010): 227-240.

nuclear capability shifted their defense strategies away from a reliance on conventional standing armies and towards a policy of deterrence through the threat of massive retaliation. In the United States, this "New Look" defense plan of 1955 signaled a move away from the strategies that dominated World War II. Britain followed suit in 1957: this small island nation would rely on the threat of nuclear force to avert future crises.[61] Britain had tested its first bomb in 1952, and by 1958 the RAF had 240 V-F Bombers capable of delivering a nuclear payload (the irony is that the nation apparently only had 20 thermo-nuclear weapons by that point!)[62] However, arms build-ups between the United States and the Soviet Union prompted, by the mid-1960s, the possibility of Mutually Assured Destruction: the chain reaction of attacks and counter-attacks between the nuclear capable nation would deliver enough firepower to summarily destroy large chunks of the populated world.[63] *The War Game* was made during this heightened moment, when the possibility of a nuclear annihilation loomed large. The film explores the anxiety around the fact that the nation might well be able to retaliate, but the destruction caused by a first strike would be great enough to cause irreparable damage and confusion. *The War Game* explores what it looks like to suffer the effects of a war to which one does not consent, and against which one has no efficacy. This is what life looks like for the victims of abstract, heavily technologized wars.

Part of the *The War Game's* eventual resonance with audiences has to do with its connection to many CND positions, including an opposition to the war in Vietnam and an advocacy for disarmament (*The War Game* advocates this not through a verbal argument, but by showing a series of potentially horrific effects). Even though Watkins was never a member of the

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[61] Michael L. Dockrill and Michael F. Hopkins, *The Cold War*, Second Edition, Studies in European History (New York: Palgrave, 2006 [1988]), 29.
[62] N.J. Wheeler, "British Nuclear Weapons and Anglo-American Relations 1945-54," *International Affairs* 62.1 (Winter 1985-1986): 78, 84.
[63] Dockrill and Hopkins 88.

CND, the organization lobbied on behalf of his film, and even used it as a tool to aid in the rebuilding (after retrenchment) of its dues paying members.[64] *The War Game* and the CND both attempted to address a public desire for information about the effects of nuclear war, coupled with a set of morally and ideologically informed demonstrations of what such a war would do to the world. As such, both goals attempted to directly address nuclear war during a time when most discourse did anything but.

A brief comparison between the "official" CND film *March to Aldermaston* and *The War Game* illustrates their similarity, as well as their eventual divergence. Both contain images of dissent against the bomb, use some archival materials to demonstrate the aftereffects of exposure (although *March to Aldermaston* reserves these few images for the end, intercut between footage of the stoic visages of resolved protesters), and make appeals to common sense and generations to come. But while *March to Aldermaston* focuses on the resolve of the protesters (who emerge as a somewhat depersonalized mass of "ordinary people," a sociable group who remain civil despite their impromptu jazz concerts and wet boots), *The War Game* showcases everyone from the victims to those with official or administrative power, illustrating that the bomb—despite its great ability to level—would affect the mass citizenry disproportionately. Unlike the weekend of solidarity of *March to Aldermaston*, *The War Game* shows that the bomb would really sever social ties and irreversibly change British behavior.

In fact, one important factor that distinguishes many science-fiction disaster films from Watkins' *The War Game* is the latter's means of representing the breakdown of social order. In *The Day of the Triffids* (1962, Steve Sekely and Freddie Francis), a film in which a strange shower of spore-bearing-meteors causes most of the world's population to go blind, the tacit rules governing social behavior are upheld to an astonishing degree. This blindness (and the threat of

[64] Shaw 1377-1379.

the Triffids, the lumbering plant-creatures that cause the blindness) has wide social effects. Like *The War Game*, the film shows the collateral and infrastructural damage that an apocalyptic scenario would cause. An early scene shows the behavior of the public after a train derails at a London station. Everyone remains calm, orderly, and continues to follow the pre-disaster rules governing public behavior. Villainous actions are reserved for a cadre of criminals (who turn a French villa into an improvised brothel and speakeasy) and the semi-sentient plants. By contrast, *The War Game* pulls no punches in illustrating the wide social repercussions of a nuclear attack. The government is overwhelmed and can no longer keep order. In the absence of socially sanctioned authority deriving from the consent of the people, the police stage public executions. Citizens immediately hoard useful supplies. The neighborliness that so frequently characterized visual representations of wartime Britain disappears.

In broader geopolitical terms, these disaster scenarios (including *The War Game*) are *fantasies of lost control*. In *Gorgo,* or *Konga* (1962, a film featuring a genetically mutated chimpanzee who wrecks large chunks of London), destruction can be contained by stopping or diverting a monster. Joseph Losey's mature film *The Damned* (finished in 1961, but not released until 1963) examines how governments fantasize about controlling the effects of radiation. A nation that has nuclear capability wants to be able to contain such unprecedented power. In *The Damned*, a couple stumbles upon a hidden bunker containing a group of captive children. These kids have been isolated since birth and are being subjected to a lifetime of tests. Given the instability and promiscuity of nuclear radiation, such small-scale containments show the asymmetrical differences in power between mankind and its weaponry.

But it is the fantasy explored by *The War Game*, as well as productions as diverse as *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1961) and *The Bed Sitting Room* that are the most politically

prescient. In each of these films, the larger stakes of the Cold War triggers a scenario in which Britain is either partially or totally destroyed thanks to nuclear war, even though it is not principally to blame. In other words, these films evince the ultimate national fear of lost prominence on a world stage: the possibility of annihilation despite relatively indirect participation in the principle geopolitical conflict. In *The War Game*, a supra-national crisis between East and West prompts the USA to initiate a NATO inspired first strike on Russia, which triggers attacks on Britain. In Val Guest's British Lion production *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*, simultaneous American and Russian nuclear bomb tests alter the environment of the world. With the earth thrown off kilter, Britain's climate changes and the nation places its people under martial law. The Mandrake character of *Dr. Strangelove* might fit this description, since he stands in for a Britain that can no longer control geopolitical and world-historical events. *The Bed Sitting Room*, Richard Lester's quintessentially British look at the absurdities of life after the bomb, explains that the end of the world was caused by "Nuclear Misunderstanding," a third World War that lasted less than three minutes (including the peace treaty).

The War Game can be situated in a formal and aesthetic continuum, one that both explains its importance and helps justify its notoriety. As is probably evident so far, it's not just the content of Watkins' film—the public executions, disorder, graphic visualizations of burns—that makes it notorious. It is slightly flippant to put Watkins' social fiction next to science fiction films, even though they all think in a speculative way. As Susan Sontag notes in her famous essay "The Imagination of Disaster," science fiction films, when read from her position in the mid-1960s, contain "absolutely no social criticism, of even the most implicit kind," and furthermore do not acknowledge "the notion of science as a social activity, interlocking with

social and political interests."[65] Watkins' film absolutely cannot be contained by Sontag's sweeping statement. The story of its production, as well as the target of many of its critiques—the authorities responsible for civil defense and decision-making in the face of a nuclear attack—is a thoroughly institutional story.

Watkins' earlier film *Culloden*, his first as a BBC director, is widely discussed for its commitment to a new realist aesthetic, wherein meticulous attention to historical detail is combined with the immediacy of closely-staged hand-held camerawork, non-professional actors with lived relationships to their roles, and a framing device that features historical personages interviewed by a camera crew (in a manner like the mid-1950s American television show *You Are There*, whose aesthetic was not nearly so assured). This expose on the 18th century Battle of Culloden, the last conventional battle to take place on the British Isles, combines acute historical research with cutting edge techniques. But Watkins was not the only director at the BBC using documentary techniques as a platform for social critique. Famously, Ken Loach used non-professional actors and a bare style in his early television work. *Cathy Come Home* (1966), a pioneering "Wednesday Play" about the path to homelessness, can thank its location filming and working class credentials for changing public perceptions of and discussions on homelessness in the UK.[66] Loach largely broke with BBC Drama Department protocol—which favored set-based, studio filmmaking—in pursuit of his desired style.[67] Less well known is director Ken Russell's even earlier pioneering of docudrama techniques, a genre that Watkins worked in, albeit to different effect. Russell's film *Prokofiev: Portrait of a Soviet Composer* (1961, part of the arts show *Monitor*) was among the first documentaries in Britain to have an actor stand in for a

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[65] Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster," *Commentary* (October 1965): 48.
[66] Mark Duguid, "*Cathy Come Home*," *BFI Screenonline*, accessed 24 Sep 2013, http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/438481/; Cook "Don't Forget" 232-233.
[67] Oliver Wake, "Wednesday Play," *BFI Screenonline*, accessed 28 Sept 2013, http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/454700/.

documentary subject. In this case, Russell shows his audience Prokofiev playing piano thanks to a closely cropped shot of the composer's hands, and even allows a more poetic and searching glimpse of the composer thanks to a reflection of this actor in rippling, murky water.[68] Russell's BBC films continued to play with illusions of realism in the documentary format. His *Pop Goes the Easel* (1962), a film about pop artists, simultaneously questions documentary staginess through several thoroughly planned sequences (including one nightmare sequence that doubles as an extended homage to *Madchen in Uniform* [1931]) while, as I have argued elsewhere, also challenging BBC assumptions about the function of genres, the cultural status of the arts, and the literacies of BBC audiences.[69]

Watkins' *The War Game* combines the two dominant representational strategies in British cinema mentioned throughout this project.[70] To one side is the long tradition of social realism, maybe the most readily recognizable strand of popular thinking about British movies, that stretches back through the documentary tradition of the 1930s, includes the "tradition of quality" melodramas of the 1940s (not the heavily performative Gainsborough melodramas, but something rather more sedate like *Brief Encounter*), and crests with the kind of realism pursued by Loach beginning in the 1960s. To the other side is the "Lost Continent" of (largely disreputable) genre cinema, encompassing everything laden with spectacle, horror, and stylistic excess: Hammer thrillers, disaster films, science fiction, arguably Ken Russell's and Nic Roeg's 1970s work[71]

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[68] Michael Brooke, "Prokofiev," *BFI Screenonline*, accessed 24 Sept 2013, http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/907277/index.html. For more on Russell's early films, see Paul Sutton, "Ken Russell at the BBC, 1959-1970," *Ken Russell: Re-Viewing England's Last Mannerist*, ed. Kevin M. Flanagan (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 3-23.
[69] Kevin M. Flanagan, "Television, Contested Culture, and Social Control: Cultural Studies and *Pop Goes the Easel*," *Ken Russell: Re-Viewing*, 64-84.
[70] Petley 98-99.
[71] For more on the use of the "Lost Continent," see Chapman "From Amicus to Atlantis" 56.

Take, for instance, *The War Game's* famed firestorm sequence. This aptly illustrates Watkins' realist credentials on technical grounds. The handheld camerawork, makeup, and sense of genuine anguish shine through. The actors are mostly non-professionals, the action is not entirely bound to a studio, and the scenario that is depicted is backed by research, both of the effects of the two bombs dropped in Japan and on tests conducted in other nations. But, at the same time, the film depicts something that goes beyond realism—an event of such exceptional status that it transcends the ordinary and the everyday—that it ventures into the realm of disaster fiction. This is one of the most acute imaginings of an inferno ever caught on film. Compare this with *No Place to Hide*, which stresses the invisibility of radioactivity over the grotesque disfigurations that Watkins looks at with unflinching intention. Knight's discussion of atomic danger in *No Place to Hide* gels with the aesthetic constraints of documentary realism in that it substitutes Watkins' unmentionables with an animation of the periodic table to elements, suggesting a playful tone that restrains the film's urgency and anxieties. Both works contain factual information, but Knight's only really breaks with generic precedent momentarily, and only then to feature something—the invisible effects of radiation—which he cannot really show. For Watkins, the pain and suffering (if only through proxy and approximation, through actors depicting their version of what exists in written and eye-witness accounts) must be shown. Thus, his vision of a nuclear strike, while really possible, goes far beyond the generic confines of realist fiction.

Watkins' visualization of nuclear attack is thoroughly dialectical in conception in that it rejects both generically realist *and* totally fictitious invention, settling instead on a measured counterpoint of the two.[72] The recorded and re-conceptualized statement of an Anglican bishop

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[72] Nick Muntean, "There is Nothing More Objectionable than Objectivity: The Films of Peter Watkins," *From the Arthouse to the Grindhouse: Highbrow and Lowbrow Transgression in Cinema's First Century*,

interrupts the footage of re-created atrocities. The jarring shift in tone, location and sentiment leaves the audience with no choice but to read the two strands of thought as diametrically contrasting takes on the subject of nuclear attack. Clearly, for Watkins as well as for most of us watching, the imagined effects of the bomb far outweigh the rather removed and disinterested talk of "level heads prevailing."

The BBC chose not to broadcast the film. One of the stated reasons was that it might scare isolated, elderly viewers, who could possibly mistake the film for an actual account of things that had recently happened.[73] In this way, *The War Game* is as contentious as the famous Orson Welles broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* from 1938 in its potential to scare. However, thanks to the BFI, the film was screened by thousands. It became the best-known visual aide to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. It won an Academy Award for best documentary in 1967.

4. *The Bed Sitting Room*: Laughing at the End of the Nation through Ruins and the Repetition Compulsion

Spike Milligan and John Antrobus' play *The Bed Sitting Room* was first staged at the Mermaid Theatre in London in 1963, followed by an engagement at the Duke of York Comedy Club and a nationwide tour. According to Aloys Fleischmann, the project was in development for roughly a year before its premiere.[74] Milligan and Antrobus co-directed *The Bed Sitting Room's* initial engagement, with music provided by the Temperance Seven, a trad-jazz band

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eds. John Cline and Robert G. Weiner (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 294.
[73] Quoted in Chapman "The BBC and the Censorship of *The War Game*" 88.
[74] Aloys Fleischmann, "John Antrobus," *Twentieth-Century British Humorists*, ed. Paul Matthew St. Pierre, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 352 (Detroit: Gale, 2009). Accessed at Literature Resource Center. Unpaginated.

whose sense of humor and dogged adherence to obsolete music fit the absurdity of this version of the end of the world. Milligan was by this time a well-known comedian, the most outspoken and bizarre cast member of *The Goon Show*. Tony Howard refers to the much younger Antrobus as "a comic surrealist, sympathetic to the abnormal and distrustful of modern science."[75] Together, they are important figures in postwar British culture precisely because of their distaste for the dominant trends of the day. According to Clive Barker, Milligan's "play (with John Antrobus) *The Bed Sitting Room* (1963) and his central performance in *Oblomov* and *Son of Oblomov* (both 1964) helped break the deadlock of the post-1956 social realist theatre and pointed forward to the post-1968 alternative theatre, liberating later playwrights to establish their own rules and invent new forms through which to express social concern."[76] Their favored means of achieving a socially engaged discourse was comedy, and both men frequently channeled their traumatic military experiences into wild critiques of the view of war as a noble and necessary pursuit. According to the biographical note in the program to *The Bed Sitting Room*, Antrobus was at the military academy in Sandhurst, and "it was here he was schooled in lunacy, which he has since taken up as a profession."[77] Milligan served in the Fifty-Sixth Regiment Royal Artillery during World War II, and despite his popularity amongst the other men in his position, he took sustained umbrage with authority figures. According to Mike Doherty, this young, aspiring trumpeter found that "music and clowning both became important [...] helping him retain his sense of humanity while war raged around him."[78] For Jeff Nuttall, both men's "lives and works [were] in

[75] Tony Howard, "Antrobus, John," *The Continuum Companion to Twentieth Century Theatre*, ed. Colin Chambers (New York: Continuum, 2002), 29.
[76] Clive Barker, "Milligan, Spike [Terence Alan]," *The Continuum Companion to Twentieth Century Theatre*, 503.
[77] John Antrobus quoted in Fleischmann.
[78] Mike Doherty, "Spike Milligan," *Twentieth-Century British Humorists*. Unpaginated.

a state of near-manic deadlock with society."[79]The first of Milligan's war memoirs, *Adolf Hitler: My Part in His Downfall* (covered in greater detail in Chapter 2) became a feature film in which an easy-going Milligan shirks work, authority, and the draconian hierarchies of the military, only lapsing out of his personal pursuit of pleasure during traumatic moments that bring the full terrors of wartime into direct view (for example, the first-hand witnessing of a fellow soldier's death from the explosion of a downed plane). By 1963, Milligan had suffered breakdowns and mental illness, while Antrobus became an alcoholic.

The Bed Sitting Room is about what happens to the United Kingdom in the wake of the bomb. It shows the illogical extension of the new militarism, where the previous boredom and regimentation of the military are supplanted by the sudden threat of annihilation. The play (and later, the film adaptation directed by Richard Lester) is not about the moments leading up to such an explosive denouement, but rather about what happens to the nation, its culture, and the few unlucky enough to survive. While the events of the play clearly take place in a near-future tense, it is concerned also with Britain's living under the shadow of the bomb in the early 1960s. In his review of the first performance of the play, the critic R.B. Marriott notes that *The Bed Sitting Room* "is not science fiction: it is straight satire and goonery pointed to comment on the way we live now, and to show that if we go on like this, the bomb is inevitable."[80] Jeff Nuttall calls it "possibly the most moving and uncompromising works about the bomb."[81] The play takes the social issues familiar to audiences and strains them through the absurd filter of a destroyed world, where the few survivors maintain the rituals of their pre-bomb lives. The twist, of course, is that the bomb and its radiation have changed the very fabric of the world, such that mutations and miracles now appear possible.

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[79] Nuttall 131.
[80] R.B. Marriott, "The Bed Sitting Room," *The Stage and Television Today* no. 4269 (7 Feb 1963): 13.
[81] Nuttall 131.

The play gets its title from the fate of its character Lord Fortnum of Alamein who, in the first act, is worried that he will metamorphose into a sentient bed sitting room (what in the United States would be known as a cheap, furnished room).[82] His fears are later alleviated when, after turning into a bed sitting room and being put on the real estate market, he learns that he currently occupies a gentrifying "neighborhood" and can expect to charge as much as 50 guineas a week in rent.[83] The plot—really a sequence of linked sketches—charts the interactions of the bizarre survivors, leading to their near-starvation and the birth of a Christ-like child, where Fortnum uses his new status as a bed sitting room to appeal to the desperate hangers-on as an omniscient God. Fortnum's maniacal, messianic view of the world is typical of the other characters in the play. Marriott writes that "after the bomb, there seems to be no pity or love or goodness left," and instead "there is only blasphemy, greed, hypocrisy, stupidity, Lust and self."[84] In Fleischmann's words, "the play includes the inevitable digs at the military and Christianity, as the survivors of World War III feebly attempt to maintain a rational nationalist identity in a world in which child-eating and metamorphoses into various kinds of animals and furniture are commonplace occurrences."[85]

The particular differences between the content of the play and the film aren't especially worth enumerating, other than to say that the film is a comprehensive, lateral expansion (an "opening out") of the themes, characters, environments, gags, and sense of national identity of its source text. As is typical of a play, *The Bed Sitting Room*, as staged, is located in only a few, mostly abstract locations, and focuses on the interactions of a small handful of survivors, some of whom have names (the eventually pregnant Penelope, Her Majesty Gladys Scroake) and

[82] Spike Milligan and John Antrobus, *The Bed Sitting Room* (London: Tandem Publishing, 1972), 22-25.
[83] *Ibid*. 48.
[84] Marriott 13.
[85] Fleischmann.

others of whom are introduced in vague terms (Plastic Mac Man, Coffin Man). *The Bed Sitting Room* uses projected footage of an atomic bomb to open the show, contains on-stage musical accompaniment, and boasts one of the most extensive and specific prop lists in the history of theater (some objects called for include “chocolate gold-wrapped pennies,” “Flip top Bible, made like cigarette pack,” and, impossibly, “Jayne Mansfield.”)[86] Fortnum transforms into a bed sitting room relatively late in the stage version as compared to the film, yielding a more concentrated focus on this post-apocalyptic world's apparent supernaturalism and capacity for miracles.

The Bed Sitting Room became a film thanks to another failed project. Richard Lester and producer Oscar Lewenstein had been planning a cinematic adaptation of Joe Orton's *Up Against It* (1967, a never-produced movie that was to star The Beatles) which had to be abandoned due to their inability to find a suitable scribe for a screenplay. However, in a coup that partially illustrates the major studio's willingness to back British projects in the 1960s, they convinced United Artists to fund *The Bed Sitting Room*, from a screenplay by Charles Wood, instead.[87] Milligan and Antrobus’ play was presented on stage as a slightly claustrophobic and paranoid farce. Much of it takes place indoors, with characters interacting frequently enough to suggest the smallness of what remains of Britain. By contrast, Lester’s movie is set largely on location, using long shots and camera movements to show the desolate vistas of a post-nuclear landscape. The film was shot at the Imperial Chemical Plant near Port Talbot, Wales, at a trash heap of cracked porcelain in Stoke-on-Trent in the Midlands, and in the clay pits of St. Austell, Cornwall.[88] If the play is characterized by the busyness of a crowded stage—piles of objects limiting the planes of possible action—then the movie is notable for its air of emptiness, its

[86] Milligan and Antrobus 9-12.
[87] Oscar Lewenstein, *Kicking Against the Pricks: A Theatre Producer Looks Back* (London: Nick Hearn Books, 1994), 128.
[88] Yule *Man who “Framed” the Beatles* 169-170.

visualization of scarcity. Neil Sinyard even goes so far as to read this as one of the film's faults, noting that "one of the problems is that the film has a landscape characterized by absences, whereas Lester's films tend to thrive on an abundance of detail."[89] Although a long way from the opulent palaces that were to feature in his *The Three Musketeers* (1973) and *The Four Musketeers* (1974), *The Bed Sitting Room's* aesthetic isn't quite the tasteful modernism of The Beatles' group house in *Help!* (1965). There are echoes of Lester and production designer Assheton Gorton's previous collaboration *The Knack…and How to Get It*, whose plot and visuals regards the world as a junk shop, to be salvaged and repurposed by youth. *The Knack* is set in a still slightly postwar, quite nearly swinging London. The Great London area of *The Bed Sitting Room* does not swing, and should be regarded as an epitaph for London's international moment of prestige. However, MGM still attempted to market the film with a consumerist mentality in mind. In their press-kit, they suggest that theaters hold promotional tie-in contests, suggesting that the theatre-owner "get the cooperation of a local furniture store to offer a suitable prize."[90]

In his theorization of "salvagepunk," an aesthetic borne from financial crisis and its attenuate ruinations, Evan Calder Williams praises *The Bed Sitting Room* as "salvage-thought at its best," "a staggering vision of waste and remnant, of frozen, necrotic social relations, and of what we keep doing to keep ourselves busy after the end of the world."[91] In his extended analysis of the film, he characterizes it as "staked on the gap between the empty and the overfull, between a depopulated, vacant world that cannot be filled and a world where repopulation can't start until the rubble is cleared away."[92] The predicament of the film is, precisely, a cultural interregnum, a situation that (as identified by Antonio Gramsci) has the old order on the precipice of extinction,

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[89] Sinyard, *Richard Lester* 80.
[90] *The Bed Sitting Room* Exhibitor's Campaign Book. BFI holding PBS-22777.
[91] Evan Calder Williams, *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2011), 45.
[92] *Ibid*. 46-47.

but does not yet allow the new to be born.[93] For Lester, and Milligan and Antrobus, this historical logjam is caused by the persistence of British life in the face of a brave new world. For Williams, "it is a struggle to become post-apocalyptic, a task which requires both remembering the past (speaking the Bomb, preserving old forms of social relation) and forgetting the past (letting it become History, throwing away the inherited relations of domination)."[94]

This is a film about ruins that effortlessly connects to wider postwar discourses about history and detritus. Twentieth-century historians have located meaning in ruins, though not in terms of the long-lost cultural inheritance of vanished civilizations akin to the eighteenth-century approach, epitomized by antiquarianism and the birthright of the "grand tour" of the Mediterranean by British aristocrats.[95] Instead, works like Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* (eventually published in English in 1999, an unfinished work-in-progress that collects the history of the industrialized 19th century into a dialectically positioned series of fragments read through the prism of the Paris Arcades) and Humphrey Jennings' similarly unfinished *Pandaemonium* (eventually released, in incomplete form, in 1985), itself an attempt to read the transmogrification of art, science and industry in Britain between the 17th and 19th centuries, as collected in a series of juxtaposed prose excerpts, stand as beacons for a new historiography based on rack and ruin in the wake of the ascendancy of capitalism.[96] Benjamin and Jennings

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[93] Antonio Gramsci, "State and Civil Society," *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 276; for an example of this as applied to cultural crisis, see Zygmunt Bauman, "Times of Interregnum," *Ethics & Global Politics*, vol. 5 no. 1 (2012): 49-56. Accessed 19 Nov 2013, http://www.ethicsandglobalpolitics.net/index.php/egp/article/view/17200/20073#NOTE0001.
[94] Williams *Combined* 47.
[95] See Jeremy Black, *The British Abroad: The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2003).
[96] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedermman, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard UP, 1999); Jennings, *Pandaemonium: The Coming of the Machine as Seen By Contemporary Observers, 1660-1886*; for more comparisons of the two, see Michael Saler, "Whigs and Surrealists: The 'Subtle Links' of Humphrey Jennings' Pandaemonium," *Singular Continuities: Tradition, Nostalgia, and Identity in Modern British Culture*, eds. George Behlmer and Fred

worked on their projects with the memory of the destruction of the First World War and carried on their research during (and in Jennings' case, just after) the Second. The visual legacies of the wars are marked by widespread environmental destruction. The effects of war on landscape, buildings, objects, and the particulars of place are in amply in evidence in films about World War I as diverse as *Oh! What a Lovely War*, the Stephen Weeks' short *1917* (in which a group of soldiers anxiously awaits death from an inhospitable trench), and the gift-giving sketch from Monty Python's *Meaning of Life* (in which unreasonably plucky soldier give ever-greater gifts of gratitude to their commanding officer before going "over the top").

Ruin is part of the iconographic repertoire of films about war from all periods. But ruin has specific resonances with post-World War II films, given the degree and kind of destruction, as well as the exponential proliferation of filmed evidence, coupled with the rise in media appetites for fictional stories of war. Leo Mellor writes about ruins and bombsites as having a special centrality to postwar Britain, where modernism read these vestiges as "a material basis to disorder and the possibilities for narratives of reclaiming, rebuilding and remaking."[97] Such ruins inspired everything from surrealist painting and photography to popular novelists like Graham Greene. In Germany, the "rubble films" of the immediate postwar period project the sobering national mood onto the physical destruction left behind by their defeat at the hands of the Allies.[98] The destroyed cities of World War II form the backdrop of other films, including psychological crime thrillers and *films noir*. Most famous is Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949, from a screenplay by Greene), which uses the bombed edifices of postwar Vienna to capture

Leventhal (Redwood City, CA: Stanford UP, 2002), 123-142 and Ben Jones and Rebecca Searle, "Humphrey Jennings, the Left and the Experience of Modernity in mid twentieth-century Britain," *History Workshop Journal* 73 (Spring 2013): 191.

[97] Leo Mellor, *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites and British Culture* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2011), 2.

[98] Robert Shandley, *Rubble Films: German Cinema in the Shadow of the Third Reich* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple UP, 2001), 3-4.

something of the desperation and exploitative potential of the city. Harry Lime (Orson Welles) both exploits the battered city (he steals penicillin and sells it on the black market) and is destroyed by it (his attempts to escape capture take him into the sewers, which cannot provide a "way out" of his crimes). Wastelands and ruined objects appear in other British films of the postwar moment, including Ken Russell's *Monitor* film *The Lonely Shore* (1961), which, according to Paul Sutton, is "an intellectual science-fiction treatise" that challenges us to look at household objects anew, as they are all that is left of our vanished way of life after an unspecified disaster (possibly the bomb).[99] Here, Russell provides an almost anthropological-documentary look at objects in ruined landscapes, questioning their possible reception, were a later civilization or group of extraterrestrials to discover them.

Postwar films that use ruinous landscapes offer at least two frames of intelligibility. On the one hand, they combine fictitious stories with documentary evidence of past damage, and thus in some sense keep alive the visual histories of wars past. On the other hand, they provide novel ways to allegorize landscapes and cityscapes, such that filmmakers and viewers can invest places, discarded objects, and damaged buildings with moral and ethical traits. For David Melbye, such "landscape allegory," connects film and television to a longer history of art, in which the representation of spaces is tightly entwined with social meanings and critiques.[100]

The Bed Sitting Room dwells on the ruinous inheritance of the "great nuclear misunderstanding." Production designer Gorton envisioned the film as "an infinity of waste and desolation."[101] Captain Bules-Martin is introduced to the audience sitting on top of a giant pile of discarded shoes that is situated in the middle of a great field of mud. The intertextual reference

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[99] Sutton "Ken Russell at the BBC" 16.

[100] David Melbye, *Landscape Allegory in Cinema: From Wilderness to Wasteland* (New York: Palgrave, 2010), 3-5; Kevin M. Flanagan, "*Landscape Allegory in Cinema: From Wilderness to Wasteland* (review)," *Film & History* 43.2 (Fall 2013): 92-93.

[101] *The Bed Sitting Room* Exhibitor's Campaign Book. BFI holding PBS-22777.

(to the amassed shoes of holocaust victims, and to an image from *Night and Fog* [1955, Alain Resnais] in particular) would not be lost on cinephile audiences of the late 1960s. The ruined dome of St. Paul's cathedral serves as yet another anchor of changed meaning. Once a famous landmark of central London, a post Great Fire of London symbol that survived the Blitz without significant damage, the St. Paul's of *The Bed Sitting Room* is reduced to a punctured dome resting in a pool of water. Like later sequences from *The Final Programme*, especially the images of Trafalgar Square, such a vision strips the building of its historical and monumental status (longevity, nation, strength) and situates it as literal shell of its formal self. Lester's film joins Ken Russell's *London Moods* (which uses the steps of St. Paul's as the site of a photo shoot for a biker gang) in remaking St. Paul's in the cultural imaginary.[102]

The War Game provides another useful point of comparison for thinking about *The Bed Sitting Room's* relationship to its massed cultural inheritance. Its fears about the bomb have as much to do with the desire to save lives as they do with an understated lament over the disappearance of civilization as we know it. *The War Game* wants public awareness of the bomb and its threats so as to preserve the good in the world. By contrast, *The Bed Sitting Room* shows the nightmare of a Britain *only partially* destroyed by the bomb. As Williams puts it, "*the problem with the apocalypse was that it wasn't apocalyptic enough*."[103] *The Bed Sitting Room* is a film of emptiness and destruction, but the few who remain are farcically insistent in their adherence to residual aspects of British life. Their inability to move on is the collective neuroses, the main manifestation of their survivor's guilt. One such tic is manifest in character's inability to refer to bombs as bombs. Bules Martin, Fortnum and others gesture to the bomb as "that nasty business" or through other allusions. It is only at the end of the film, with the wrecking ball

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[102] Flanagan "Whitehead's London" 287-288.
[103] Williams *Combined* 47. Italics in original.

destruction of the walls of the bed sitting room that characters, in their moment of terror, can actually refer directly to a nuclear attack. These are trauma victims caught in a caustic condensation of British life, where deference and old niceties remain obstinately in place. Lester's film is sadly funny in its showing the disconnect between the state of the world and the rote repetitions of its inhabitants.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1921), Freud thinks about the neurotic compulsion to repeat, a peculiar trait that he had witnessed in victims of trauma.[104] Through a chance encounter with a younger relative, Freud noticed a ball game the child played, wherein his repetition of fort (gone) and da (there) represented a simulation of disappearance and return, a working-out of any number of instinctual neuroses (such as a kind of revenge on one's mother for temporary abandonment).[105] For the child, this "compulsion to repeat" was a cultural invention that gave indirect access to the psychical path to pleasure. For his truly neurotic patients, Freud noticed that their repetitious behavior usually "purely infantile" fascinations with these acts and actions.[106] The trauma victim instinctively repeats as a conservative gesture, yielding Freud to theorize this repetition as aligned not with the straightforward preservation of life (pure pleasure), but rather with the "death instinct," wherein the "aim of all life is death," the endgame of which is a set of gestures that evince "a need to restore an earlier state of things."[107] People repeat for pleasure, instinctual fulfillment, or comfort, but on a grander scale, such repetitions inhibit socialization and new cultural formations. This ties to Williams' point about about *The Bed Sitting Room's* struggle with history: the survivors of this world are unable to leave the remnants of the past behind such that their culturally obsolete allegiance to Britain becomes the

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[104] Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XVIII, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 12.
[105] *Ibid*. 14-16.
[106] *Ibid*. 36.
[107] *Ibid*. 36-37; 38; 57.

emblem of their immanent failure to transition and move on with new modes of living.

The Bed Sitting Room illustrates the actions of the few survivors of an atomic war, noting that they all obsessively perform the culture of their prewar lives. Lord Fortnum (Ralph Richardson) remains an aristocrat who takes every possible opportunity to denigrate others because of their lower social status or race, even after morphing into a bed sitting room. Captain Bules Martin, a former military doctor, regards his patients as he would have before the widespread destruction, asking them if they want National Health Service or first class Private treatment, as well as continuing to write prescriptions for non-existent pharmacies. Father (Arthur Lowe) and Mother (Mona Washburne) remain the doting, protective parents to their adult daughter Penelope (Rita Tushingham), with Father exclaiming "it's family life that's important" as they obliviously wander the ruined landscape. There is a real blurring between the instinctual self-preservation of the pleasure principle and the oblivious repetition of the death instinct, as the family wanders into certain danger, starvation, and dehydration, tacitly in search of a better life but with glimpses of treating their doom like its a vacation.

Such rote, machinic repetitions are as much informed by survivor's guilt as they are by Henri Bergson's theories of the comic. In *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1900), Bergson discusses laughter as a social phenomenon, one requiring a shared social or cultural point-of-view.[108] Much of the comic boils down to absentmindedness, inelasticity, and habit.[109] What Bergson finds laughable often gels with what Lester does. Both find comedy in manipulated movement that goes beyond human limitations. In everything from the *Goon Show* collaboration *The Running, Jumping, and Standing Still Film* (1960) to his Beatles collaborations *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!*, Lester delights in accelerated, manic, and mimicked movements.

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[108] Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (New York: Macmillan, 1914), 7-8.
[109] *Ibid*. 25.

In *The Bed Sitting Room*, the core family is hoisted with many Bergsonian gags, and is given an acutely visualized repetition compulsion, as they are introduced to the film as having survived by riding the Circle Line of the London Underground in a loop for the past several years, living principally on found chocolate bars. In an added nod to the absurd devotion to the past cultural ecosystem, the film shows how the Underground, and the electricity for the whole nation, is generated by Electricity Man (Henry Woolf), a lone figure who rides a stationary bike day and night. The family's failed ride up the escalator perfectly ties the Bergsonian comic to the film's continued critique of old technologies in this brave new world. The escalator is more a threat than a convenience, wastes precious resources, unsuccessfully weds human to machine, and literalizes mankind's loss of footing. Moreover, this sequence of the family being unceremoniously dumped onto the ground recalls Bergson's signaling of momentum, rigidity, and "physical obstinacy" as sources of laughter from slapstick encounters.[110] In the post-apocalyptic illogic of *The Bed Sitting Room*, Britain remains a sovereign nation because it keeps the trains running on time and provides institutional support, however off-base, to its citizenry. The citizenry, in turn, uses this infrastructure out of alarmingly mechanical habit.

In *The Bed Sitting Room*, the small size of the population means that single survivors come to embody whole residual cultural formations unto themselves. This carries on Lester's Brechtian game from *How I Won the War* in that characters directly and continuously state their class allegiances, function in the narrative, and their relationships to social hierarchies like the military or the church. For the world of *The Bed Sitting Room*, the church is solely represented by the Underwater Vicar (Jack Shepherd, who performs the comical marriage of Penelope and Bules Martin), while the police force is wholly embodied by three people, including Inspector (Peter Cook) and Sergeant (Dudley Moore), who float above the landscape in a hot air balloon in

[110] *Ibid*. 9.

an endless circle, imploring the citizenry to "keep moving" so that they are less of a target for a possible follow-up bombing. Neil Sinyard best explains the paradox: "if institutions have become individuals, the effect has not been to individualise the institution so much as to institutionalise the individual."[111] One of the most iconic ongoing jokes from *The Bed Sitting Room* is its use of Frank Thornton as "The BBC," a man who wears the upper third of a tuxedo and wanders around reading the news to people by temporarily inhabiting the insides of broken televisions. He is the "voice of Britain" (in the old sense, since he speaks in a posh accent, and in an official sense, since he is the sole surviving employee of the British Broadcasting Corporation), but any claims to authority are lost given his inability to even explain what the near-total destruction of the nation was all about.

The Bed Sitting Room is funny, but its farce is savage, since it reduces its characters to caricatures unable to act with individual agency, foresee a future, or use reason. The fantasy of lost control of the film is not just over the sudden and irreversible destruction of the nation (the same fear as *The War Game*), but also over the potential loss of any control whatsoever. History, institutions, old objects, and old prejudices inexplicably maintain their pre-bomb allure. When Mate (Milligan) and Chinaman (Cecil Cheng) want to trick Bules Martin into leaving the inside of the bed sitting room, they pretend that at "Burma Reunion March" is going on outdoors, a prospect that causes Bules, an old military man, to improbably set outside and parade around like he's part of his old troop. Mate continues as a low-rung civil servant, at one point attempting to return an atomic bomb to The Army (Ronald Fraser), claiming that its original delivery (an attempt at bombing China) prompted a "return to sender" message. In his capacity as a Royal Mail Employee, Milligan insists that there is money owed on the return.

But the world *has* changed, even if Britain does not notice. Father is recruited as prime

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[111] Sinyard *Richard Lester* 76.

minister, morphs into a parrot, and is eaten by his daughter, her lover, and her husband. Sergeant upholds the law until the very last, at which point he becomes a dog and accepts his life as a domesticated pet. Fortnum, whose life as a bed sitting room gives him a new lease on life, uses his disembodied voice and pretends to be God. Inspector offers a *deus ex machina* ending by agreeing to be prime minister (and thus literally instituting a police state). His inspired speech, delivered in close-up with an authority that only Peter Cook (or maybe a young John Cleese) can give, is told to the amassed stragglers while inspiring nondiegetic music swells. The Inspector promises order and a retention of the British way of life. With the atomic bomb recently returned to sender, Britain is a nuclear power again. Of course, this is a naïve and disingenuous description of the end of the film. The radiation has reached newly dangerous levels. The survivors are starving, forced to eat their own family members. The world may not end with a bang, but with a chortle, stomach rumble, and a squawk.

5. Conclusion

The War Game and *The Bed Sitting Room* are two very different films about two different moments in the national experience of a singular event (the destruction of the nation by nuclear weapons). Both tie to larger trends in British society and culture that displace, suppress, or allegorize some aspects of bomb discourse, yet have moments of eruption that ask their audiences to face this international threat, even if only momentarily. While the whole situation has to do with a stand-off between capitalist-aligned nation and communist-aligned nations, these films—and many discussed at shorter length throughout the chapter, with the exception, perhaps, of *Dr. Strangelove*—don't focus too intently on the intricate geopolitical dance governing the deadlock between East and West. Like many of the films featured in this project,

they explore their premise through the clever triangulation of a confident auteur working on a personal project, the knowing re-combination and expansion of genre elements related to their themes, and a tempering of social anxieties central to their historical moment's understanding of the changing face of war. Both *The War Game* and *The Bed Sitting Room* accept an inevitable defaulting of goodwill between the two power blocs (an ultimate, hellish eventuality which, thankfully, did not happen during the Cold War), and explore aspects of the British response to such circumstances. That they both express fear over a national loss of control in the face of abstract destructive powers on a previously unknown scale speaks intimately to Britain's international status during the Cold War, and further typifies an emergent strand of movies that show nothing of the heroism, little of the traditional iconographies of conflict, and few of the pieties that previously governed the representation of war.

Conclusion

The Legacy of Failure and Obscurity

Most of the films and television programs discussed in this project failed to dethrone the dominantly placed texts that readily replicated the "pleasure culture of war" in their original cultural moment. As with any generalization, this one contains a few caveats. Some of the works with alternative conceptions of war that I have highlighted were actually quite popular, and were recognized as great achievements soon after release. Movies like *Carry on Sergeant* or *if….* certainly found critical and popular praise in their day, albeit for different reasons and among different audiences that those of more mainstream films. That said, the various new and different strands of war representation always remained peripheral to the dominant national self-mythologization. In this conclusion, I demonstrate and contextualize this commercial failure and subsequent obscurity (an obscurity both to cinephile audiences today and to academic film studies, where these films are only recently being talked about in any depth), noting the ways in which aspects of emergent and counter-hegemonic war representations reverberated in genre trends of subsequent decades. Despite the continued marginal status of many of the film and television texts analyzed in the preceding chapters, elements of the achievements are alive and well in film and television productions today. These texts are a testament to the notion that commercially and critically favored modes of war remembrance and military representation must contend with a continued plurality of oppositional voices.

1. Reception

Audiences and critics appreciated *The Silent Village* on release, especially because the public outcry around the destruction of Lidice was still strong and was a contributing factor motivating the war effort. That said, the strange circumstances of its production and execution could scarcely be replicated, meaning that the film was only really influential as a sensitive, uniquely fitting tribute and (in its time) as an artful work of propaganda. "E.O." of the *Monthly Film Bulletin* called a "moving documentary" with "an air of passionate sincerity and acute observation running through the whole."[1] The film deserved the highest possible praise: "by reconstituting in simple and homely fashion the known in terms of the unknown it conveys more clearly than film has done before the full tragedy of Nazi occupation."[2] The reviewer from *The Times* called it "one of the most powerful exercises in intelligent propaganda yet witnessed on the screen."[3]

Oh What a Lovely War, both as a play and as a film, achieved a degree of recognition (then as now) denied the other films in this project. From the play's first stagings in 1963 and extensive tour in 1964 (when it began to play in the U.S.) to its theatrical revival in the West End in 1969, it was a popular and critical success, even if it felt less radical in its later iterations.[4] By the time it came to the United States in 1964, *Washington Post's* Richard L. Coe raved that it "must be experienced rather than defined."[5] While some critics (like *Back Stage's* Allen Zwerdling) acknowledged the play's imaginative staging but still complained about it on

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[1] E.O. "The Silent Village," *Monthly Film Bulletin* 10.114 (1943): 61-62.
[2] *Ibid*.
[3] "The Silent Village," *The Times* 10 Jun 1943: 6.
[4] For instance, Derek Paget has argued that the production was tempered to suit mainstream interests in its 1969 revival. See Derek Paget, "Case Study: Oh What a Lovely War, 1963," *The Cambridge History of the British Theatre Volume 3*, Since 1895, ed. Baz Kershaw (New York: Cambridge UP, 2004), 409.
[5] Richard L. Coe, "'Lovely War' A N.Y. Must," *Washington Post* 7 Nov 1964: D14.

conventional grounds (pace, tempo), the newness of the vision usually trumped any minor hesitations.[6] Attenborough's film garnered generally favorable reviews, even if there were some reservations about its aspirations to blockbuster business. The *Variety* reviewer, in a near-rave, claimed that "it may be a long time before a better, more moving and significant film emanates from a British (or, indeed, any) studio."[7] Across the Atlantic, *Films in London*, in their first issue, ventured that *Oh! What a Lovely War* was an "unqualified triumph for Richard Attenborough, directing his first film. Joan Littlewood's stage production of World War I translated into pure cinema. An eloquent, angry obituary for a lost generation."[8] A month later, it was still editor David Castell's "pick of the week."[9] The film was nominated for nine BAFTA awards in 1970 (it won five) and was rewarded the "United Nations Award" for promoting the principles of the U.N. charter.[10]

Though less of a multi-tiered cultural phenomenon, Joseph Losey's *King & Country* (curiously, also a film about the First World War that perhaps benefits from the same historical distance as the Attenborough film) received extensive critical attention. That this came a year after Losey's breakthrough collaboration with Harold Pinter on *The Servant* probably has something to do with its adulation, as does his formidable reputation among the French critical establishment. It also, as *Variety*'s "Myro" points out, at least partially has to do with *King & Country's* road-tested familiarity: "The story of Private Hamp [...] has already been told on radio, television and the stage, but undeterred by this exposure, director Joseph Losey has attacked the subject with confidence and vigor, and the result is a highly sensitive and emotional drama,

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[6] Allen Zwerdling, "Capsule Review: 'Oh What a Lovely War'," *BackStage* 5.36 (Oct 1964): 8.
[7] Rich. "Film Reviews: *Oh! What a Lovely War*," *Variety* (16 Apr 1969): 6.
[8] "OH! WHAT A LOVELY WAR," *Films in London* 1.1 (7-13 Sep 1969): 15.
[9] David Castell, "Pick of the Week," *Films in London* 1.5 (5-11 Oct 1969): 11.
[10] See the BAFTA Awards Database, accessed 5 Feb 2015, http://awards.bafta.org/keyword-search?keywords=lovely+war.

enlivened by sterling performances and a sincere screenplay."[11] Writing after the film's U.S. release in 1966, Philip K. Scheuer singled out praise for the contrast between Tom Courtenay's performance as Hamp and Dirk Bogarde's turn as Hargreaves, as well as for the "stark lighting by cameraman Dennys Coup."[12] Both registers of the film were singled out for institutional praise in the way of four 1965 BAFTA nominations (Courtenay as Best Actor, Dennys Coup for Black and White Cinematography, Richard MacDonald for Art Direction, and Best Film).[13]

As mentioned in Chapter 1, *Went the Day Well*? solicited a range of responses, although the passage of time has been kind to the film. Upon initial release, for instance, "E.R." from the *Monthly Film Bulletin* reviewed it as a failure in relation to the "tradition of quality": Greene "has written a good story but the direction lacks cohesion."[14] This reviewer wanted unity and did not care for the sudden shifts in tone. In all, they found that "the photography and lighting are good, but the value of the film could have been increased by a slightly different approach and more convincing dialogue and direction."[15] Today, critics praise the film and Cavalcanti. In a five-star *Guardian* review, Peter Bradshaw describes *Went the Day Well?* as "a wartime conspiracy thriller, a black-comic nightmare and a surrealist masterpiece."[16]

Another of the films treated in this project to eventually win acknowledgement as an immense achievement, almost as important now as it was during its initial controversy, is *The War Game*. Despite nearly blacklisting Peter Watkins, being suppressed the BBC, and in some ways being as historically significant as the catalyst for an institutional panic as it was essential as a warning against the probable effects of the bomb, *The War Game* stands today as key. It has

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[11] Myro, "Venice Film Fest Reviews - King & Country," *Variety* 236.4 (16 Sep 1964): 6.
[12] Philip K. Scheuer, "'King & Country' Hits Military Mind," *LA Times* 10 Sep 1966: 18.
[13] See BAFTA Database, http://awards.bafta.org/keyword-search?keywords=king+and+country.
[14] E.R., "Went the Day Well?," *Monthly Film Bulletin* IX.97-108 (1942): 142.
[15] *Ibid*.
[16] Peter Bradshaw, "Went the Day Well?," *The Guardian* 8 July 2010, accessed 9 Feb 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/jul/08/went-the-day-well-film-review.

continuously been taught in academic settings since the mid-1960s and has helped Watkins achieve pride of place as one of the key documentary/docudrama filmmakers on the Left.[17] Because *The War Game* played aboard, circulating in cinemas and classrooms, it was given a new lease on life. It won the Academy Award for Best Documentary in 1967.

Despite these prominent examples, most of the films I have discussed at length are not centrally regarded in traditions of war representation in Britain in part because they were either decried or ignored upon release, often ensuring an obscure cultural afterlife, even during the early days of home video. Michael Winner's *You Must Be Joking!* and *Hannibal Brooks* only became legally available thanks to print-on-demand technology and would never have been sufficiently well-known for large-scale reissue. Others, like *Apaches*, had such a narrow, regional impact, that their importance can only be assessed thanks to the global distribution of the internet.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Tony Richardson's *Charge of the Light Brigade* elicited a series of big responses: the studio wanted to promote it as a sweeping, spectacular event, even though Richardson refused to screen it for critics and banned publicists from the set.[18] The critical consensus is something of a mixed bag leaning towards the positive, but box office failure, on-set production problems, and the fallout of the parties involved (especially the split between key Woodfall Films players Richardson and playwright John Osborne) meant that the film quickly faded into relative obscurity.[19] A *Variety* article from April 24, 1968 surveys the positive response of the London-based critics, noting that they largely came to Richardson's aide

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[17] Cook, "'Don't Forget to Look Into the Camera!'" 239.
[18] Philip Oakes, "Getting Charge out of 'Light Brigade'," *LA Times* (7 May 1968): d20; "Tony Richardson," *Variety* 251.12 (7 Aug 1968): 2.
[19] Don Radovich, *Tony Richardson: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 127.

despite his calling them "acidulated intellectual eunuchs."[20] One tactic was to praise the unusual choices the film makes, even if things like the performances and the costumes are usually given the most space. In *Box Office*, Addison Verrell writes that "Tony Richardson has taken enormous chances in this film and it's a credit to him that most of them work," but "the chief assets are the performances" (bar that of David Hemmings, whom he singles out as a weak link).[21] Richard L. Coe's review in *The Washington Post* lambastes the film in a manner that would not be out of place with 1940s film critics. He writes that the film "lacks a single tone or cohesion," (note the expectation of unity), features battle scenes that look like "limp chaos," and is a disappointment, through and through: "to see touches of brilliance, cleverness, heart and expense makes one only the more disgusted with this pretentious mess."[22] The critic in *The Independent Film Journal* offers a short review that sums up the critical consensus, noting that *Charge* is "a lavishly detailed and intellectualized work, featuring moments of excellence in both writing and performances," yet it is also "a cold, impersonal creation."[23] The film was nominated for seven BAFTA awards, mainly in technical categories, but failed to win any.

Despite having a Beatle in a supporting role and featuring one of the most thorough attempts at reconciling the theatre of Brecht with the popular war film genre, *How I Won the War* was viewed as a success only insofar as it was controversial. An article announcing the film's opening in New York mentions that, as of Fall 1967, the film was "currently breaking boxoffice at three Northern California Theatres."[24] In London, the film caused protests from the Far Right, who stormed the London Pavillion and denounced the film as "communist propaganda."[25] Much

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[20] "His 'Acidulated Intellectual Eunuchs' Mostly Praise Richardson's 'Brigade'," *Variety* (24 Apr 1968): 7.
[21] Addison Verrell, "The Charge of the Light Brigade," *Box Office* 93.24 (30 Sep 1968): 10.
[22] Richard L. Coe, "This 'Charge' is Too Scattered," *Washington Post* 25 Oct 1968: C8.
[23] "The Charge of the Light Brigade," *The Independent Film Journal* 64.3 (Jul 1969): 1037.
[24] "'How I Won the War' Opens Here," *New Amsterdam News* 30 Dec 1967: 17.
[25] "Agitators Mar London Run of 'How I Won War,'" *Variety* 248.11 (1 Nov 1967): 2, 16.

of the nuance of Lester's film was lost on audiences and critics of the day, such that the film's reputation at release was built around distilled sound bites. In a syndicated column, writer Joan Deppa labelled the movie "wildly offbeat, highly irreverent, and savagely anti-war."[26] A *Variety* article surveying the U.S. release revealed that many critics had defended the film on artistic grounds, yet there was a general recognition that Lester's attempts to thoroughly deflate, mock, and overturn the situation around the Second World War might have come too soon after the conflict itself.[27] In a later article, Deppa probed Lester's desire to mock "every cliche about war and war epics," and the result seems to be Lester's attempt to take on the general register in which war is represented (and not necessarily any individual act of heroism or valor, or the contributions of any specific people to an admittedly dire situation).[28] Even this stated claim of intent was not enough for Lester to win over some critics. The reviewer in *Variety* was harsh on the whole package, noting that "Richard Lester's latest film is an uneven, forced black comedy in which liabilities outweigh assets."[29] Richard L. Coe was "disgusted" by Lester's film, and offers what is likely the most probing damnation of any British film about war ever put to screen: "But, in general, 'How I Won the War' is a formless, silly niece which in a thoughtless way, oddly detracts from the sum of human knowledge."[30]

Despite riding high on critical compliments for the first half of the 1960s, the end of the decade was not kind to Joseph Losey, who had a string of relative flops including *Modesty Blaise* (1966), *Boom!* and *Secret Ceremony* and two great successes (*Accident* and *The Go-Between*, both collaborations with Harold Pinter). Despite all the ways in which it visualizes war differently from every other movie of its time, *Figures in a Landscape* might have had the worst

[26] Joan Deppa, "'How I Won the War' Anti-War, Irreverent," *LA Times* 4 Sep 1967: e16.
[27] "Critics Doing Their Hoped-For Best to Keep UA's 'War' A-Boiling," *Variety* (8 Nov 1967): 20.
[28] Joan Deppa, "Lester Film Mocks Wartime Heroics," *LA Times* 21 Sep 1967: e14.
[29] Murf, "How I Won the War," *Variety* 248.10 (25 Oct 1967): 6.
[30] Richard L. Coe, "Lester's Satire a Foolish Movie," *Washington Post* 22 Dec 1967: C6.

reception of the lot, but not because of overly harsh reviews. Part of this has to do with the rapidity with which the film left screens. It also has to do with how few people publically commented on the film at the time of its (belated) release. Aside from a handful of festival screenings and a few weeks in the major metropolises, it was hardly seen until the age of the internet. In a generally favorable article comparing the divergent approaches of *Figures in a Landscape* and *The Go-Between*, Joy Gould Boyum prophetically notes that the film played and left New York "with an unsettling rapidity (unsettling because, whatever a film's quality, to remove it from the market with such abruptness is to condemn it to oblivion)."[31] Vincent Canby's *New York Times* review found some things to admire (especially Losey's own "metaphysical concerns") but tellingly calls the attempt at intellectualizing the war/adventure genre "decidedly mixed" in achievement.[32] In Mike Wallington's *Sight and Sound* review, he brands the film a failure as a film about the relationship between two men engaged in the desperate act of war, but praises it for its mood, the general way that it uses the landscape and space.[33] Victoria Radin makes a similar move in *The Monthly Film Bulletin*, arguing the film does not have a profound social message, yet works well as a site for "the dreamlike quality of fear and menace."[34] An article about the film's production by Patricia Johnson admits that the whole process was filled with frustrations, which carried over to the film's release.[35]

A similar sense of bad luck and distribution limbo mars *The Gladiators*. According to Watkins, "'The Gladiators' (Gladiatorerna) was first released in Sweden in June 1969—to a very stormy press: mostly dismissive in Sweden, somewhat more mixed in Britain, and with at least

[31] Joy Gould Boyum, "Losey's Realism and Symbolism," *Wall Street Journal* 13 Sep 1971: 16.
[32] Vincent Canby, "Figures in a Landscape," *New York Times* 19 Jul 1971, 3 Feb 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=940DE1DE1E3FE63ABC4152DFB166838A669EDE.
[33] Mike Wallington, "Figures in a Landscape," *Sight & Sound* XL.1 (Winter 1970-1971): 48-49.
[34] Victoria Radin, "Figures in a Landscape," *Monthly Film Bulletin* 38.444-455 (1971): 23.
[35] Patricia Johnson, "Losey's 'Landscape' Littered with Frustrations," *LA Times* 7 Sep 1969: q28.

one very positive review in the US by Judith Crist in the *New York Magazine*."[36] *The Independent Film Journal*, for instance, praises the film's technical achievements, but criticizes the many forms of narration as being "overwhelmingly heavy handed" and lacking "any degree of subtlety."[37] A *Variety* article highlighting Watkins' controversial career notes that the film was "only shown five days in a British theatre, and then withdrawn," and even more incredibly, that "the Swedish company which backed him [Sandrews] insists it has 'lost' the master print of the film so it will never be shown commercially."[38] Watkins claims that "'The Gladiators' was shown at one or two festivals, and following on what was to become a pattern for most of my subsequent films, disappeared."[39] Prior to its revival on DVD in 2006, the film only had a few television screenings and some play on college campuses (often with Watkins in attendance).

The Bed Sitting Room opened relatively widely, but received mixed reviews and became a box office liability for distributor United Artists. In the United States, the critics stressed the degree to which the film is irredeemably British. The *Boxoffice* review warns that the film will appeal to "extremely select audiences" and that "most of the dialog is so British that American audiences will have difficulty figuring out what's going on."[40] *Variety* reviewer "Hawk" thought the film "miraculously manages to convey its grim message with surprising humor," but that "since a pic set midst the ruins of atomized London isn't likely to automatically set the turnstiles spinning, United Artists will have its work cut out to get the message across that this is a very special little picture worth a discriminating look-see."[41] Vincent Canby thought that the film did not live up to its ambitions, noting that "'The Bed Sitting Room' however is so absurd that it

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[36] Peter Watkins "The Gladiators" *Peter Watkins Films*.
[37] "The Gladiators," *The Independent Film Journal* 69.1 (9 Dec 1971): 12.
[38] "Peter Watkins' Lament for Making 'Serious' Films for Scared Showmen," *Variety* 262.7 (31 Mar 1971): 20.
[39] Watkins "The Gladiators" *Peter Watkins Films*.
[40] "The Bed Sitting Room," *Boxoffice* 96.1 (20 Oct 1969): a11.
[41] Hawk, "Berlin Fest Reviews - 'The Bed Sitting Room'," *Variety* 255.9 (16 Jul 1969): 6.

turns the possibility of nuclear destruction no more meaningful—or terrifying—than a well-aimed custard pie."[42] The notion that *The Bed Sitting Room* was neither cohesive nor stylistically in line with previous Lester films runs through many reviews. In *Films in London*, David Castell assesses the movie as an adaptation:

> What survives the translation from the stage to a rather frantic and mannered film is as good a collection of surrealist jokes and sight gags as we have seen for a while, but structurally the piece is diminished. Lester is right to worry about our apathy, kind to nudge us in this genteel and amusing manner, perceptive to have his Brave New World acting out all the follies of the old one, but the film doesn't add up to much.[43]

In the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Russell Campbell describes *The Bed Sitting Room* as amusing but failed surrealism, with "scarcely a trace of story-line," a film that "falls almost completely flat" despite "so many elements [that] operate brilliantly towards constructing a devastating critique of 'civilised' society and its pathetic values."[44] *The Bed Sitting Room*, a film about craziness and the replacement of stability with chaos, gets criticized for itself being too lunatic and inconsistent!

2. War and Art Cinema: Britain and Beyond

So far, this project has explored the remarkable diversity of modes of war representation in British cinema and television, both during the Second World War and after. Especially in the case studies I have provided, I have stressed the degree to which one wider way in which war gets projected during these decades is not so much through popular genre films by journeymen directors as by pop-art hybrid films made by culturally recognized "auteur" directors. However,

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[42] Vincent Canby, "Lester's Surrealistic Farce," *New York Times* 29 Sep 1969: 53.
[43] David Castell, "The Bed Sitting Room," *Films in London* 2.21 (22 Mar/4 Apr 1970: 130.
[44] Russell Campbell, "Bed Sitting Room," *Monthly Film Bulletin* XXXVII.432-443 (1970): 67-68.

it should be noted that this is not just a British phenomenon. The culture of film criticism and appreciation in Anglo-French publications, from *Cahiers du Cinema* to *Movie*, promoted these ideals. In the post-war period, art cinema gains a pride-of-place in Western markets, and the self-motivated and uncompromising film director earns an unprecedented kind of public admiration.[45]

Thus, Euro-American directors of the 1960s and 1970s almost inevitably turn to the legacies of 19th and 20th century wars for inspiration for their narrative designs. Whether they be the nation-building intrigues in Luchino Visconti's *The Leopard* (1963), or the capitalist-opportunist vision of the American forces during Second World War in Mike Nichol's *Catch-22*, or the retrospective and problematic eroticization of Nazism in Liliana Cavnini's *The Night Porter* (1974), notable filmmakers were assessing military culture, wartime life, and the traumatic memory of conflict from all angles. In Germany, Hans-Jurgen Syberberg's *Hitler: A Film from Germany* (1977, a film and television event of monumental ambition co-produced by the BBC) assessed the culpability and mania that had beset this Central European power of the last century. In France, Marcel Ophuls' *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1969) unflinchingly investigated collaboration with Germans in wartime France, with specific emphasis on longstanding national tendencies towards anti-Semitism. While the critical fashions of the 1960s and 1970s would usually place discussions of these films into conversation with previous works by the same director (the desire being the demonstration of artistic consistency and growth of the artist-director), they now read clear as a wider Euro-American impulse that contests the internal logic of the popular war film genre (the heroic action films, like *The Green Berets* [1967, John Wayne et. al], that maintained a residual insistence on outmoded values). Part of the goal of this

[45] See, for instance, the discourse on directors in Joseph Gelmis, *The Film Director as Superstar* (New York: Doubleday, 1970).

dissertation has been to put films of almost irreconcilable difference next to one another to see how they relate to larger themes and debates.

An example of the type of filmmaker who is at once part of a wider Euro-American sensibility while still being interested in the cultural specificity of Britain is Ken Russell, a director not known for war films—precisely because nothing that he did in his fifty-year career could easily be labeled as such—but whose work is suffused with war images and his own wartime experiences.[46] Russell makes everything from found-footage documentaries that visualize war (the "Mars" sequence *Ken Russell's View of the Planets* [1983, London Weekend Television], which uses footage from Nazi actuality films to liken their militarism to Holst's programmatic music) to a courtroom drama about a high profile military trial (*Prisoner of Honor* [1991, HBO] about the Dreyfus Affair). His cold war spy thriller *Billion Dollar Brain* (1967) borrows images from *Triumph of the Will* in order to make thematic points about fascism, while his film of power struggles and presumed possession *The Devils* (1971) is as much a film about military occupation and marshal law enacted by the state as it is a horror movie. That said, he most frequently represents The First and Second World Wars from a British perspective. In adaptations of D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920, adapted 1969) and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928, adapted 1993), he explores the commemoration of the Great War and visualizes (throughout) the battered and traumatized bodies of the war-wounded, usually as a means of making story-specific points about compromised or challenged masculinity. In films like *Tommy* (1975) and *A British Picture* (1989, ITV), he uses his own memories and experiences as a young man living in wartime Britain to isolate and accentuate aspects of life during this peculiar period. In Russell's hands, representative wartime experiences in Britain include scantily clad chorus

[46] This is adapted from my talk "Ken Russell's Wartime Imagery," Imagining the Past: Ken Russell, Biography, and the Making of History, Brussels, BE, 20 Mar 2014.

girls running through the ruins of a bombed city wearing gas masks, or the director screening 8mm silent films (mainly those of Fritz Lang) while the Luftwaffe strikes from above.

In Ken Russell (and Joseph Losey, Richard Lester, Tony Richardson, Peter Watkins, and in a slightly earlier moment, Humphrey Jennings and Alberto Cavalcanti), British cinema achieves a balancing act: a group of filmmakers who make movies about the legacies of war and militarism in Britain, yet do so from undeniably transnational places as informed by wider trends in world cinema and aesthetics and the internal logic of the war film genre or popularly circulating perceptions about war and the cultural moment.

3. Immediate Legacy: War Representation and Thatcher

Graham Dawson has written that the media coverage and subsequent popular discourse surrounding the Falklands-Malvinas War of 1982 represented "the British nation [...] as strong, freedom-loving and prepared (as in the 1940s) to go to war in defence of democratic principles."[47] In line with Margaret Thatcher's ideological program of reasserting British military and financial power on the world stage, this narrative about war's relationship to nation reasserted the dominant rhetoric of war representation after a period (as I have shown) of dissent and unruliness. Everywhere in Britain in the early 1980s, from newspapers to videogames, was what Dawson calls "the latent sources of triumphalist psychic energy," the long-dominant narrative of the nation at war made even more (apparently) essential.[48]

Curiously, though, the resurgent patriotism of the early Thatcher years also coincides with one of the British film industry's periodic cycles of decline, even as official national rhetoric announced renewal and rebirth. John Hill demonstrates that many of the older

[47] Dawson 2.
[48] *Ibid.* 283.

conglomerates were closing or failing during these years, one consequence of which was a move toward independent productions, many of which were backed by TV and lottery money.[49] During this shift, certain types of films (including large-scale war movies) disappear from screens, while others (historical costume dramas, contemporary realist social problem films) are ascendant.[50]

Much of the "work" of conventional war movies—the sense of masculine adventure, the focus on Britain's past, the discourses of nationalism and the burden of rule—remains alive in "heritage" films, a heterogeneous grouping that contains quality literary adaptations (*A Room With a View* [1984, Merchant-Ivory]), lavish biopics (*Gandhi* [1982, Richard Attenborough]), historical dramas, Shakespeare adaptations, and costume dramas of all sorts.[51] The recasting of the British (mainly English) past as "heritage" is one way in which filmmakers continued to survey the legacy of war and militarism on British culture in the 1980s and early 1990s. For instance, *The Remains of the Day* (1993, Merchant-Ivory) and *Richard III* (1995, Richard Loncraine) explore Britain's relationship to fascism, Nazism and the far Right, in the imagined historical past, in the process suggesting (like *It Happened Here*) the probable nightmare of a fascist Britain. Yet, films that interrogate "heritage" constructions of the British past need not themselves be complicit in the project of the revival of a wished-for golden age.

That said, war, the military and even the fantastic trends dear to so many films and filmmakers of the mid-1950s to mid-1970s remain alive, if barely, scattered across many different types of British films. There are serious films on how wars affect contemporary life. One urgent subject is the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland, a conflict that resulted in numerous

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[49] John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s: Issues and Themes* (New York: Oxford UP 1999), 39-49.
[50] Nick James, "British Cinema's US Surrender—A View from 2001," *The British Cinema Book*, 25.
[51] For a more comprehensive selection of examples, see Sheldon Hall, "The Wrong Sort of Cinema: Refashioning the Heritage Film Debate," *The British Cinema Book*, 47-48.

films about this very different kind of war. In *Angel* (1982, Neil Jordan) and *Cal* (1984, Pat O'Connor), the major players of the conflict—IRA guerrilla fighters, proto-militaristic Loyalist brigades, and the occupying British army—all contribute to individualized stories for which a protracted war is a natural fact. Another tendency is to assess Britain's new place in the world based on the legacy of World War II. This is expertly done in *The Ploughman's Lunch* (1983, Richard Eyre, from a script by Ian McEwan) in which main character James (Jonathan Pryce) investigates the legacy of the Suez Crisis, in the process shining light on the conditions that allowed for the rise of Thatcher.

Of course, there are plenty of films set during the war period, though most of these use the war as a backdrop. *Another Time, Another Place* (1983, Michael Radford) concerns the love affair between a Scots woman (Phyllis Logan) and an Italian prisoner of war (Giovanni Mauriello) interned near her house. *Jane and the Lost City* (1987, Terry Marcel), based on the popular Jane comic strip published throughout the war by the *Daily Mirror*, is a low-brow erotic adventure film in which the eponymous Jane ventures after treasure in Africa whilst thwarting Nazi agents.[52]

As with the previous decades, so much of what was said about war and the military came from genre-hybrid productions that would be hard to situate entirely in the war film genre as usually understood. *Death Ship* (1980, Alvin Rakoff), set aboard a supernaturally preserved Nazi torture ship, and *The Keep* (1983, Michael Mann), a Wales-lensed occult film in which Nazis disturb a dark secret in a ruined Romanian castle, are among the first British productions to situate the Second World War in the context of the horror film. Eighties British responses to the continued threat of nuclear war are similarly hybrid, with *Threads* (1984, Mick Jackson, BBC), a

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[52] David Graves, "Death of 'Jane', the Model Who Helped Win the War," *Telegraph* 8 Dec 2000, accessed 8 Feb 2015, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1377473/Death-of-Jane-the-model-who-helped-win-war.html.

realist-inflected speculative drama about the probable course of World War III and *When the Wind Blows* (1986, Jimmy Murakami), a stop-motion animated film about one elderly couple's response to a nuclear attack representing similar themes but almost opposite approaches. *Threads*, for instance, has a large sweep and jumps locations, while *When the Wind Blows* focuses almost exclusively on how its elderly Sussex residents respond to seemingly far-away news about impending doom. Finally, it comes as no surprise the that the best remembered, most iconic sequence about war from British television in the 1980s comes from the last episode of the comic *Blackadder Goes Forth* (1989, Channel 4), in which the usually quite ridiculous Edmund Blackadder (Rowan Atkinson) and his crew go "over the top," cynical but loveable jesters sacrificed at the altar of historical contingency.[53] The moment works because of a radical shift in tone. While waiting to charge, the men are jokey, but the second they emerge from the trench, the charge and subsequent slaughter is presented in slow motion. Using fades and superimpositions, the battlefield goes from an exploding, foggy graveyard, to eerie stillness, becoming (with the suggested passage of time) a verdant field that finally gives way to a blanket of poppies.

3. Varieties of War Representation in Contemporary British Cinema and Television

As in the 1980s and 1990s, the British film industry has made almost no conventional war films since the new millennium. This is not to say that British militarism has been absent from the screen, but rather to suggest that when such productions appear, they are usually funded

[53] Brandon Nowalk et. al., "25 Years Later, Blackadder's Finale is Still Devastating," *AV Club* (20 Feb 2014), accessed 8 Feb 2015, http://www.avclub.com/article/25-years-later-blackadders-finale-is-still-devasta-
201271

by the U.S. film industry and often have non-British directors. A good example of this is *War Horse* (2011, Steven Spielberg), a movie (based on the novel and subsequent stage play by Michael Morpurgo) about the British experience of World War I that was shot in England but funded and distributed by Dreamworks. Of course, in the decades since Thatcher, international co-production agreements and funding through presales and television/video rights have both signaled the ways in which the British film industry is increasingly entwined in the fortunes of other film industries. The extraordinary success of BBC content licensed for play in the United States (where it is released through Warner Brothers, PBS, HBO and other outlets) is a testament to this.

Two HBO/BBC productions illustrate a common type of British war story released in recent years. *The Gathering Storm* (2002, Richard Loncraine), a biopic of Winston Churchill that takes him from a low ebb of influence in the mid-1930s to his installation as First Lord of the Admiralty at the beginning of the Second World War, is a triumphalist narrative in which Churchill stands up to the Baldwin government and its unwillingness to take the rise of Nazi Germany seriously. The film is about what war preparation looks like from the top down. Winston (Albert Finney), full of idiosyncrasies and doubts about his place in the world, takes it upon himself to warn the nation about where the world is going. The war narrative is set next to a thread where Winston deals with difficulties in his family life, especially with his increasingly distant and independent wife Clementine (Vanessa Redgrave). By the end, the great man has overcome his problems and is poised to lead the nation to war. More recently, the mini-series adaptation of Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* (2012, Susanna White) uses war as a kind of mood and distancing factor in the tumultuous love life of Christopher (Benedict Cumberbatch) and Sylvia (Rebecca Hall) Tietjens, unhappily married aristocrats who look elsewhere for

fulfillment. Christopher serves in the trenches of World War I, but the War and Tietjens' military career are mainly used thematic resonance.

The last fifteen years has seen an explosion of war-related films and television shows that are utterly unconcerned with depicting war in terms of squad-based, frontline combat, and are instead interested in exploring under-represented, strange, or seemingly unknown aspects of wartime experience. *Chickens* (2013, Sky One), a World War I era single camera sitcom edited with a tempo reminiscent of other contemporary comedies, is set in the fictional village of Rittle-on-Sea, and follows the struggles of three men who did not go off to war. In a genius inversion of cliches, this series looks at how the men (who are conscientious objectors, medically unfit, or just plain opportunist) get on in a small town where they are actively hated by most of the population. The show looks at how war and militarism construct masculinity by showing deviance and non-participation. *Chickens* is one of few contemporary attempts at challenging the widespread war orthodoxies in a matter conversant with the most daring satires of the 1960s.

The Second World War, the most represented conflict in British cinema and television, is now being mined for aspects of wartime experience or contributions to the war effort that once seemed peripheral or were protected by the Official Secrets Act. The most famous example of this is *The Imitation Game* (2014, Morten Tyldum), a biopic about Alan Turing that focuses on his war work at Bletchley Park, where he and fellow cryptographers pioneered automated systems whose programmability and automation would eventually influence the Turing Machine and the first digital computers. The ability to make film and television programs about the work of Bletchley Park was only possible after the mid-1970s, once associated documents and personnel became declassified.[54] Bletchley Park currently looms large in the British imaginary,

[54] Katy Lewis, "Bletchley Park: No Longer the World's Best Kept Secret," *BBC News* (17 June 2014), accessed 9 Feb 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-27808962.

prompting everything from memoirs about life at the park to *The Bletchley Park Circle* (2011-, ITV), in which a group of women who practiced cryptography during the war joining forces several years later to solve mysteries using the tools and theories they perfected as government employees.[55] World War II has increasingly become the world-historical backdrop for crime shows like *Foyle's War* (2002-2015, ITV) in which a detective fights back against things war profiteering, the black market, and vice. Even the "land girl," the itinerant agricultural laborer in the Women's Land Army who did heavy farm labor while men were at war, have a film (*The Land Girls*, 1998, David Leland) and a television series (*Land Girls*, 2009, BBC).

As much as serious, dramatic costume drama with realist aspirations remains the dominant modality for telling war stories, two genre-hybrid tendencies provide alternative paradigms. As *Chickens* suggests, comedy and war remain productive bedfellows. Short form comedy shows like *That Mitchell and Webb Look* (2006-2010, BBC2) frequently milk the Second World War for material. In one memorable *TMaWL* sketch, two SS officers discuss the *totenkopf* (the mini skull and crossbones badge) on their hats, prompting some grim self-awareness: "are we the baddies?" In another sketch Admiral Karl Doenitz (David Mitchell) is alerted of Adolf Hitler's suicide and is told that he has been installed as the new Fuhrer. After a celebratory dance, the enthusiastic spitballing of new policies, and a call to his wife, Doenitz realizes that they "really just need someone to say that we've surrendered." The humor comes from how ardently Doenitz tries to make the best of what is clearly a terrible, hopeless situation. Probably the most contemporary in message and sense of humor of current British films about war is *Four Lions* (2010, Chris Morris), a comedy in which four young Muslim men from Sheffield begin a misguided attempt at becoming suicide bombers. Given that war is an

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[55] See, for instance, Sinclair McKay, *The Secret Lives of Codebreakers: The Men and Women Who Cracked the Enigma Code at Bletchley Park* (New York: Plume, 2012).

increasingly decentralized activity, and that terrorism and asymmetrical conflict has displaced conventional warfare (especially since the 9/11 attacks in the U.S. and the July 2005 bombings in London), *Four Lions* provides a taste of what a cinema concerned with war but not obsessed with the historical past might look like.

Horror and occult war stories have become markedly more prevalent in recent years. *Deathwatch* (2002, Michael J. Bassett) is somewhat unique in that it is set in 1917, during World War I. Here, a squad of British soldiers wanders, lost in German trenches, and slowly succumbs to environmentally-motivated madness. Most of the hybrid horror-war films made in recent years look at how the supernatural (some of which is rooted in the past) comes into conflict with the contemporary, all-volunteer British Army and the personality types that army attracts. *Dog Soldiers* (2002, Neil Marshall) has a group of army men, out on maneuvers in Scotland, encounter a sinister pack of werewolves. In *28 Days Later* (2002, Danny Boyle), survivors of a zombie epidemic become prisoners of the corrupt, megalomaniacal Major West (Christopher Eccleston), who uses his and his men's military training to lord over a fortress. *28 Weeks Later* (2007, Juan Carlos Fresnadillo) imagines a more advanced version of this zombie plague, and begins with the notion that London is once again uninhabitable because of the protection and marshal law offered by garrisoned members of the U.S. Army (in this fantasia on U.S.-U.K. relations, America's might seems to set England right, but the undead hordes soon cause untold disorder and disrupt the special relationship). *Outpost* (2007, Steve Barker) and its sequels are noteworthy for illustrating the ways in which the historical past enacts revenge on the present (even if they dwell as much on action and gore as the motivating factors behind their horror conceits). In *Outpost*, a mercenary group lead by DC (Ray Stevenson) disturbs a World War II

era bunker, which prompts the undead Nazi inhabitants—it was once a lab for occult experiments—to rise up and attack the men.

In general, war is still everywhere in British cinema and television, and even as much as productions now routinely dwell on more obscure aspects of war life and experience, they still fall back on dominant modes of presentation (historical costume drama strung between melodrama and conventionalized realism). That said, alternatives continue to exist, ensuring that the landscape of war representation remains as fraught as ever.

4. Parting Shots

As this project has shown, war representation in Britain is so much more than the celebratory, triumphalist, and nationalistic tradition with which it is most readily associated. The "pleasure culture of war" is only part of the story, a large body of texts across media whose commercial centrality obscures the unique achievements of other, differently positioned artworks. I have provided an exhaustive set of examples that demonstrate how war stories on film and television are often more than a reductive set of dominant genre tendencies. This conclusion shows that, although representative films from various emergent traditions failed or were not overtly influential, several of them have had at least some kind of resonance on film and television production in recent decades. Despite the current crop of film and television works that represent war in challenging and unconventional ways, it is also my contention that there was something about the British film industry, the status of auteur directors in film and popular culture, and the urgency of war representation as related to contemporary concerns (the Cold War writ large) that occurred at the time period I have considered that cannot be replicated today.

In other words, even in commercial failure and obscurity, texts as diverse as *Figures in a Landscape* and *The Gladiators* provide some productive constellation of a director's personal voice, responses to technological and social changes in warfare, and meta-commentary on the status of war as a genre for filmmaking that is, complexly and irreducibly, of a specific historical moment. That such powerful, strange, and novel comments could be made on film in the context of an increasingly unstable movie industry, by people speaking on behalf of a nation understood to be in terminal decline, suggests that British cinema, especially in the late 1960s and early 1970s, was especially sensitive to notions of experimentation and crisis, even at the expense of proven genre formulae. That innovative means of talking about and representing war should find a home in a type of film poised between mainstream appeal and art cinema (one that is often strangely stuck between conventional definitions of "realism" and "fantasy") tells volumes about the complex, competing discourses on war and military matters during this period. Imagined as a broad project about cultures of war in British history, and discourses of war representation in British cinema and television, this study clues us in to how the Nation imagines its martial past in the present (as well as its present in the past).

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