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**Rupture and Rapture:
French Theory in Britain,
1956 – 1986**

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2021

Declaration of Authorship

I, Colm McAuliffe, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Abstract

This thesis considers the trajectory of French theory across a number of sites of reception in Britain in the late twentieth century. It focuses upon para-academic spaces: the *New Left Review*, the BFI Education Department, *Screen* journal, the Institute of Contemporary Arts, and the rhetorical devices employed by the pop group Scritti Politti. In doing so, this research offers an original account of French theory's journey in contemporary British history.

This thesis is the first to investigate the reception of French theory in Britain through the method of institutional histories, archival research and contemporary interviews. It is also unique in its emphasis on intellectual spaces separate from the academy. The research presented in this thesis demonstrates the intoxicating, performative, and often antagonistic nature of the encounter between these travelling theories and these intellectual scenes in Britain. I maintain that French theory has a uniquely British history, arguing against existing accounts of this phenomenon, each of which places it as a primarily American invention. My thesis argues that French theory's journey in Britain is indebted to the work of intellectuals working across a range cultural institutions and media, as the legitimacy necessary for these theories to take hold was denied by more traditional means of reception and diffusion.

The introduction contextualises French theory's journey in Britain, along with my own engagement with these theories. The first chapter examines the initial appearance of French theoretical texts in the *New Left Review*, demonstrating how the journal positioned itself *contra* extant forms of socialist humanism. The second chapter traces the reception of French theory through the pioneering work undertaken at the BFI Education Department, specifically highlighting the key roles played by Paddy Whannel and Peter Wollen in allowing the institution to become fertile terrain for the import of these theories. The third chapter considers *Screen* journal, an offshoot of the BFI Education Department, as a site where French theory served as the very core for its own form of theoretical practice. The fourth chapter examines the reception of French theory in a curatorial context through the work of the Institute of Contemporary Arts and its attempt to link the presentation of talks by French theorists with Britain's concurrent accession to the Common Market. The final chapter examines the work of the pop group Scritti Politti, particularly focusing upon the rhetorical devices employed by frontman Green Gartside, and his use of French theory in a strikingly performative manner.

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Introduction



Prophets in grass-skirts. The French cartoonist Maurice Henry's view of four leading Structuralists (l. to r.), Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes.

Definitions

April 01, 1984: the arts section of *The Observer* newspaper features a short article with a curious headline: “Terminal Sex”.¹ Written by the British academic and literary critic Malcolm Bradbury, the piece details the life and work of one Henri Mensonge, described as a leading figure in “structuralism”, a movement which has had “an international impact in fields as various as history, linguistics, anthropology, psycho-analysis, literary criticism and the *nouvelle cuisine*”. While some of structuralism’s leading figures such as “[Roland] Barthes and [Claude] Lévi-Strauss, [Jacques] Lacan and [Jacques] Derrida have become well-known, even if not well read”, Henri Mensonge has had *precisely no impact whatsoever*. This is a strange occurrence, according to Bradbury, as Mensonge “could fairly be called the structuralist’s structuralist”. But why is Bradbury now bringing Mensonge to our attention? The answer lies in a publication: it appears that Mensonge wrote a thirty-five page book, in either 1965 or 1966, entitled *La fornication acte culturel*, which happened to be about sex but

¹ Malcolm Bradbury, “Terminal Sex”, *The Observer*, London 01 April 1984, p. 23.

only in the most incidental sense. “Lévi-Strauss has interpreted once for all the exchange significance of the cooking pot”, quotes Bradbury quoting Mensonge, “why then, should I not do the same for the fornicatory act?”, further describing his task as a “deconstruction of...sex as sex”. And this work is important, Bradbury insists, because he demonstrates sex as the “falsehood of all exchange”: in deconstructing the notion of sex, he proves that the process is merely an interaction “of nothing with nothing”. We can quickly surmise from the article that the *presence of absence* is a recurring theme: Mensonge himself is absent from the roll-call of structuralists, his work is absent from having any significant effect largely because it is completely unobtainable, and even Mensonge himself has absented himself from intellectual life. Mensonge, we are led to believe, has deconstructed himself and his work into oblivion.

Of course, Mensonge never existed – check the date of the article’s original publication. But the question remains: why would a highly successful British academic, literary critic and novelist decide to play an April Fool’s prank on an imaginary French critic and, by proxy, the largely Francophone fields of structuralism, post-structuralism and deconstruction? There is an overall sense here that the reader is invited to feel superior to the silly French and their solemn, pretentious and circumlocutory ways. French theorists and their structuralist methods are a mere fad, steeped in unnecessary Gallic obscurity. Mensonge, the name itself translating from French as “lie”, is a composite of a number of Francophone intellectuals associated with structuralism: we are told he was born in Bulgaria and worked with Barthes (as did Julia Kristeva); he wrote for the avant-garde journal *Tel Quel* (as did Barthes, Derrida, Michel Foucault, Kristeva and many more) and taught at the Université Paris VIII (as did Foucault).²

² For a comprehensive account of theory in France, see Patrick Ffrench’s *The Time of Theory: History of Tel Quel, 1960-83* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

The year of publication is also significant: 1965 or 1966 places Mensonge directly before both the Johns Hopkins international symposium on “The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man”, where a form of “post-structuralism” was demonstrated through Derrida’s paper on “Structure, Sign and Play”, and Derrida’s own *annus mirabilis* of 1967 in which he published *La Voix et le Phénomène*, *L’Écriture et la Différence* and *De la Grammatologie*—both events radically re-fashioning contemporary structuralist thought, and to which we will shortly return.³ But, for now, Bradbury’s re-discovery of Mensonge places the latter in a liminal state between competing forms of structuralism. If Mensonge was using post-structuralist methods *before* Derrida’s grand interventions, we therefore need to question the significance of Derrida’s work. But Bradbury’s references to deconstruction, another term commonly associated with Derrida, are uniformly negative: in the world of Henri Mensonge, it is a pointless task where nothing leads to nothing. Even though Mensonge is a composite of a very specific type of French intellectual, who operates at the frontier of structuralism and post-structuralism, he is one whose (alleged) reception in Britain is not just meaningless but worthy of ridicule and haughty dismissal.

In creating the character of Mensonge, Bradbury has demonstrated some of the facets of French theory in Britain: rooted in structuralist thought, provocative, antagonistic, but also somewhat slippery and elusive. Using Mensonge as a model, we can safely say that French theory in Britain comprises an assembly of Francophone philosophers and writers working within the *sciences humaines*, using methods deployed from the fields of Marxism and structuralism. But, then, who exactly features in this line-up? This is never quite fixed: Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva and

³ Jacques Derrida, *La Voix et le phénomène*, (Paris, P.U.F., Collection, 1967); *L’Écriture et la différence*, (Paris, Seuil, 1967); (*De la grammatologie*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit 1967).

Jacques Lacan were the French theorists alluded to in the Mensonge ruse but we could also add Louis Althusser, Jean Baudrillard, Hélène Cixous, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari and Jean-François Lyotard to this list. This uncertainty hints at a charge often levelled at this definition of French theory: it is philosophically naïve, an unsophisticated grouping of Francophone theorists many of whom have little or nothing in common with one another.⁴ But, as Edward Baring points out in his study of the young Derrida, what “seems philosophically unsophisticated can seem historically plausible”.⁵ This is certainly true if one considers the import of these works into British intellectual and cultural networks. These French theorists were not only largely part of the same community and generation, they were also translated into English around the same period from the late 1960s through the mid 1980s. This allows for us to consider these theorists in a single grouping; indeed, the fact that the line-up of French theorists operating within French theory was never fixed is concomitant with Pierre Bourdieu’s feeling that ultimately, it is the use of “[w]ords, names of schools or groups, proper names” that makes “things into something: distinctive signs, they produce existence in a universe where to exist is to be different, ‘to make oneself a name’, a proper name or a name in common (that of a group)”.⁶

While the theories emerged in France against a backdrop of the enormous success of the existentialist movement, described by Baring as “a philosophical movement unrivalled in its ability to appeal to young students...which initiated a ‘golden era’ in French intellectual history”,⁷ what was the prevailing nature of critical consciousness in Britain which allowed

⁴ This is the charge levelled by Francois Cusset in *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), Jean-Philippe Mathy in “The Resistance to French Theory in the United States”, *French Historical Studies*, Autumn 1995, Vol .19, No. 2, pp. 331-347 and Sylvère Lotringer and Sande Cohen in *French Theory in America* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁵ Edward Baring, *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy 1945 – 1968*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 1-2.

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), p. 157.

⁷ Baring, *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy, 1945-1968*, p. 2.

the French theoretical influence to manifest itself in the 1960s? For many, this was a landscape of intellectual and theoretical poverty. The writer Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, a very early proponent of French theory in Britain and important for this study, reflected that “for young socialist intellectuals leaving university in the mid-1960s, the intellectual foundations of the best available doctrine – i.e. Marxism – were not after all as sound as they were cracked up to be...and they had better things to do with their time than sell the *Daily Worker* on the street corner on Saturday mornings”.⁸ Nowell-Smith’s pithy comment directs us towards an important point: French theory drew much of its energy from a performative quality, in comparison to the drab, monochrome vision of the socialist intellectual. French theory was catalysed through the aesthetic and political values associated with the “new”, contrasting with a form of British Marxist historian which had emerged in the 1930s, a development which occurred, according to Eric Hobsbawm, due to

the fact that on the arts side of British sixth forms, literature took the space left vacant by the absence of philosophy. British Marxist historians began, more often than not, as young intellectuals who moved to historical analysis from, or with a passion for literature: Christopher Hill, Victor Kiernan, Leslie Mortin, E.P Thompson, Raymond Williams and indeed myself.⁹

This development allowed for the cultivation of, as Sina Talachian describes, the “English Marxist historian’s scholarly persona”.¹⁰

⁸ Email interview, 14 August 2018.

⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Inventing Times: A Twentieth Century Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), pp. 97-8.

¹⁰ Sina Talachian, “The emergence of the English Marxist Historian’s scholarly persona: The English Revolution Debate of 1940-1941” in Herman Paul (ed.), *How to be a historian: Scholarly personae in historical studies, 1800-2000*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), pp. 146-163.

These British Marxist historians, particularly Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson, are hugely influential figures within the intellectual era covered by this study. While Thompson remained openly hostile to French theory throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Raymond Williams's work, in some respects, flows both into and against the early tides of French theory in Britain. Writing in *Culture and Society* (1958),¹¹ Williams questions how Marxism understands the autonomy of art which brings into view the idea of individual freedom and subjectivity: "either the arts are passively dependent on social reality, a proposition which I take to be that of mechanical materialism or a vulgar misinterpretation of Marx. Or the arts, as the creators of consciousness, determine social reality, the proposition which the Romantic poets sometimes advanced".¹² This represents an impasse: a truly socialist culture will arise from the emancipation of the working class but only if social existence determines consciousness. But if socialist culture has to be explicitly manufactured and tended, consciousness determines existence. And it is at this point with which Williams renounces his engagement with this form of thinking, writing as "one who is not a Marxist".¹³ Yet this argument rests at precisely the same point at which the problems of the human subject and relative autonomy are re-engineered by Louis Althusser's earliest essays in France in the 1960s, and to which we will return in the first chapter.

But it is important to note that the French theorists did not determine their reception in Britain unlike, say, Sartre and de Beauvoir or even Derrida in the USA. As we will see, much of the work of these theorists, Althusser and Lacan in particular, was taken up and deployed in fields far from their original concerns. Althusser was no film theorist nor was Lacan a feminist yet the loosening of their work through the process of travel and translation allowed

¹¹ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958).

¹² Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 266.

¹³ Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 269.

their re-appropriation within these burgeoning fields of interest. Yet a danger exists within this movement, too: the lifting of theoretical work from one national context into a different national context raises questions around “fit” or “lack of fit” and further to charges of elitism, particularly if a theory or theorist is presented as “important” without arguing the case for inclusion other than by sheer assertion or unproven assumption. This work presents a negative side to French theory where it is presented as monolithic, difficult to access, and asks the reader to make a choice: unchallenged acceptance or complete rejection. Thus the antagonism generated by these theories is not just directed against tradition; it can also move in the other direction, a challenge towards other intellectuals, used as a form of intellectual positioning, a term to which we will return, to position both oneself and fellow intellectuals in the field.

While French theory developed a reputation for provocation, this study also aims to demonstrate how these transported theories generated a form of *intoxication* amongst its readers and agents in Britain. Indeed, it is arguable that the target of Malcolm Bradbury’s burlesque whimsy is not just the French theorists but also an intellectual audience in Britain who associated themselves with these new theories from France. At the time of Bradbury’s writing in 1984, many of the key figures we associate with structuralism and post-structuralism had recently died: between 1980 and 1984, Barthes, Lacan and Foucault all passed away. Yet their impact in Britain was stronger than ever. The pop group Scritti Politti achieved minor chart success with a song entitled “Jacques Derrida” in 1981¹⁴ – can you imagine, say, a French pop group having a hit with a song entitled “Terry Eagleton”?¹⁵ – while that same year the “Cambridge Structuralist” Colin MacCabe had made front-page

¹⁴ Scritti Politti, “Asylums In Jerusalem/Jacques Derrida”, Rough Trade Records, 1982.

¹⁵ Nevertheless, some aspects of Anglophone culture are surprisingly popular in France e.g. the comedies of Benny Hill, and some very English novelists such as Jonathan Coe and Julian Barnes.

news having been denied tenure at that venerable institution for, allegedly, incorporating ideas purloined from the work of Lacan and Derrida in his teaching.¹⁶ In 1983, the British film director Ken McMullen made a film entitled *Ghost Dance* which not only deployed Derrida's work on ghosts as a narrative strategy but *starred* Derrida as well.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London was inviting many of these French theorists to speak at the venue, an initiative which proved so popular with the public that a series of important publications entitled *ICA Documents* was subsequently produced to satiate the need of a "burgeoning public" who "cannot be fitted into available space". The first of these events, held in late 1983, was on the topic of "Desire" and featured Julia Kristeva in conversation with Rosalind Coward, discussing her work but also, as Coward says, "[how] we in England have been very attracted to French thought [and how] for left-wing intellectuals, our 'Other' has been France". This was followed by a larger season of talks and conferences entitled *Crossing the Channel* during November and December 1984, published as *Ideas From France: The Legacy of French Theory*¹⁸— bringing the term French theory into the cultural consciousness of Britain -- while Derrida himself appeared at the venue in conversation with Geoffrey Bennington in November 1985. During the same period, a non-academic music journal in Oxford called *Monitor*, spearheaded by Paul Oldfield and Simon Reynolds, was proposing entirely new possibilities for writing about pop music, filtered through the theories of Michel Foucault, an endeavour so successful that Oldfield and Reynolds, two of the journal's writers, were snapped up by *Melody Maker*, one of Britain's most popular music publications, and given free rein to develop their French theory-infused

¹⁶ See Mervyn Jones, "The Oxbridge Malaise", *the Guardian*, London 14 February 1981, p. 9.

¹⁷ One is also reminded of Roland Barthes's only acting role, a brief cameo as William Makepeace Thackeray in André Téchiné's *Les sœurs Brontë* (1979).

¹⁸ *Ideas From France: The Legacy of French Theory*, ed. Lisa Appiagnensi, (London: Free Association Books, 1989).

critiques of contemporary popular music.¹⁹ The fact is that throughout British culture, from literary criticism to film, from popular music to curation, these French intellectuals achieved a level of influence and notoriety in Britain, which did not correspond to their reception in France. Their names and concepts became reference points for a form of “otherness”, where problems are posed, alternative values explored and different intellectual strategies are performed. The usage of these French theories allowed British intellectuals and artists to re-imagine existing concepts of “Englishness” or “Britishness”, providing them with a way of both thinking about their own social world and confronting it.

These events and initiatives demonstrate some of the excitement, fashion and sheer intoxication of French theory in Britain during the 1980s. My own engagement with these theories is a little bit later, during the 1990s, but emerges from reading dated copies of *Melody Maker* bequeathed to me by older neighbours and cousins. My reading was undertaken in a town in Co. Cork which, at the time, felt like light years away from the cultural epicentre of London. While Ireland had its own healthy music and music writing infrastructure, it was quite different to what was going on in London and this created a double lag between my own experience and what I was reading about: it was often difficult for me to track down the actual music I was reading about, which meant the writing adapted a surge which was entirely separate to its reference points which were often steeped in French theory. Furthermore, the material I was reading was approximately ten years out of date. The resulting *décalage* allowed for an intoxicating encounter between reader and text: the middle ground was, therefore, largely occupied by French theory. I was excited by the roll of the name “Derrida”, the cool exotica of “Roland Barthes” and the revolutionary potential of

¹⁹ David Stubbs, also a *Monitor* alumni, also made the move to *Melody Maker* around this time although his writing was less overtly informed by French theory.

terms like “deconstruction” and “jouissance”. This distanced me from my own life and transported me into, again, a double existence: a London cultural life with easy access to music, film and literature but also a more obscure French existence, a rich intellectual world full of playful ideas and productive misunderstandings. This frisson between London, on the one hand, and a more nebulous concept of “France”, on the other, is at the heart of this study.

But what of the concept of “France”, and “Frenchness”, within the cultural context of Britain? Or to put it another way: does the movement of French theory in Britain correspond to historical receptions of France and Frenchness in British culture? France *contra* Britain has a much longer history. The historian Tony Judt, in *Past Imperfect* (1992), his account of post-war French intellectuals, expounds upon this long-standing British conception of “France”:

Ever since the eighteenth century, the French intellectual (to employ a convenient anachronism) has displayed certain distinctive traits. This is not the place to discuss in detail the plausibility of traditional and modern accounts of those characteristics; for our purposes it is enough that they were widely believed to exist. Foreign observers, notably the English, took a special delight in mocking the French; Dr. Johnson in 1780 wrote of his contemporaries south of Calais, ‘A Frenchman must be always talking, whether he knows anything of the matter or not; an Englishman is content to say nothing, when he has nothing to say.’ Johnson, like so many eighteenth-century Englishmen, is a hostile witness, but had he known of the opinions of M. Scat-Louis de Muralt, writing a half-century earlier, he might have been comforted in his prejudices. Reflecting, like Johnson, on the differences between the French and the British, Muralt suggests that one

feature in particular distinguished his own countrymen: ‘Style, whatever it expresses, is an important thing in France. Elsewhere, expressions are born of thoughts...here it is the reverse; often it is expressions that give birth to thoughts’.²⁰

In creating the figure of Mensonge, Malcolm Bradbury certainly operates within this long tradition of amusement and irritation described by Judt. Mensonge was little more than a singular joke for a single article, recycled into a talk but was later fleshed out and published as a short book, simply titled *Mensonge: My Strange Quest For Structuralism’s Hidden Hero* (1987),²¹ described by the *Spectator* as “not only the best satire of deconstruction...the best thing Bradbury has written” while *the Times* trilled that Bradbury “has some playful fun at the expense of structuralists, deconstructionists and other modish academics”. It is difficult not to detect a sense of glee in these reviews: these abstruse imports from France *deserve* to be lampooned in such a fashion. This, again, is the familiar charge: the British are so frightfully uncomfortable with theoretical concepts that they can only truly comprehend them through derision and a nervous giggle.

But the specific perceptions of “France”, or ‘Frenchness’, in Britain are in no way fixed concepts. One thing that has remained constant, however, is the idea of France as a site of exile or refuge *from* Britain. France was the site of reception for the more nefarious aspects of British life. In Oscar Wilde’s *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (1892), the “fallen” Mrs Erlynne can flee London via the “Club Train”, an express journey which took passengers from London to Paris in under eight hours.²² And as the availability of faster transport became more

²⁰ Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956*, (New York: NYU Press, 1992), p. 248.

²¹ Malcolm Bradbury, *Mensonge: My Strange Quest for Structuralism’s Hidden Hero*, (London: Harper Collins, 1987).

²² One could also add Wilde’s own fleeing of London for Paris into this category.

accessible during the course of the late nineteenth century, France was afforded even greater importance within literature, as criminals, bigamists and murderers – including those in the Sherlock Holmes mysteries - are apprehended on the boat or on the boat train. Indeed, the train, or the journey, itself becomes part of France, as it is so inextricably linked to the notion of escape to the Continent itself. France, therefore, had cemented its reputation as a site for exiles and refugees from British law and British morality. It was a site of illicitness and deeply un-British. But it had modish associations, too: Joris-Karl Huysman's *À rebours*, translated into English as *Against Nature* in 1883, was read as a bible of *decadence*, hailed by Francophile writer Arthur Symons as a “new and interesting and beautiful disease”²³ before being denounced within a few years, also by Symons, as “an interlude, a half-mock interlude.”²⁴ The French philosopher Henri Bergson was also, briefly, a star within the British intellectual circuit in the early part of the twentieth century. “No further application for tickets can be entertained for the forthcoming lectures at University College by M. Henri Bergson,” announced a half-page notice in *The Times* in October 1911.²⁵ Over two hundred articles were published on Bergson's work in Anglophone journals, newspapers and books between the years 1909 and 1911 and his lectures, as attested by the *Times* notice, were social occasions of great popularity. One of Bergson's early advocates was T.S. Eliot, whose literary journal *The Criterion*, founded in that crucial Modernist year of 1922, actively presented aspects of French intellectual life to its readers through translations, reviews of Francophone publications and a digest of the contents of contemporary French journals.

²³ Arthur Symons, “The Decadent Movement in Literature”, in *Arthur Symons: Selected Writings*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 72.

²⁴ Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, (New York: Haskell House, 1971), p. 7.

²⁵ “University Intelligence”, *The Times*, London 20 October 1911, p. 8.

But the impact of Francophone movements within the art and literature world later in the twentieth century is more debatable.²⁶ The *nouveau roman* novels of the 1950s made minimal impression in Britain, as discussed by Adam Guy in his essential study *The Nouveau Roman and Writing in Britain after Modernism* (2019),²⁷ suggesting that the *nouveau roman* is simply one “among many examples of British literary culture’s entanglements with its global contexts. A list of those other examples would include writers with interests in other currents in French literature and thought – say, with Iris Murdoch and Existentialism or Alexander Trocchi and Situationism”. The writer Iris Murdoch was a very early British adapter of existentialism, publishing *Sartre: Romantic Realist* in 1953, the first English-language publication to deal solely with his work and a year later publishing her debut novel *Under The Net* (1954), a humanist synthesis of Sartrean morality and British class mores.²⁸ And as Stefan Collini points out, the “extraordinary amount of attention” which was fostered upon Sartre during the 1950s “cannot be irrelevant to the reception of [Colin Wilson’s] *The Outsider*”, where Wilson promoted the existential ideals of rejecting one’s upbringing in favour of choosing one’s values for oneself. While Wilson was undeniably British, he wore black roll-neck sweaters and was “alienated”; ergo, he was an existentialist.

Yet it is inadequate simply to study French theory as having some sort of inherent “French” spirit. Nor is it adequate to study French theory as a mere history of ideas and charismatic (mainly) men. Instead, we must investigate the institutional contexts in Britain within which these currents of French thought impacted. In a perceptive article on writing the history of

²⁶ The critic Herbert Read became the chief theoretician of surrealism in 1930s Britain, writing an introduction to the movement to accompany the International Surrealist Exhibition held in London in the summer of 1936. Read was later one of the founders of the Institute of Contemporary Arts [ICA], see Chapter Four for more on the ICA.

²⁷ Adam Guy, *The Nouveau Roman and Writing in Britain after Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 19.

²⁸ Iris Murdoch met Jacques Derrida many years later and thought he talked “tosh”. See Avril Horner & Anne Rowe (eds), *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934–1995* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995).

French theory, Warren Breckman states that French theory is a “hard case” for historians due to “the complexity of its intellectual genealogy, its diverse institutional settings, its role in an international indeed globalizing culture, and the resistance of its major figures to the kinds of techniques whereby historians customarily historicize their subjects”. Yet Breckman closes on a tentatively positive note: “the great age of French Theory is past” but it is the task of twenty-first century historians to “explore this phenomenon in its many historical dimensions”.²⁹

I would argue that the above examples of contact between the French and British intellectual traditions constitutes a far smoother transition than the sociological antagonisms generated by French theory in Britain, as demonstrated by this thesis. As we will see, the theories of structuralism and post-structuralism were received as concepts far more threatening to British traditions and values than say, surrealism or existentialism. This form of circulation is described by Francois Cusset as a “double détente”.³⁰ Surrealism and existentialism and even the *nouveau roman* arrived in Britain in a fully-formed state, as “products of importation, in all the strangeness of their exotic provenance”, and underwent as many “adjustments and adaptations as there were convergences”. Cusset is writing about France and America but the dominance of empiricism and “relative ideological consensus” which arrived through the “extension of the culture of liberalism” provided intellectual life in both America and Britain with a certain “genteel, level-headed and ‘civilised’ patina”.³¹ Thus French theory establishes itself as a creation *ex nihilo* in British intellectual life in that it corresponds to a form of intellectual work grounded in specific theoretical strategies, or a “theoretical practice” in Althusser’s phrase, and a resistance to normativity, a powerful convergence which enabled

²⁹ Warren Breckman, “On Writing the History of French Theory”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol. 71, No. 3 (July 2010), pp. 341-2.

³⁰ Cusset, *French Theory*, p. 26.

³¹ Cusset, *French Theory*, p. 26.

the development of new schools and movements to shatter the political impasses and disciplinary blockages of mid-to-late twentieth century Britain. And it is in this sense, Cusset insists, that the difference “between the Surrealist or existentialist infiltrations of the 1950s and the emergence of French theory” exists: it is a difference which is “above all historical, bound up with the enigmas of an electrified present”.³² The cultural upheavals across the West at the end of the 1960s encouraged the flourishing of radical thought: specifically in Britain, this flourishing occurring largely outside the official academy, within the journals and institutions and merging of disciplines contained within the present study: in short the para-academic spaces of the *New Left Review*, BFI, and ICA during the 1960s and 1970s, along with *Scritti Politti* in the music press during the following decade.

Writing on the 1960s, Fredric Jameson dismisses the idea of locating an organic unity within the “spirit of the age”; instead, such a shift is delineated by a series of temporary “homologies between the breaks”³³ or turning points in different spheres of activities, or, as Lisa Tickner describes, a “a partial but significant transition to new experiences, ways of living and forms of expression...a new atmosphere, both elusive and distinct”.³⁴ In Britain, these shifts were earlier propelled by an economy on the rise after post-war austerity in the 1950s, a decrease in unemployment, an easing of credit restrictions, and the boarding of the first transatlantic flights from London Airport to New York. The Free Cinema movement, initiated by Lindsay Anderson, Karel Reisz, Tony Richardson and Lorenza Mazzetti began to programme sell-out screenings at the British Film Institute’s National Film Theatre while John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*, the press release for which coined the phrase “Angry Young Men”, also opened during 1956. A couple of years later, the education system was expanded through the

³² Cusset, *French Theory*, p. 27.

³³ Fredric Jameson, “Periodizing the 60s”, *Social Text* no 9/10, “The 60s without Apology”, Spring-Summer 1984, eds. Sohnya Sayres, Anders Stephanson, Stanley Aronowitz and Fredric Jameson, pp. 178-209.

³⁴ Lisa Tickner, *London’s New Scene: Art and Culture in the 1960s*, (London: Paul Mellon Centre, 2020), p. 1.

findings of the Robbins Report which recommended a place in higher education for “all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and wish to do so”,³⁵ introducing new universities in Sussex, East Anglia, York, Essex, Kent, Warwick and Lancaster, many of which were considerably more open to the import of theories from France than their more established academic counterparts.

It is curious, however, that there are few, if any, studies of French theory’s circulation in Britain. Antony Easthope’s *British Post-Structuralism Since 1968* (1988) is the sole example of a serious investigation into this particular movement of French theory.³⁶ For Easthope, post-structuralism refers to “the body of French critical writing produced especially in the decade between 1962 and 1972”, and offers a passionate, almost aggressive, defence of these methods against Anglo-empiricist methods, even going as far as to criticise the title of his own book in the introduction: “The name ‘British’ is an embarrassment, since it is the cover under which English imperialism imposed itself upon Ireland, Wales and Scotland”.³⁷ The book is a useful, wide-ranging account of how structuralist and post-structuralist methodologies can be applied across a range of fields from literary theory to musicology and ends with a call for opening up a range of practices – film, television, painting, literature – to be thoroughly impacted by post-structuralism at an institutional level. However, my study differs from Easthope’s in a number of ways: firstly, my study is a cultural history of the circulation and dissemination of French theory in Britain *outside of the academy* whereas Easthope largely situates his work within academia; second, Easthope’s study only goes back to 1974 whereas I offer a history of French theory in Britain which begins during the crucial year of 1956. Easthope’s work works best as a guide to the use of structuralism as each

³⁵ Quoted in Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles*, (London: Abacus, 2005), e-book, p. 1042.

³⁶ Antony Easthope, *British Post-Structuralism Since 1968*, (London: Routledge, 1988).

³⁷ Easthope, *British Post-Structuralism Since 1968*, p. xiv.

chapter neatly plots out the ways in which methodologies from the work of Althusser and Derrida, primarily, can be used in the reading and interpretation of texts. In this sense, the work operates within the rubric of the “beginner’s guides” to theory, as evinced by Catherine Belsey’s *Critical Practice* (1980)³⁸ or Terry Eagleton’s hugely successful *Literary Theory* (1983).³⁹

However, the most significant influence on the present research is by a much more recent work: Francois Cusset’s *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Co.*

Transformed The Intellectual Life of the United States (2003). Cusset, like many others, reads French theory as a purely American invention, where the transferral of “a body of theoretical texts from 1960s-70s France to 1980s-90s North America” was used to confront American ideals of “cultural identity” and “symbolic conflicts” within the “academic market”. Cusset’s text is a key guide throughout this thesis to which I refer frequently. However, the clear difference between the two texts is Cusset’s focus upon the American reception of French theory in comparison to my own research on its British trajectory. Cusset demonstrates how French theory penetrated American academic circles from a very specific starting point: the international symposium at Johns Hopkins, Baltimore from 18 – 21 October, 1966. Paul de Man, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, amongst many more, appeared to speak about their work for the first time in an American setting.⁴⁰

Reflecting on the occasion some twenty years later, Derrida reflected that it was “an event in which many things changed (it is on purpose that I leave these formulations somewhat vague)

³⁸ Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice*, (London: Methuen, 1980).

³⁹ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, (Oxford: Blackwells, 1983).

⁴⁰ For an account of the proceedings of this conference, see Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato eds, *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

on the American scene... What is now called "theory" in this country may even have an essential link with what is said to have happened there in 1966".⁴¹

The impact of the conference had lasting effects for both French theory in the USA, incorporating post-structuralism and French theorists, and their American reception. Derrida taught in the USA every year after this symposium, through significant academic institutions such as Yale, Cornell, and the University of California at Irvine. Michel Foucault similarly lectured during the late 1970s and 1980s in California while the *Schizo-Culture* conference at Columbia University in New York during 1975 offered a further calibration, if somewhat more chaotic, of contemporary French theorists, including Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Jean-François Lyotard with American counterculture figures such as William Burroughs and John Cage.⁴² These events help to explain not just the particular trajectory followed by French theory in the USA but its difference from its British version. French theory in America is, in Cusset and Sylvère Lotringer's terms, linked with "post-structuralism", itself generally unused in France, but designated by Slavoj Žižek as "a strain of French Theory...an Anglo-Saxon and German invention [which] refers to the way the Anglo-Saxon world perceived and located the theories of Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, etc".⁴³

But there was no effective "break" with structuralism in Britain similar to Derrida's explosive lecture at Johns Hopkins, and deconstruction was a largely American reading of the work of Jacques Derrida and did not impact upon British intellectuals in the same manner. This explains why my study focuses upon the circulation of French theory in Britain occurring

⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, "Some statements and truisms about neologisms, newisms, postisms, parasitisms, and other small seismisms", trans. Anne Tomiche, *The States of "Theory": History, Art, and Critical Discourse*, David Carroll, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

⁴² See Sylvère Lotringer and David Morris eds., *Schizo-Culture: The Event* (Los Angeles: M.I.T. Press, 2013).

⁴³ Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1991), p. 142.

largely outside the academy: unlike their Ivy League counterparts, Oxford and Cambridge were hostile to the import of these contemporary foreign ideas even during a period of time. Furthermore the work of Williams and Richard Hoggart points towards a separate trajectory of French theory in Britain: the intellectual project of cultural studies through its foundation at the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, aligning subsequent engagement with methodologies derived from Althusser, Barthes, Bourdieu, Gramsci and many more. The cultural studies project has been well documented, particularly by one its key figures, Hall in his essay "The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis of the Humanities" (1990)⁴⁴ and more recently by Richard E. Lee's *Life and Times of Cultural Studies* (2004).⁴⁵

The present study, by contrast, traces a separate history of theory, one which disseminated through non-academic spaces and found itself at the centre of vanguardist approaches to film education, film criticism, curatorial projects, music writing and music performance.

Furthermore, the key figures at the heart of this study are less the French theorists themselves but their "discoverers" or "agents" within a British context. While these figures were not necessarily experts in French theory, they were intellectuals who excelled in adopting language and theoretical strategies from the French theorists and marshalling this language to challenge existing agendas, both culturally and institutionally. Whereas cultural studies was often characterised by the meticulous critique of the textual arrangement and collusive pleasures of novels, films, advertisements and recipes in the academy, the deployment of French theory by intellectuals in cultural institutions allowed for challenging approaches to be adapted; indeed, cultural products became much more than merely "cultural" and through

⁴⁴ Stuart Hall, "The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis of the Humanities", *October*, Vol. 53, The Humanities as Social Technology (Summer, 1990), pp. 11-23.

⁴⁵ Richard E. Lee, *Life and Times of Cultural Studies: The Politics and Transformation of the Structures of Knowledge* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

the effective application of French theory, could be apprehended for political means. This political angle is important, too, for French theory, especially in its British circulation as its development is annexed to a Marxist tradition: as Antony Easthope points out, “intellectuals [in Britain] who were already Marxists read texts by Louis Althusser in the 1960s and 1970s, and were led from there...to the psychoanalytic writings of Jacques Lacan”.⁴⁶ Armed with these translated texts, these advocates of French theory felt that it was a worthwhile challenge not just to convey something of the ferment of a French intellectual life, often criticised or ignored by the British on account of alleged faddishness and verbal convolutions, but to generate a form of intoxication allowed by the creative re-use of this material in translation. As we will see, throughout the course of the late 1960s and 1970s, the cultural imagination of the left was re-calibrated to accommodate fresh ideas from emergent disciplines such as semiotics and psychoanalysis and the publishing market in Britain was flooded with French theory texts, many appearing out of order with their original publication in France. The discovery of these theorists and texts in stores such as Compendium and the ICA’s own bookshop generated a further *frisson* through an atmospheric connection between these exciting French imports. As we will see, French theory became a lifeblood in an era of rapidly increasing communication between disciplines, artforms, and emergent social movements.⁴⁷

Method

This study does not attempt to prise open the source French theory texts through structuralist or post-structuralist means. Instead, this project’s methodology is indebted to Pierre

⁴⁶ Easthope, *British Post-Structuralism Since 1968*, p. xiii.

⁴⁷ See Colm McAuliffe, “The French Programme: How Theory Came to London”, <<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/5009-the-french-programme-how-theory-came-to-london>>, [accessed 24 May 2021].

Bourdieu's study of the social conditions of the international circulation of ideas and the work of Patrick Baert on positioning theory and intellectual interventions.⁴⁸ While my work operates within the rubric of cultural and intellectual history, my research also exists within the field concerned with the social life of ideas, one which focuses upon the institutional and social conditions under which "knowledge is produced, interpreted, diffused, and used".⁴⁹ Working from this context, we can view French theory as a paradigm, a "powerful vehicle for the circulation of ideas and intellectual exchange" which allows me to situate my work beyond national and disciplinary boundaries and focus upon the intellectuals or "agents" of French theory in Britain and the institutions through which they worked.⁵⁰ It is at this juncture where Baert's work proves most useful: one of the benefits of Baert's deployment of positioning and intellectual interventions is that it accounts for the changes which may occur within intellectuals' views over a period of time. Baert demonstrates how the launch of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir's journal *Les Temps Modernes* in October 1945 was such an intellectual intervention as it enabled the editors of the journal to "position themselves as engaged intellectuals, tackling issues of contemporary social and political significance".⁵¹ Accordingly, these interventions occur in the form of writing or speaking but always involve positioning: locating the author or speaker within an intellectual field while simultaneously situating other intellectuals either as allies or opponents.⁵² Within this framework, Baert specifies two corresponding effects to these intellectual interventions: first, the positioning itself as a product of the intervention and second, effective positioning assisting in the diffusion of ideas.⁵³ As we will see, this form of positioning forms a key

⁴⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Social Conditions of the International Circulation of Ideas" in *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Shusterman (Blackwell: Oxford, 1999).

⁴⁹ Marco Santoro and Gisèle Sapiro "On the Social Life of Ideas and the Persistence of the Author in the Social and Human Sciences. A presentation of the Symposium", *Sociologica* (2017) doi: 10.2383/86980.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Patrick Baert, *The Existential Moment*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. 168.

⁵² Patrick Baert, "Positioning theory and intellectual interventions", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 42:3 (2012), p. 309.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

element of the work undertaken by the intellectuals in the present study in disseminating French theory within their own milieu and the wider institutions covered by the research.

Furthermore, in his investigation of Jean-Paul Sartre's career, *The Existential Moment* (2013), Baert states that writers "position themselves intellectually" and this form of positioning has an effect on "whether their ideas are taken up by others and, if successful, how they are adapted".⁵⁴ An intellectual intervention, as a form of positioning, is often the most effective way for intellectuals to position themselves within a field. But the effectivity of this form of positioning depends on a number of factors. Firstly, the broader intellectual network is crucial in legitimising intellectuals positioning as is the role of teamwork. The present study is very much alive to the fluidity of teamwork through the collaborative work undertaken at these sites of reception for French theory and the effectiveness of this positioning theory allows my study to demonstrate how the interventions by these intellectuals located their work within a rapidly changing political, intellectual and cultural landscape. The teamwork element is important as we witness members of these groups co-ordinating their activities to create a relatively coherent form of positioning: while some of these intellectuals, particularly those associated with the New Left, already have the financial and material resources to assist their positioning, Baert points out that the effectiveness of this also depends on how others interpret one's arguments. This is a key aspect of the circulation of French theory in Britain in that it is a never ending process and never entirely in the hands of the "author(s)".

The chapters relating to the BFI Education Department and the Institute of Contemporary Arts also rely heavily on archival work. Much of the work in these particular chapters is

⁵⁴ Baert, *The Existential Moment*, p. 16.

structured by the archival finds which reveals a journey of French theory through the bureaucratic and administrative corridors of the institution. My investigations unearthed original information concerning the extent to which the use of French theory upset the Board of Governors at the BFI; conversely, the ICA archives at the Tate revealed how complicit the then-Conservative government of 1972 was with funding the appearance of Foucault and Derrida at the institution. As such, these chapters, in particular, benefit from an alliance between the methodologies of Baert and Bourdieu and an original tracing of the textual and administrative networks that surround the work undertaken at these institutions during the late 1960s and early 1970s. My research has also benefitted from face-to-face, e-mail and Zoom interviews with many of the key figures associated with this study. These interviews allow me to directly participate in the field: many of the interviewees proved to be rather sensitive interpreters of their work with French theory and their reasons for deploying these theories were often consciously and explicitly cognised, abetted by many years of distance between their current selves and their “French theory” selves. While I write from a primarily sympathetic position, I do strive to maintain an analytical distance between my arguments and the arguments and reflections of my interviewees and note my disagreements where appropriate.

Contribution To Knowledge

This project seeks to make an original contribution to both cultural and intellectual history in two central forms. Firstly, it provides a history of French theory’s trajectory in Britain, one that is distinct from its trajectory in America, as detailed by Cusset, Lotringer and Lejeune,

Mignon and Pirenne,⁵⁵ but also distinct from its lack of trajectory in France, as detailed by Angermuller.⁵⁶ In researching and presenting this project, I hope to have assembled a distinct journey which may be of use for further scholarly research and as a springboard for debates around the travelling of theories from one culture to another. Secondly, this project does not just aim to ponder the reception of these travelling theories but it aims to expand the scope of study, under the cultural and intellectual history, into fresh areas of research: institutional film departments, film programmes, curatorial projects, popular music and music writing, as legitimate arenas of intellectual activity. This project chooses to read these institutions and forms of cultural production as categories ripe for analysis which allows us to consider the wider implications of these cultural forms. While there is some contemporary work within the sociology of ideas on the “MacCabe Affair” at Cambridge, why is there no comparable consideration of the antagonism generated by agents who were similar to Colin MacCabe but who did not work in the academy?⁵⁷ And equally, what does this trajectory of foreign theories within cultural institutions in Britain tell us about the cultural work undertaken in this country, how it is legitimised, or even de-legitimised? This study aims to highlight the role played by a more nimble form of intellectual in the social life of ideas: in each of these chapters, we witness intellectuals such as Peter Wollen, Laura Mulvey and Claire Johnston operating as writers, lecturers, filmmakers and cultural administrators, demonstrating a form of intellectual engagement which is far more active than the avatars of French theory in France, most of whom work as professors within the official academy.

⁵⁵ See *French Theory and American Art*, ed. Anael Lejeune, Olivier Mignon, Raphael Pirenne (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013).

⁵⁶ Johannes Angermuller, *Why There Is No Post-Structuralism in France* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

⁵⁷ See Patrick Baert and Marcus Morgan, *Conflict in the Academy: A Study in the Sociology of Intellectuals*, (London: Palgrave, 2015).

Warren Breckman posits that “we find ourselves in a curious intellectual position” and may feel “a certain nostalgia for thinkers and ideas capable of simultaneously liberating and enthralling us”.⁵⁸ But this study does not wish to provide simply a mere nostalgic reminiscence for a golden age of French theory in Britain. While this study certainly demonstrates how French theory, and indeed the names Barthes, Derrida, Kristeva, and Foucault, refer to an entire period, an era when the influence of French thought and the renewal of the human science produced “great names” or “great figures”, my study also rejects the oft-repeated lament that “there are no more great thinkers”. Instead, I argue the fostering of such representatives of intellectual thought does not depend solely on their own qualities but on the choices and intellectual work undertaken by these key “agents” and discoverers and, by proxy, the wider society to identify with them. Therefore, each of the chapters in this thesis are alive to the range and fluidity of rhetorical acts and collaboration which these discoverers demonstrated in their desire to diffuse French theory within the institutions, or cultural scenes, where they worked and performed.

Secondly, this study demonstrates how French theory became a “mark of distinction” in its own right in Britain, a distinction which still exists to this day: French theory has become a convenient target for the political Right, a “stand-in” for a nefarious, foreign influence, one which threatens the very fabric of British society. In eliding the singularity of the work of the theorists being referred to, French theory occupies a symbolic power where it becomes a byword for a pernicious foreign influence, a fact which makes its continued influence all the more essential to research. This study, therefore, provides a timely examination of the roots of this division through its case studies from an earlier era, namely the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s.

⁵⁸ Breckman, “On Writing the History of French Theory”, p. 342.

Plan of the Thesis

Over the course of five chapters, I explore a trajectory of French theory in Britain through a series of differing sites of reception: the *New Left Review* journal, the BFI Education Department, *Screen* journal, the Institute of Contemporary Arts, and the work of the pop group Scritti Politti operating within the field of popular music. Each of these chapters tells the story of a series of intellectuals, often working in teams, who elected to transpose French theory into their institutional and/or cultural surroundings. Focusing upon the “agents” rather than the original theorists themselves, these chapters ask how these agents assembled, consumed, diffused, discussed and legitimised varying, but not unrelated, forms of French theory: who were the key agents and what reason did they have in deploying French theory? What was the effect of their deployment? How were these French theories re-used or re-appropriated in these British contexts? How were these theories received? And in what way did these ideas have an impact far from their original concern?

Chapter One focuses upon the Marxist journal *New Left Review*, specifically through the comprehensive revision of the journal’s editorial policy from 1962, whereby it adapted a defiantly international outlook. Through a series of intellectual interventions, the NLR both diagnosed the paucity of theory in contemporary Britain and created the space for an intellectual vacancy to be filled through a process of translation and presentation of continental Marxist writers, particularly Louis Althusser. The chapter focuses upon the roles played by key agents Juliet Mitchell and Peter Wollen in breaking from the British Marxist tendency to simply historicize as they deployed French theory at the methodological pivot for their path-breaking texts on feminism and film studies.

The second chapter follows the trajectory of Peter Wollen's own work from the *NLR* to the BFI Education Department and offers a comprehensive reading of the remarkable range of intellectual work which was undertaken within this institution. Demonstrating the teamwork between Wollen and Paddy Whannel as the core behind the department's re-fashioning of itself as a progressive laboratory of ideas and extremely fertile terrain for the import of French theory, I use a whole range of articles, seminar papers, internal documents as an assemblage to create an entirely fresh history of this education department, situating it in a cultural field far beyond the remit of film studies. The subsequent chapter on *Screen* journal develops many of the themes from the first two, underscoring *Screen* journal as the progeny of an alliance between the NLR and BFI Education Department. The chapter identifies *Screen* as a "high-point" of French theory in Britain: one which proved both deeply antagonistic through the assertion of the translated theories of Jacques Lacan, and also extremely influential in allowing a form of feminist women's cinema to emerge through the work of Laura Mulvey and Claire Johnston.

The fourth and fifth chapters of the thesis take French theory into a more public and performative realm. Beginning with the work undertaken at the ICA during the early 1970s, Chapter Four relies upon extensive archival research, revealing the administrative work behind the curation of an entire month dedicated to French culture, incorporating French theory, at the ICA in tandem with Britain's accession to the Common Market. The final chapter moves into the world of popular music and the unusual success of Green Gartside, operating under the name Scritti Politti, a pop star whose primary influences appear to be Barthes, Derrida and Lacan, allowing for a *vogue* of French theory to emerge in 1980s Britain: where the grain of the voice and rapture over resonance takes precedence in a

dizzying *mélange* of theory and contemporary music. Finally, my conclusion posits the role of French theory in Britain as a uniquely fluid form of travelling theory, one which still has the power to complicate, challenge, and inspire to the present day.

Chapter One - *New Left Review*: 1956 – 1969



Introduction: the Dawn of the New Left

On October 23rd 1959, *the Guardian* newspaper ran a short, uncredited article under the headline “The new Left”. Remarking upon the news that the *Universities and Left Review* [*ULR*] journal was to amalgamate with the *New Reasoner* journal to form the *New Left Review* [*NLR*], the piece adopted a pithy tone towards the press release announcing the merger of these two publications. “It seems unlikely”, the article warned, “that the electorate will respond to such fiery doses of Yugoslav slivovitz or Polish vodka as the ‘New Left Review’ seems likely to give them”.

¹ *The Guardian*'s curt dismissal of the transnational ambitions of this newly-formed journal was typical of the political uncertainties within the wider Labour movement of late 1950s Britain as Marxist intellectuals, including the founders of these journals, attempted to salvage an intellectual alternative from the moral wreckage created by Khrushchev's revelations about Stalinism and by the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. While the article chided the *NLR* press release for demonstrating a nostalgia for "syndicalism", an ersatz form of trade unionism that emerged in turn-of-the-century France but largely declined due to the rise of communism, it suggested that intellectuals on the Left were in search of a new form of positioning, one which not only broke from both contemporary attempts to align the Labour movement with political liberalism but also one which opened up a bridge connecting intellectuals with industrial workers.

This bridge was demonstrated in real, human terms at the official launch of the *NLR* at a public meeting at St. Pancras Town Hall in London in December 1959. The cadre of intellectuals speaking at the launch indicated that the journal was targeted at a wide readership albeit one that was almost entirely British. Speeches were given by Lawrence Daly, a miner from Fife; Labour MP Lena Jeger; cultural theorist Raymond Williams; and Stuart Hall, the *NLR*'s first editor. Hall's speech, described by David Kynaston as memorably delivered in a "soft and compelling" voice, indicated his hope that the work of the *NLR* would provide a space to break down the traditional British disconnection between the intellectual and the working classes.² This inaugural meeting lasted from 8 p.m. until 10.40 p.m., whereupon the attendees continued the discussions at The Partisan, the Soho coffee house which had been set up by Raphael Samuel with the assistance of Hall and Eric

¹ 'The New Left', *the Guardian*, London 23 October 1959, p. 10.

² David Kynaston, *Modernity Britain*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 424. Kynaston further quotes one attendee recalling the assembled throng descending upon The Partisan coffee house in Soho after the launch, where he witnessed "grave faces considering grave events and the problems of post-capitalist society".

Hobsbawm and financial aid from the actor Michael Redgrave, theatre critic Kenneth Tynan, and Scottish poet Naomi Mitchison, and had become the hub of New Left social and political circles.³ We shall return to *The Partisan* later in this chapter.

Introducing the journal's intellectual positioning in the inaugural issue, Hall firmly aligned the journal with a form of socialist humanism, one which "must be developed in cultural and social terms, as well as in economic and political".⁴ Hall insisted on this as a powerful alternative to reductive forms of Marxism and he encouraged an engaged form of intellectualism, in accordance with human agency that looks to the "real" and the "everyday". "The task of socialism", he continued, "is to meet people where they *are*, where they are touched, bitten, moved, frustrated, nauseated — to develop discontent and, at the same time, to give the socialist movement some direct sense of the times and ways in which we live".⁵ This editorial statement of intent laid the foundations for the *NLR*'s initial purview, one which relied on an account of human reality predicated upon a privileged human subject, where language remains tethered to direct human intervention and where power is located within a dominant, human centre.

Yet this socialist humanism of the early *NLR* was precisely the terrain on which Hall, Thompson, and the first editorial board were ousted in a coup led by Perry Anderson, an Anglo-Irish historian, with an impeccable Eton and Oxford academic pedigree. This second iteration of the *NLR*, emerging in 1962, re-configured the journal as a resolutely theoretical organ and site of reception for the importation and transposition of Western Marxism, including the ideas of the French-Algerian Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser and the

³ Vanessa Thorpe, "How A Soho Coffee-House Gave Birth to The New Left", *the Guardian*, London 23 April 2017, <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/apr/22/cafe-cnd-new-left>>, [accessed 18 January 2021].

⁴ Stuart Hall, "Editorial", *NLR* 1/1, January/February 1960, p. 5.

⁵ Hall, "Editorial", p. 1.

French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Accordingly, the basis for the circulation and dissemination of what we now call French theory lies within the intellectual work undertaken by the *NLR* during the 1960s, located in Carlyle Street in the heart of London's Soho district. This chapter offers a fresh history of the journal's formation, demonstrating how its first iteration, and its allegiance to the "socialist humanism" of British intellectuals post-1956, was comprehensively supplanted by a theoretically rigorous analysis of Britain's stunted intellectual development while gradually presenting and translating selected figures from Francophone Marxism which had emerged since the First World War. Using Bourdieu's characterisation of dominant and subordinate positions typical to the field formation as basis for this analysis, I develop my investigation of the positioning moves undertaken within in this intellectual sphere through the deployment of Baert's positioning theory and intellectual interventions. This allows for a detailed survey of the "reception, survival, and diffusion of intellectual products" – in this case the French theories of Althusser and Lacan – not only through the quality of the theories transposed from French Marxism and psychoanalysis but also through the "range of rhetorical devices authors employ to locate themselves (and position others) within the intellectual field".⁶

The prime authors in the promotion of French theory in the *NLR* are highlighted as, initially, Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn. These strident historians diagnose the ills of Britain's cultural inheritance and create the space for intellectual vacancies through problematizing the field, allowing them to consecrate new, foreign authors and present them within the journal. While Anderson and Nairn do not explicitly engage in theoretical writing of their own, the chapter highlights the work of Juliet Mitchell and Peter Wollen who, I contend, *do* write in a theoretical fashion, composing pioneering texts for the *NLR* in the shadow of their own

⁶ Baert, "Positioning theory and intellectual interventions", p. 304.

readings of Louis Althusser. These texts, I argue, are among the earliest, if not the earliest, texts which demonstrate the form of French theory investigated by this study. While Mitchell's essay, "Women: The Longest Revolution", is an acclaimed account of the struggle for women, it is rarely viewed within the prism of the Althusserian influence which underpins its methodological structure. Further, Wollen's essays on Hollywood film directors, using methodologies from Claude Lévi-Strauss, are largely ignored in the light of his more successful *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* publication from later the decade. My aim here is to re-position these works within a wider network of influence centred around the *NLR* editorial staff's own knowledge and importation of French theoretical texts. In this respect, this chapter posits Anderson, Nairn, Mitchell, and Wollen as the "agents" whose positioning and intellectual interventions serve to legitimise terms and concepts appropriated from French theory in a manner which loosens them from the horizon of French Marxist philosophy and psychoanalysis, freeing them up for fresh usage in a new cultural context. While this is the first chapter in the thesis, it is also the most extensive. This is because I view the work of the *NLR* as providing the basis for subsequent importations of French theory into left-cultural networks in Britain. The work of the *NLR* has a significant impact on every other chapter in this thesis: the BFI Education Department, *Screen* journal, the ICA and even the post-punk networks of late 1970s London are all indebted in various ways to the *NLR*'s comprehensive strategy of importation and translation.

Despite its theoretical outlook, there is a surprisingly limited body of work written on the *NLR*. Duncan Thompson's *Pessimism of the Intellect: A History of the New Left Review* (2007) is the singular substantial account of the journal's history, focusing on its intellectual

development over an extended period of forty years.⁷ Other studies offer a more restricted time-span and are more expansive in focus including Nigel Young's *An Infantile Disorder? The Crisis and Decline of the New Left* (1977); Lin Chun's *The British New Left* (1993); and Michael Kenny's *The First New Left: British Intellectuals After Stalin* (1995).⁸ Indeed, as Stefan Collini points out, the history of the journal has been hindered by the somewhat clandestine character of its internal modus operandi; Perry Anderson, in particular, is notoriously reluctant to divulge too many details upon the internal economics of the *NLR*.⁹ The cultural period of the first New Left has also been covered quite thoroughly in recent historical accounts such as David Kynaston's *Modernity Britain* (2014) and Dominic Sandbrook's *Never Had It So Good* (2008) while personal reflections, including Stuart Hall's *Familiar Stranger* (2017) and Fred Inglis's eponymously titled biography of Raymond Williams (1998), explore the experience of the New Left in often rich and illuminating terms.¹⁰ Nevertheless, none of these accounts critically reflects upon the quite specific role played by the journal in the presentation and dissemination of French intellectual thinking during the period. Indeed, little systematic commentary is available on the circulation of these

⁷ Duncan Thompson, *Pessimism of the Intellect: A History of the New Left Review*, (Talgart: Merlin Press, 2007).

⁸ Nigel Young, *Infantile Disorder?: Crisis and Decline of the New Left* (London: Routledge, 1977); Lin Chun, *The British New Left*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993). Chun's book provoked a rebuke from Ellen Meiskins Wood in the *Socialist Register*. In fact, Wood's own review provides a thorough history of the British New Left albeit one which is rather scathing of the *NLR*'s propensity for theory: "...left academics have adopted modes of intellectual activity that seem deliberately exclusionary; and the waters are further muddied by the fact that the more inaccessible the fashionable discourses become, the less available they are to all but a small minority of initiates, the more they proclaim their celebration of 'popular culture'." "A Chronology Of The New Left And Its Successors, Or: Who's Old-Fashioned Now?", *Socialist Register* 1995, pp. 30-57; Michael Kenny, *The First New Left: British Intellectuals After Stalin* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995).

⁹ Stefan Collini, "A Life In Politics: *NLR* At 50", <

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/feb/13/new/left/review/stefan/collini>>, [accessed 30 August 2019]. A revealing correction to the above article on the *NLR*'s fiftieth edition states: "This article was amended on 24 February 2010 to delete a sentence saying that *NLR*'s finances were unclear with rumours suggesting that [Perry] Anderson family money subsidised it. It has been replaced with a sentence saying the publication has long been self-financing".

¹⁰ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain From Suez to the Beatles*. (London: Abacus, 2008); According to Hall, "[Perry Anderson] belonged to a new generation. He was obviously an incredibly intellectual, high-academic kind of man. He is the only person who still uses half a dozen words in his essays which I have never ever seen before! If you have the kind of Eton education he did, you just know things that ordinary human beings don't know." Stuart Hall with Bill Schwarz, *Familiar Stranger*, (London: Allen Lane, 2017), p. 26; Fred Inglis, *Raymond Williams*, (London: Routledge, 1998).

theories from France to Britain; the primary scholarship available on these movements concentrate on theory's journey across the Atlantic to the USA, bypassing the British bridge almost entirely.¹¹

The current *NLR* offers a history of the journal on its website titled "A Brief History of *New Left Review* 1960-2010".¹² Dividing the history of the journal into eleven separate categories, the entries for the 1960s do not mention Louis Althusser at any stage. Lacan is given only brief acknowledgement and while Juliet Mitchell's "Women: The Longest Revolution" essay, which we will look at towards the end of this chapter, is hailed as "path-breaking", the website avoids mentioning Althusser as the methodological structure behind the essay, instead describing it as an "original synthesis of de Beauvoir, Engels, Viola Klein, Betty Friedan and other analysts of women's oppression". The following chapter, and indeed entire thesis, aims to rectify these oversights, particularly regarding Althusser's influence during the 1960s and how he paved the way for the importation of contemporaneous Francophone authors steeped in the practice of theory.

Finally, I would also like to offer a different purview of the *NLR* in comparison to the journal's long-standing reputation as an outlet for austere and recondite promulgations. Describing the *NLR*'s style and focus in an article heralding the journal's quinquagenary, Stefan Collini noted that the journal is "not in any obvious sense 'lively'; it is downright difficult...because what it tries to analyse is complex and its preferred intellectual tools are

¹¹ The term "The British Bridge" is used as the title for a chapter on the influence of French Theory on the work of Laura Mulvey and Victor Burgin in the otherwise USA-focused *French Theory and American Art*, Anaël Lejeune, Olivier Mignon, Raphaël Pirenne (eds.), (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013).

¹² "A Brief History of the *New Left Review*, 1960-2010", <<https://newleftreview.org/pages/history>>, [accessed 18 January 2021].

often conceptually sophisticated”.¹³ To this day, the *NLR* maintains a Herculean attempt to understand, to analyse, and to theorise. Yet a re-reading of its output during its first decade of existence reveals within its coverage a surprising number of cultural and, it could even be said, “lively” topics ranging from the avant-garde compositions of Luigi Nono and Karl-Heinz Stockhausen, deep engagement with the musical trajectory of the Rolling Stones and the thematic structures underpinning the work of Hollywood directors such as Sam Fuller, Howard Hawks and Alfred Hitchcock. While the analytical sophistication may initially appear to be out of step with some of the more populist topics of analysis, the journal was ground-breaking in allowing cultural criticism to sidestep the apparently ossified nature of bourgeois “good taste” – as we will see, represented by a respected film magazine such as *Sight and Sound* – and instead offer methodologically rigorous accounts of Anglo-American culture. Furthermore, the *NLR* operated from offices in Carlyle Street at the very heart of 1960s Soho. This chapter, therefore, offers a distinctive account of the *NLR* field, re-locating the intellectual work undertaken by the journal within the progressive spirit of the times.

1956 and All That

How do we look for beginnings of French theory in Britain? The task of finding a singular beginning for any movement or theory is a difficult one, fraught with traps and empirical dangers. But we can say that the reception of Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan into the knowledge base of the *NLR* and their transformation into a working and critical rationality were somehow *activated* by a series of historical breaks with orthodoxies, creating the space or vacancies for these French intellectual figures to appear in the viewfinder of British

¹³ The very term “quinquagenary” was used by the *NLR* in an advertisement announcing this particular issue of the journal. The free usage of this word is indicative of the journal’s reputation for sesquipedalian terminology.

intellectuals. One of these breaks occurred in the Moscow of 1956 where Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech outlined the "perversions" of Stalinist doctrine at the 20th Party Congress, a move which kick-started a revolt on the left away from Communism, one which was brutally consolidated by the Soviet invasion of Hungary later that year.¹⁴ Intellectuals on the left, deeply disillusioned with Stalinism, sought refuge in a revamped Marxism, one which returned to the Hegelian-influenced writings of the young Marx, and was represented particularly by Sartre's publication of *Critique de la raison dialectique* which incorporated "agency and creativity into a historical narrative of class struggle".¹⁵

But we can also detect another beginning for French theory, one closer to home: Paris, 1962 when Claude Lévi-Strauss published *La Pensée sauvage* which launched an attack on Jean-Paul Sartre's historicism and humanism.¹⁶ History, in Lévi-Strauss's account, was merely the dying embers of a transcendental humanist outlook; in opposition to the constitution of man, Lévi-Strauss encouraged the dissolution of man, in the process displacing Sartre and inaugurating the structuralist programme in the formation of younger French Marxists, in particular Louis Althusser, who endorsed Lévi-Strauss's intervention and re-calibrated his positioning into a form of a Marxism which was resolutely theoretical and avowedly anti-humanist. The combined effects of these two interventions allowed Marxists, born in and around the era of the Second World War, to thoroughly re-think their affiliations: first, they had to re-think their own political orientation in the light of Stalin, and second, Lévi-Strauss's move against Sartre offered the genesis of a method which allowed for a structuralist

¹⁴ While innumerable histories of 1956 exist, my primary reference is Tony Judt's comprehensive *Post-War: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London: Vintage, 2010).

¹⁵ Baert, *The Existential Moment*, p. 155.

¹⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage*, (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1962). An English translation appeared in 1966 under the title *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1966) although Lévi-Strauss was apparently unhappy with this title as it failed to register the pun of the French title, *Pensée* meaning both thought and pansy. A fresh translation by Jeffrey Mehlman and John Leavitt, re-titled *Wild Thoughts*, appeared in 2021 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

technique to become wedded to a form of Marxism. Much of this theoretical work was undertaken at the *École normale supérieure* in Paris where a collective effort, between Althusser and his students, was being undertaken in order to replenish and modernise readings of Marx.¹⁷

But while Althusser and his students were engaged in their ambitious theoretical projects, British Marxists were still attempting to unravel the tumultuous events of 1956. Indeed, the crushing combination of Moscow and Hungary represent what we can term a cultural trauma for left intellectuals. Baert defines this phenomenon as “a situation where particular events force large sections of a given society to reconsider their societal history in a very different, and often negative, light, identifying and reassessing central presuppositions which they previously held”.¹⁸ Certainly, the English Left was thrown into disarray as the Communist Party of Britain saw its membership nearly halved yet progressive steps were undertaken to deal with the trauma. Firstly, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament [CND] was inaugurated in London on February 17th, 1958, a movement described by Judt as “squarely within the great dissenting tradition of British radical politics: most of its supporters were educated, left-leaning and non-violent, and their demands were addressed in the first instance to their own government”.¹⁹ Secondly, two journals were quickly formed: the *New Reasoner* and *Universities and Left Review*.²⁰ In Baert’s terms, the reconsideration of one’s “societal history” after a trauma process is often represented by the formation of “carrier groups” which play a significant role in the post-trauma process. The CND and, in particular, the *New Reasoner* and *ULR* were such carrier groups who assist with the reparation of traumatic

¹⁷ The results of these re-readings were published as *Le livre capital* (François Maspero: Paris, 1965). An abridged version was translated by Ben Brewster and published by New Left Books in 1970. An unabridged version in English finally appeared in 2015, also published by New Left Books/Verso.

¹⁸ Baert, *The Existential Moment*, p. 143.

¹⁹ Judt, *Post-War: A History of Europe Since 1945*, p. 255.

experiences through speech acts, enabling people to articulate and come to terms with the trauma. The CND was a prime, public-facing example, an outlet for differing sensations of anger, itself a term with great currency in the late 1950s through the emergence of the “angry young men” of English letters.

Universities and Left Review and Cosmopolitan Coffee Culture

But how can we describe the strategies employed by the *New Reasoner* and *ULR* as intellectual interventions? Firstly, the *ULR*, the first of these two journals to be founded, announced its intentions to re-purpose the means of Marxist discourse through not only the writings in the journal but also public activities. The *Universities and Left Review Club* was duly formed and held fortnightly discussion meetings at the Royal Hotel at Woburn Place in central London.²¹ “[Our intention is] To draw together the discussion and research of many people in different fields in the common theme of culture and community”, outlined the editors in the first issue, dated spring 1957. “The theme has not existed as a subject for discussion, debate and propaganda, in its own right, for many years. We have come to it ourselves only in the course of trying to push past the limits of specialised problems, in the attempt to find some vantage point from which to make a deep criticism, not merely of some institutions, but of a whole culture – a way of life, under capitalism”.²² The descriptions of

²¹ Three of the journal’s editors, including Stuart Hall, a West Indian Rhodes scholar, were in Oxford while Ralph (later known as Raphael) Samuel was positioned at the London School of Economics. Reflecting back on this era, Stuart Hall recalled how the *ULR* came out of the “rich networks”, especially within the cadres of the Socialist Club which acted as a meeting point for these debates. As the Cold War began to thaw, Hall continued, so the political divisions began to be diminished and a more enthusiastic Left political culture emerged across the conventional Cold War divides. Hall remarks how the discourse around this culture was highly focused around the questions: “how has the world changed?”; and “why was it so qualitatively different, both from what had prevailed before, and from what the political theories devised to explain historical change had predicted?”. “This discussion had what I would call a necessarily ‘critical’ or ‘post’, even a ‘deconstructive’ edge to it, *avant la lettre*”, concluded Hall. See Hall with Schwarz, *Familiar Stranger*, pp. 241-2.

²² *ULR* 1, spring 1957, <http://banmarchive.org.uk/collections/ULR/index_frame.htm> [accessed 31 August 2019].

culture as a “way of life” align the *ULR* editorial positioning with that of Raymond Williams whose “Culture Is Ordinary” essay from the following year demonstrated a similarly sympathetic recapitulation of culture as lived experience.²³

This “carrier act” function continued through the *ULR* Club meetings, often frequented by Williams who recalled these “well attended, lively” encounters between fellow academics, the *ULR* team, CND activists and filmmakers, including Lindsay Anderson, one of the founders of the concomitant Free Cinema movement. Williams reflected very fondly on his memories of the *ULR* group and the role they played in “the pain of reworking that past [of the immediate Cold War struggles]”.²⁴ The intensity of Williams’s reflections provides an indication of the ongoing effects of the traumas of 1956 and the social benefits afforded by these carrier groups in working and writing through the trauma process. But another effect of this social element of the *ULR* was to allow new concepts to percolate and differing disciplines to intersect in a convivial space, allowing for a consistent circulation of ideas. The aforementioned Partisan coffee house in Soho was a safe space to recoil from the external anger of the times and allowed disaffected intellectuals on the British left to work out strategies for a fresh cultural intervention. Yet there remains an undercurrent of bias against certain emergent popular movements. A close analysis of the *ULR*’s listings reveals how the Coffee House was advertised within the pages of the journal as “London’s First Anti-Espresso Bar”: this declaration, which now reads rather curiously, needs to be seen within the context of the late 1950s emergence of a stream of colourful coffee shops in Soho,²⁵ the

²³ Raymond Williams, “Culture Is Ordinary”, in *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 3-14.

²⁴ Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews With New Left Review*, (London: Verso, 2015), p. 361.

²⁵ Keith Waterhouse’s novel *Billy Liar*, published in 1959, also details an ambiguity regarding the coffee shop as pivoting between domestic and foreign cultures in Britain. “The Kit-Kat was another example of Stradhoughton moving with the times, or rather dragging its wooden leg about five paces behind the times. The plaster sundae was all that was supposed to be left of a former tradition of throbbing urns, slophouse cooking, and the thin tide of biscuit crumbs and tomato pips that was symbolic of Stradhoughton public catering. The Kit Kat was now a coffee bar, or thought it was. It had a cackling espresso machine, a few empty plant-pots, and

boom in espresso consumption kick-started by the Moka Bar on 29 Frith Street, resplendent with “a curvaceous Formica-covered bar, metal stools, bright lights, and on the bar, the piece de resistance; a gleaming Gaggia coffee machine”.²⁶ In essence, the Partisan Coffee House was modelled against these gleeful displays of cosmopolitan fashionability, yet it was out of business by 1962.²⁷ In this sense, we can place the *ULR* as extraordinarily close to the cultural transformations enveloping Britain’s youth during the late 1950s: the writings on Free Cinema and the politics of adolescence betray a cautious engagement, in the lineage of Richard Hoggart’s dismissals of the nefarious influence of mass-media and the Americanisation of British culture, a stance borne out by the *ULR* Coffee House positioning itself as the opposite of Soho’s burgeoning espresso culture.²⁸

about half a dozen glass plates with brown sugar stuck all over them. The stippled walls, although redecorated, remained straight milkbar: a kind of Theatre Royal backcloth showing Dick Whittington and his cat hiking it across some of the more rolling dales”. (London: Michael Joseph, 1959), pp. 90-91.

²⁶ The writer Barry Miles, who has chronicled much of London life in the 1960s through *London Calling* (London: Atlantic Books, 2011) and his biographies of Paul McCartney and William Burroughs, offered a flavour of Soho during this time in an email interview with me on 19 January 2021: “[The Partisan] was a left-wing coffee bar with folk music and protest songs and bearded beatniks playing chess. I first went there in 1959. Wonderful place with a huge noticeboard covered with flyers for demos and CND protests. I don’t think it represented anything other than the *New Left Review*’s own rather above-it-all, aloof attitude toward coffee shops like the 2is where commercial rock ‘n’ roll was played by and to working class lads. I don’t think it was called *ULR* Coffee House for very long, if ever. I only ever knew it as The Partisan. They really did have singers who sang about mining disasters with one finger in their ear. It was quite expensive, as I remember. Very much a university crowd drinking coffee from glass cups and saucers. I’ve never heard of any coffee shop factions [between espresso and anti/espresso brigades as per the *ULR* advertisement]. Obviously some people thought that The Freight Train (Chas McDevitt’s place, he had a hit record of that name) was more authentic than Heaven and Hell, with its skulls and coffins as tables in the basement, but they were really just for meeting the opposite sex, talking, hanging out. They attracted a younger crowd because there was nowhere for young people to go if they were not yet 18 and couldn’t go to pubs. The Moka on Frith Street was the first and was quite highly regarded in 1959-60”.

²⁷ Matthew Green, “Coffee in a coffin: The fascinating story of Le Macabre – and Soho’s 1950s espresso revolution”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 09 March 2017, <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/united/kingdom/england/london/articles/the/amazing/story/of/soho/1950s/espresso/revolution/>>, [accessed 18 January 2021].

²⁸ Hoggart’s despair was reflected by his descriptions of British youth lurking ominously in “harshly-lit milk-bars”, as they socialised through a “peculiarly thin and pallid form of dissipation”, indicating a complete “aesthetic breakdown”. See Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), pp. 247-8.

New Reasoner and E.P. Thompson's Britain

The second of the journals formed in the shadow of 1956, the *New Reasoner* offered a more sober analysis, positioning itself more firmly within the Marxist lineage, declaring “no desire to break impetuously with the Marxist tradition in Britain”. The journal traced its history through William Morris, trade unionist Tom Mann, and historic journals such as *Left Review* and *Modern Quarterly*, hoping to build bridges between this tradition and socialists who “developed their thought altogether outside it”.²⁹ Furthermore, the *New Reasoner* explicitly announced their allegiance to “Socialist Humanism” from the first issue in summer 1957 through a lengthy E.P. Thompson declaration. In what is announced as a “Discussion Article” in the journal and subtitled “An Epistle to the Philistines”, Thompson vividly calls for a “British socialism” as an oppositional culture to Stalinism, which is rebuked as an “ideology...a form of false consciousness, deriving from a partial, partisan, view of reality”. Under a further sub-heading “The Disease of Orthodoxy”, Thompson argues that Communism engendered a society which inhibits “the emergence of ideas” and cautions unspecified Western Marxists for attempting to create a “science of history” as “no ‘basis’ ever invented a steam engine, or sat on the National Coal Board”. The science of history is, in Thompson’s terms, a “poor model” which leads into “dangerous abstractions” as it is “far easier to be inhumane if one takes a non-human model”. Stalinism is explicitly linked with “the belittling of conscious human agency in the making of history”. In response to the impending dangers of these inhumane abstractions, Thompson prescribes an international movement for a democratic society, entirely based on humanist principles. “Only if men by

²⁹ John Savile and E.P. Thompson, “Editorial”, *New Reasoner* 1, summer 1957, pp. 2-3.

their own human agency, can master this thing,” he concludes, “will Marx’s [vision] will be confirmed”.³⁰

Re-casting Thompson’s vibrant article in the context of the subsequent importation of Althusser later in the 1960s, it reads like a pre-emptive strike *against* the “abstractions” of a French theory of structuralism, one which had yet to be imported to Britain from Paris. It also pre-figures Thompson’s later associations of Althusser with Stalin where he declares that “Althusserianism *is* Stalinism reduced to the paradigm of theory. It is Stalinism at last, theorized as ideology”.³¹ The article also provides an insight into Thompson’s own positioning: socialist humanism is pivoted as an opposition to the horrors of Stalinism on a local level but also on an international level. The revelations surrounding the grotesque excesses of the Stalinist regime are, in Thompson’s account, matched by unnecessary excesses within the dual dangers of Stalinism and capitalism as the combination of both has “reduced human beings to things, commodities or appendages to machines”, echoing the concerns of Hoggart and Williams directed towards the commodification of English culture.

While this Marxist position adapted by Thompson in the *New Reasoner* offered a powerfully argued alternative to reductive forms of Marxism, Thompson’s own perspective remained profoundly English. Reflecting a more advanced form of the *ULR*’s antipathy towards espresso culture, Thompson admitted his traditional leanings in an open letter to Leszek Kolakowski in 1973, later re-published as a postscript to *The Poverty of Theory*:

³⁰ E.P. Thompson, “Socialist Humanism: An Epistle to the Philistines”, *New Reasoner* 1, summer 1957, pp. 105–143.

³¹ E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, (London: Merlin, 1978), p. 333.

This, if I am honest, is my self, my sensibility. Take Marx and Vico and a few European novelists away, and my most intimate pantheon would be a provincial tea-party: a gathering of the English and the Anglo-Irish. Talk of free-will and determinism, and I think first of Milton. Talk of man's inhumanity, I think of Swift. Talk of morality and revolution, and my mind is off with Wordsworth's *Solitary*. Talk of the problems of self-activity and creative labour in socialist society, and I am in an instant back with William Morris.³²

Throughout his writings, Thompson revisits the positive motif of human agency against an impersonal historical process indicating a consistency to Thompson's positioning: his passionate diatribes serve to patrol and regulate the borders of British Marxist epistemology and historicism, fending off implicit dangers which lurk from foreign climes. This form of defence becomes even more explicit and hostile later in the 1960s as the *New Left Review* begins to change formation.

The *New Left Review* and Pop(ular) Culture

Despite the differences in tone between the *ULR* and *New Reasoner*, the two were operating along complementary socialist lines, regularly advertising and promoting each other throughout 1957 and 1958. Stuart Hall recalled how the two editorial boards "began to meet regularly around a broader political agenda, to appoint editorial board members in common and to recruit new ones".³³ But the cost of running the journals was becoming problematic, as

³² Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, (New York: NYU Press, 1978), p. 319.

³³ Stuart Hall, "Life and Times of the First New Left", *NLR* 2/61, January/February 2010, p. 8.

was the sheer amount of human effort involved. “Some [of us] had not stopped running around in circles since [1956]”, admitted Hall, “and were by then in a state of extreme political exhaustion”. It was through this sense of mutual exhaustion that the idea appeared for the two journals to merge. Such a collaborative effort would also serve to bolster a more singular outlook for their respective forms of socialism. “Out of this variety of factors came the decision to merge”, Hall continues, “and, with more suitable candidates like [Edward] Thompson and others being unwilling to serve, I rashly agreed to become first editor of *New Left Review*, with John Saville acting as chairman of the board”.³⁴

The *NLR* was birthed into a rapidly changing cultural sphere. The increasing appeal of American culture, through the circulation of Hollywood cinema and rock n’ roll, was heralded by the spectacular success of singer Bill Haley and the *Rock Around The Clock* film which played to delirious audiences in the UK throughout the autumn of 1956.³⁵ The consistent popularity of cinema as a social pastime was concurrent with the exposure to American music beyond the novelty value of Bill Haley and his Comets — the likes of Chuck Berry and Little Richard also made their UK chart debuts in the late 1950s. This dual discovery of both Hollywood and American pop music was intoxicating for English teenagers born around the beginnings of World War II and who were coming of age in the later 1950s; this is reflected in not just the likes of the Rolling Stones appropriating American black blues singers but also in the later allusions to Hollywood in British pop art through Richard Hamilton and Pauline Boty.³⁶

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ In a personal interview on 08 December 2018, Laura Mulvey recalled the first meeting of the *Universities and Left Review* taking place simultaneously to Bill Haley’s first tour of the UK – a tantalizing crossover of cultural events, even if, on further research, the dates do not appear to entirely match up.

³⁶ In a 1957 letter to architects Alison and Peter Smithson, Hamilton listed the “characteristics of pop art” in a letter to his friends. the architects Peter and Alison Smithson: “Pop Art is: Popular (designed for a mass audience), Transient (short/term solution), Expendable (easily forgotten), Low cost, Mass produced, Young (aimed at youth), Witty, Sexy, Gimmicky, Glamorous, Big business”. Richard Hamilton, *Collected Words 1953-1982*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1982), p. 28; “Film stars are the 20th/century gods and goddesses”, Boty

The *NLR* was certainly appealing to young, left intellectuals. The writer and academic Fred Inglis, an avid reader of the *NLR* during this phase of its existence, and recalls marvelling at the journal's "tabloid format, the grainy social realist photography, the instantly intelligent commentary on the world of the times".³⁷ The cover of the very first issue, which was published with a date of January/February 1960, depicted Prime Minister Harold MacMillan inspecting nuclear weaponry. Inside, there was a diverse range of articles, including a discussion of CND's current policies; a transcript of a conversation between Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart on "working-class values"; and analyses of the Labour Party and working class voters by Ralph Miliband and Raphael Samuel.

Theory In Absentia

But what of the influence from Western Europe upon the *NLR*? Despite the journal's alignment with Marxism, there was a paucity of influence from contemporary Western (European) Marxism. The forms of Marxism which emerged in post-war Europe and represented by Lukacs, Goldman, Gramsci and the Frankfurt School were largely unknown in Britain at the time. Even Marx's early works were as yet untranslated into English; the *Grundrisse* would have to wait until the mid-1970s until it was available to Anglophone readers. This lack of theoretical options had been remarked upon as far back as the 1930s by the Communist Party where a rampant "contempt for theory" and "our traditional and shameful theoretical level" were repeated points of contention.³⁸ On their resignation from

declared. "People need them, and the myths that surround them, because their own lives are enriched by them. Pop art colours those myths". Pauline Boty interview with Cedric French, *Men Only*, March 1963, p. 98.

³⁷ Quoted in Kynaston, *Modernity Britain*, p. 56.

³⁸ Allen Hutt, 'The Revolutionary Role of the Theoretical Struggle', *Communist Review*

the same party, some twenty five years later, both Edward Thompson and John Saville had also belaboured “the weakness of the Marxist tradition in England” and the “shallow growth of Marxist scholarship”.³⁹

These were the conditions which allowed French theory to emerge through the *NLR*. The work undertaken by the *New Reasoner*, *ULR* and the first iteration of the *NLR* was vital in working through the cultural traumas of 1956, but the journals also represent a tenacity in holding the borders against foreign influence: as we will see, a number of marginally younger intellectuals on the Left felt British culture was stifling across the entire class system and saw little of interest in either the “social patriotism” of George Orwell⁴⁰ or Raymond Williams’s renewed call for the revitalisation of a “living culture.”⁴¹ But we can view both the *New Reasoner* and *ULR* journals as organs which allowed these British intellectuals to orientate their own positioning and become more aware of their own roles within the field.⁴² The journals constituted a preliminary form of field, one which allowed for a new apprehension of intellectual work, allowing for a new way of seizing the moment and an offering a rallying around the common questions of the period. The work undertaken within these journals was crucial in allowing these intellectuals to operate beyond their own institutional cloisters without falling victim to the pressures of remaining within one single discipline, be that literature, sociology, history or politics. What results from this ferment is, in Walter Benjamin’s terms, a “melting down” process in which “many of the contrasts in terms of

vol. 4, February 1932, pp. 78-79, in Neal Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals*, (London: Gollancz, 1959), pp. 170-71. As early as 1925, the Comintern had condemned the CPGB’s ‘aversion to theory’—an aversion reduced, but not eradicated, as the party began to recruit middle-class intellectuals in significant numbers in the 1930s. See Stuart Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science: Marxism in Britain, 1917-1933*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986), pp. 94-97.

³⁹ Thompson and Saville, “Editorial”, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Anderson, *Arguments Within English Marxism*, p. 147.

⁴¹ Williams, “Culture Is Ordinary”, p. 99.

⁴² Paul Thibaud, as quoted in Danielle Marx-Scouras, “The Dissident Politics of ‘Tel Quel’,” *L’Esprit Créateur*, Vol. 27, No. 2, *Literature of Change, Opposition & Revolution*, Summer 1987, pp. 101-108.

what we have been accustomed to think lose their relevance” through a process of erosion but also one of contamination and renewal.⁴³

This erosion soon revealed itself in the merging of the two journals as the *NLR* quickly fell victim to internal ambiguities. Beset by a lack of editorial unity, Mike Kidron, editor of *International Socialism*,⁴⁴ remarked in a letter, there was a gap between the journal’s writing and the realities of everyday life:

Here is an intellectual liberalism that makes equals of all problems. True, class and consciousness are recognised as fields of enquiry, but so is much else, and all so well segregated. Little is done to bridge them. I defy anyone to see in the spate of words on cinema and sentiment, painting and politics, the primacy of a single galvanising element....in a word, to my mind [*International Socialism*] is geared to action; *NLR* is not. Action demands priorities of preoccupation; inaction can do without.⁴⁵

These same ambiguities also appeared within the *NLR* at an administrative level. The attempts to establish Left Clubs in industrial non-University towns, and to make the clubs into active centres of socialism, were faltering. Edward Thompson announced that he was “getting bored with some of the members of ‘Marxist’ sects who pop up at Left Club meetings around the country to demand in a your money or your life tone whether the

⁴³ Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer”, in *Thinking Photography*, ed. Victor Burgin, (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 19.

⁴⁴ *International Socialism* was launched in September 1958 and identifies itself as a Trotskyite journal.

⁴⁵ *NLR* 1/7, January/February 1961, p. 59.

speaker is a Marxist, whether he 'believes in' the class struggle and whether he is willing to give instant adhesion to this or that version of the Creed".⁴⁶

By late 1961, the *NLR* was in a state of crisis. Was it an intellectual milieu? A movement of people or ideas? An independent political movement? Or merely a lobbying group of the Labour party? Indeed, after Labour's third successive electoral defeat in 1959 the energies of the Left were, unsurprisingly, further absorbed in the struggle for the party's soul. "What is wrong with the New Left?", queried an editorial in late 1961. "Everyone has an answer. The journal: too glossy, too detached, too Cuban, too much. The Board: too big, too windy, too incompetent... The [New Left] Clubs: too few, too gimmicky, too much talking-shops, too little hard organisation. Too much Old Left. Too little culture. You can take your pick".⁴⁷

There were a number of external pressures which also contributed to the editorial collapse. First, the failure to sustain Labour's commitment to unilateralism did much to dissipate the energy of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the New Left. Second, the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, emphasising Britain's diplomatic irrelevance as the world came close to outright nuclear war, induced a sense of helplessness. Third, the *NLR* was plagued by financial problems and the inevitable inefficiency of a voluntary outfit. A gap was opening up between Edward Thompson and the younger academics and as early as the eleventh issue, dated September-October 1961, an editorial was announcing that a considerable reconstruction was in hand, affecting both journal and movement. By the close of 1961, the process of relinquishing the journal into a new editorial board was inaugurated,

⁴⁶ Edward Thompson, "Revolution Again!", *NLR* 1/ 6, November/December 1960, p. 61.

⁴⁷ "Notes For Readers", *NLR* 1/12 November/December 1961.

one which would only be complete by March/April 1964. By that stage, the theoretical revolutions under Perry Anderson were already well underway.

We have already seen how the socio-historical context of the *NLR* was crucial in its self-defining role as responding to the political upheaval of 1956. The power struggles within the nascent *NLR* are also vital to our understanding of the exchanges between national fields as these conditions significantly influence the circulation of theories and ideas cultures. Indeed, Sapiro insists that “phenomena of importation and reception must also be attributed to the specific issues at stake in the field of reception.”⁴⁸ With the *NLR* poised as this field of reception, we will now turn our attention to the new intellectual mission of the *NLR*, spearheaded by Perry Anderson whose stewardship of the *NLR* played a defining role in facilitating the diffusion of French theory in Britain.

In The Tracks of Perry Anderson

It is important to note, at this juncture, that journals positioned on the Left in Britain increased the effectiveness of their intellectual positioning through teamwork, centring around a recognisable, if ultimately discarded, label of socialist humanism.⁴⁹ But as Baert warns us, successful teams imply a certain danger in that they may struggle to “position themselves as having an independent voice or as innovative”.⁵⁰ This certainly was the case with the initial *NLR* editorial team who long harboured grievances against Perry Anderson for his takeover of the journal between 1962 and 1963: Thompson accused Anderson of “dismissing” the founders of the *NLR* while rejecting any opportunities to debate their

⁴⁸ Gisèle Sapiro, “Field”, <<https://www.politika.io/en/notice/a/field>> [Accessed 30 December 2019].

⁴⁹ See Baert, “Positioning and Intellectual Interventions”, p. 316.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

theoretical differences; Anderson, in response, claimed that the allegation of dismissal was “untrue” while admitting that a “fracture” did emerge without any “systematic effort to solicit and integrate [the old *NLR* editorial committee into the new one]”. Baert warns that such a break is necessary in order for “other team-members to actively reposition themselves as dissenting from the team-leader” to secure their own voices as independent, but also that team membership is, by default, “rarely...uncontested” as “rival intellectuals” are likely to plot a challenge, “portraying him or her as outdated, insignificant, pernicious, erroneous, or as misrepresenting his or her self-proclaimed position”. The ensuing debates between Thompson and Anderson throughout the following three decades are testament to the levels of rancour: the terrain on which this was fought was consistently the uses and misuses of French theory.⁵¹

Perry Anderson’s commitment to a profoundly continental impulse of the *NLR*’s cultural re-orientation under his editorship was not entirely without precedent or pedigree. His own retrospective analysis of the contrasts between the first and second New Lefts elaborates on this theme.⁵² Anderson was born in 1938 and grew up in China, California and the south-east of Ireland before attending Eton and Oxford. A former editor of the radical *New University* magazine,⁵³ Anderson had considerable private means which assisted his takeover of the *NLR*, initially becoming editor in late 1962 before becoming owner in early 1964. In Anderson’s own terms, the new *NLR*’s programme was to “set out...to introduce the major

⁵¹ See Baert, *The Existential Moment*, p. 168.

⁵² Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism*, pp. 147-49. For Anderson’s reflections on the actual transfer of editorial control of the *NLR* in 1962-3, rejecting the notion of a coup as a ‘legend’, see pp. 135-37 (a more substantial account than that provided in ‘Statement’, *NLR* no. 24, March/April 1964, p. 112). Some more personal thoughts can be found in Anderson’s obituary ‘Diary’ on Edward Thompson, *London Review of Books*, 21 October 1993, pp. 24-5. For a counter viewpoint, in ‘a voice choking with anger’, see E.P. Thompson’s ‘The Peculiarities of the English’, *Socialist Register* 1965, which provides both a history and a denunciation of the Anderson takeover of the *NLR*. NB smart quotation marks here

⁵³ See Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, art and politics since 1940*, (London: Methuen, 1995), p. 112.

intellectual systems of continental socialism in the post-classical epoch into the culture of the British Left”.⁵⁴ This was a fierce task in dismantling their formidable intellectual inheritance. Armed with a blistering sense of arrogance and the sectarianism of youth, the new editorial structure of the *NLR* was formed with Anderson as editor, flanked by Robin Blackburn and Tom Nairn. The only female on the *NLR* board was Juliet Mitchell, a key figure whose work we will return to later in the chapter. From the outset, however, the new *NLR* concentrated on defining itself in opposing terms to its predecessors.⁵⁵ “We really hated the insularity of British culture at the time”, reflected Anderson. “It was self-satisfaction. Provincial, yes, but not the provincialism of a small country, rather than provincialism of a nation which had once ruled a quarter of the world and still had colonies. It was a complacent culture”.⁵⁶

The positioning of Anderson and his peers in their home country, pitting themselves firmly against the apparently reductive forms of Marxism espoused by E.P. Thompson, indicates the formation of a transnational field, a move which allowed for the circulation of these models, paradigms, theories, and methodologies from the more expansive field of Western Marxism. But for the purposes of this study on French theory in Britain, we will focus upon the detachment of theories of Althusser and Lacan from their pre-defined Francophone corpus which facilitated their transposition into a nascent form of British Marxist cultural criticism. This allows us to witness the effects of this circulation, occurring outside of the academy and in a reception field which, as we will see in the later chapters, allowed for the use of these foreign authors and their theories in contexts very far removed from the one in which they

⁵⁴ Anderson, *Arguments Within English Marxism*, p. 149.

⁵⁵ Julia Swindells and Lisa Jardine recount that “it is striking to us that in all the retrospective literature which we shall have occasion to refer to [in *What’s Left? Women In Culture and the Labour Movement*, London: Routledge, 1990, p. 158], reflecting upon the political significance of the arguments between the old and new New Left, Juliet Mitchell is not once mentioned”. Furthermore, Laura Mulvey remarked that The History Group — a late 1960s reading group comprised of Mulvey, artist Mary Kelly, Juliet Mitchell among others — were essentially the wives and girlfriends of the *NLR* editorial committee (interview with author, 08 December 2018).

⁵⁶ Perry Anderson, ‘Conversations With History’, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjTKsRfVM9Q>>, [accessed 31 August 2019].

originally appeared. For the time being, however, Anderson and his editorial board operate within the “dominant” position of the field – particularly important as Anderson is both editor *and* outright owner of the journal, allowing them to set the “rules of the game”.⁵⁷

But in endeavouring to disengage British culture from its “provincialism”, the *NLR* sought to refuse a history they had not made, but that had nevertheless profoundly marked them.⁵⁸ The aggressively international discourse of the new *NLR*, therefore, resulted in a paradox. The journal focused extensively on Britain during 1962-63 – the internationalism was one of perspective rather than coverage, placing Britain in a wider geo-political field of reference amid an attempt to re-visualise it, in some sense, as a foreign land. This interplay between national and international was a hallmark of the *NLR* under Anderson’s editorship, the journal quickly becoming a symbol of the left intelligentsia engaged in a global search for both political and cultural truth. This was not without precedent during the early 1960s. As de-Stalinization had challenged Communism and socialism from within, revealing that the bourgeois were not the only enemies and that the Soviet Union was not necessarily in the vanguard of history, a new universalist mirage presented itself to revolutionary intellectuals who were unable to relinquish Marxism completely: the independence struggles of what was then termed the Third World. A number of historians, including François Furet, Tony Judt, Jacques Julliard, and Edgar Morin, have explained that this was one way of coming to terms with what became known as the “Stalinist truth”: shifting attentions from Russia to the Third

⁵⁷ See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 183.

⁵⁸ “The general editorial conception of the new *NLR* was largely inspired by *Les Temps Modernes*”, quoted in Gregory Elliott, *Perry Anderson: The Merciless Laboratory of History*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 248. Also, according to Robin Blackburn, in the period 1964-66 a “certain diffuse Sartreanist also coloured the magazine’s politics and *Les Temps Modernes* furnished an admired model”. See Robin Blackburn, *A Brief History of New Left Review, 1960-1990*, in *Thirty Years of New Left Review: Index to Numbers 1-184 [1960-1990]*, London: Verso, 1992, pp. v-xi). Interestingly, Lisa Appiagnensi reveals that the founders of *Les Temps Modernes* -- Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre -- named their journal in honour of the 1936 American comedy *Modern Times*, written and directed by its star, Englishman Charlie Chaplin. See Lisa Appiagnensi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, (London: Haus, 2005), p. 82.

World was certainly one of the New Left's ways of bolstering Marxism while condemning both Stalinism and colonialism.⁵⁹

In his role as editor, Perry Anderson inculcated a sweeping dismissal of the themes and outlooks of the initial *NLR* board: out went socialist humanism, agency, and lived experience, to be comprehensively overtaken by a set of entirely new co-ordinates through the systematic introduction of "Western Marxism". This term was described by Anderson as "an entirely new intellectual configuration within the development of historical materialism...[where] Marxism became a type of theory in certain critical respects quite distinct from anything that had preceded it".⁶⁰ Certainly, this distinction was soon evident in the *NLR* as the work of the British Marxist historians were displaced by translations of György Lukács (Hungary), Karl Korsch (Germany), Antonio Gramsci (Italy), Theodor Adorno (Germany), Galvano Della Volpe (Italy), Lucio Colletti (Italy), Lucien Goldmann (Romania), Jean-Paul Sartre (France), Sebastian Timpanaro (Italy), along with the aforementioned Althusser and Lacan. This progressive reshaping of the journal's purview was, in effect, a cogent strategy predicated upon "a fierce hatred of the reigning cultural conformism in Britain", disallowing any tendency to reflect on the native past and insisting on an alternative to "English cultural empiricism".⁶¹ Under the new *NLR*, there was a resounding shift towards the theoretical and international, politically driven by Gramsci and culturally steered by Althusser,⁶² underpinned by the belief that Britain had yet failed to generate any significant revolutionary socialist party in the 20th century, in striking contrast to most major European countries.

Anderson's editorial board had a common outlook -- the arrogance and impertinence that

⁵⁹ As quoted in Danielle Marx-Scouras, *The Cultural Politics of Tel Quel: Literature and the Left in the Wake of Engagement*, (Pennsylvania: UPenn Press, 1996), p. 19.

⁶⁰ Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, (London: New Left Books, 1974), p. 25.

⁶¹ Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism*, (London: New Left Books, 1979), pp. 147-49.

⁶² For a typically comprehensive survey of this period of the *NLR*, see Perry Anderson "Ukania Perpetua", *NLR* 2/125, September/October 2020, pp. 35-107.

comes from an upper-middle class upbringing through public schools and a university education at Oxford – but also a shared aspiration to create a journal which had the seriousness to write in a scholarly yet radical fashion and thoroughly internationalise post-war Anglophone cultural criticism. “Here we were, sitting in London”, reflected Anderson many years later, “and there was this whole European continent with this incredibly rich intellectual tradition of its own, lots going on politically that was fascinating. We needed to bring that back into our culture and make a living set of references for our generation and that was very important...in terms of international commitment, this was one of the most important tasks we set ourselves”.⁶³

The Rediscovery of Europe

From early 1964, the *NLR* adapted a more cogent strategy and form of presentation, coinciding with the beginning of Anderson’s period of ownership of the entire operation. The March/April edition of that year was presented in a striking luminous yellow cover with “new” and “review” in italics with the “left” untouched and the issue number, 24, positioned to the far left of the journal name. Almost the entire top half of the front cover was devoid of print. A white banner ran across just underneath the halfway point declaring “Problems and Strategies for the Labour Party” while further underneath lay a list of five articles and their writers along with mentions of “Scanner/Motifs/Reviews” and “Poetry/Jazz/Cinema”.⁶⁴ The design is both minimalist and modernist and highly effective: there is no doubt that this is a

⁶³ Perry Anderson, “Conversations With History”, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjTKsRfVM9Q>>, [accessed 31 August 2019].

⁶⁴ In this respect, the musical element of the “Motifs” section, with its focus on free jazz, electronic experimentalism and esoteric record labels can be seen as a clear forerunner to *Wire* magazine, first published in 1982 and still running to this day.

serious journal dealing with serious issues but the heavy proportion of colour-to-text suggests an appeal beyond the confines of text-heavy journal publication.

But what was the yield of this more focused and cogent formation to the *NLR*? First, the new journal served up an assembly of intersecting disciplinary exigences operating under the *NLR* umbrella. Some of these were revolutionary in intent, including R.D. Laing on schizophrenia or Régis Debray on Latin America, while others were more overtly political in orientation, for example Conor Cruise-O'Brien writing on the situation in Congo. Much of the work was purely cultural in orientation: indeed, there is a wonderful vibrancy in being able to read Alan Beckett's articles on Sonny Rollins's jazz since 1961, the multi-instrumentalism of Eric Dolphy, or the Delta blues of John Lee Hooker mere pages away from the aforementioned "serious" pieces. This sense of atmospheric connection between progressive music and *NLR* politics belies the claims that the journal was uniformly staid in orientation. In fact, the *NLR*'s internationalism had far more reach than it is given credit for: the journal created a unique space where experimental and avant-garde music could correspond with Western Marxism, perhaps pre-figuring the much-later effects of French theory and popular music that will be surveyed in the final chapter of this thesis.

The concept of "France" also played a significant part in these nascent issues of the new *NLR*. Michael Kustow,⁶⁵ writing in late 1961, offered a robust critique of Roger Planchon's Théâtre de la Cité, insisting that "the artistic and social adventure conducted by Planchon and his troupe offers us the example of a lucid, active response to a specific national and cultural

⁶⁵ Kustow became a deeply influential figure in the arts in Britain through his directorship of the Institute of Contemporary Arts from 1967-1970, associate directorship of the National Theatre, head of arts programming at Channel 4 among many other positions of note. In his autobiographical roman à clef, *Tank* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), he assumed a *nom de plume*, K, to embark upon a discursive journey through his upbringing, education, and cultural and sexual enthusiasms. The novel remains a curious, if rather dated, account of a working life in the culture industries of late 1960s and early 1970s Britain.

situation. This situation is not ours, but in an age when mechanical means of diffusion and reproduction are dissolving clear-cut frontiers between epochs and cultures, the examination of Planchon's French experiment can be valuable for those of us who are trying to come to grips with an analogous situation in this country".⁶⁶ Kustow laments the incapacities of the English language in sufficiently translating the term *Écriture scénique*, a term Planchon uses to determine the concept of "writing...about theatre and cinema", and dolefully declares that we are "faced with the necessity of learning a new technique". Kustow's essay foreshadows two issues which would become paramount to the internationalisation of the *NLR*: one, the ineffectiveness of extant theoretical models to write adequately about culture, and two, the desire to look across the channel for effective models to provide a new methodology which would provide a freedom from analytical dereliction and an inadequate intellectualism founded upon purely empirical models. But for Kustow, as a cultural producer, it was also a question of seeking out fresh theories to deploy against the rigid categories of existing cultural fields, one which we will return to later in Chapter Four's account of the Institute of Contemporary Arts curation of a programme dedicated to forms of French theory in Britain.

But why "France"? The *NLR* undeniably sought a cultural interlocutor - in the form of theoretical rigour - for its programme of cultural renewal, a programme defined on the one hand by the poverty of British intellectual tradition and, on the other, by the richness of the intellectual tradition across the English channel. The concept of "France" appeared repeatedly throughout the journal as an intellectual and theoretical counterpoint to the apparently wretched British traditions; Michael Kustow's appeal to invoke "France" was certainly not an isolated cry throughout the early issues of the *NLR*. During the course of 1962, the review printed translations of a Claude Lévi-Strauss essay on "Crowds" while further articles

⁶⁶ Michael Kustow, "A Theatre For Our Time", *NLR* 1/12, November/December 1961, pp. 45- 58.

appeared the following year authored by the Belgian Marxist economist Ernest Mandel signalling these new, Francophone interests.⁶⁷ This sense of encroaching Francophilia did not go unnoticed; in a perceptive critique which appeared in *International Socialism* in the summer of 1964, Peter Sedgwick identified the strength of the new *NLR* as existing “in its richly documented structural and historical studies of metropolitan and colonial societies, studded with Sartrean logic and Gallicized syntax (there have been occasional attempts to copy the typographical style of *Les Temps Modernes*)”.⁶⁸

But another question remains: what actually triggered the circulation of specific French theoretical texts within the *NLR*? As we will see, the travelling of a work from one national field to another frees up the work to be re-defined and appropriated in the site of reception. In the case of the *NLR*, this appropriation of foreign works was deployed as a model for filling the theoretical gap as diagnosed by Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn in their essays published from 1963 to 1968, to which we will now turn.

The Nairn-Anderson Theses

The Nairn-Anderson theses were a series of essays written by Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn, published in the *NLR* during the early-to-mid 1960s. The principal essays are Tom Nairn, “The British Political Elite”, *NLR*, 1/23 (1964), Perry Anderson, “Origins of the Present Crisis”, *NLR*, 1/24 (1964), Nairn, “The English Working Class”, *NLR*, 1/24 (1964),

⁶⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Crowds”, *NLR* 1/15, May/June 1962; see, for example, “Introduction to Mandel on Belgium”, *NLR* 1/20, Summer 1963.

⁶⁸ Peter Sedgwick, “The Two New Lefts”, reprinted in David Widgery, comp., *The Left in Britain, 1956-1968*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976, pp. 131-53. Anderson agreed with much of Sedgwick’s political criticisms in the ‘Conspectus’, pp. 5-6. But one imagines he found the subsequent parody of his “Sartrean logic and gallicized syntax” less amusing: Sedgwick, ‘Pseud Left Review’, *International Socialism* no. 15, summer 1966, pp. 18-19.

“Anatomy of the Labour Party”, *NLR*, 1/27 and 1/28 (1964). Nairn’s “The English Working Class” doubled as a review of E.P. Thompson’s *The Makings of the English Working Class* (1963), a humanist social history of the working class published by Victor Gollancz. The term “essays” feels inadequate to describe the tenor of these writings; reading more like fierce polemics, Anderson and Nairn’s accounts placed an overriding focus upon Britain’s intellectual evolution. It is within these writings that Anderson and Nairn effected their most sustained intellectual intervention, positioning themselves within a form of “national nihilism”,⁶⁹ challenging and over-powering the extant logics of the English Marxist tradition, as represented by Thompson. These essays are vital as they provide us with the rationale to examine the effect of French theory through the following levels: on a micro level of Nairn and Anderson’s own habitus and strategies, the meso-level of laying the groundwork for an infusion of cultural transposition from western Europe, and on a macro-level in that these essays provide the larger structure which both allow for and legitimise the programme of importing and translating theoretical texts into the Anglosphere.⁷⁰

What were the problems which the Nairn Anderson essays diagnosed? The combination of a rapidly diminishing aristocracy in tandem with a bourgeoisie in ascension resulted in a British culture which was exceptionally traditional. Furthermore, the arrival of a radical movement at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and crucially before Marxism, created significant problems for the British left, resulting in an aversion to theory and intellectualism. And those intellectuals who did engage with the British left towards the end of the nineteenth

⁶⁹ In the foreword to *English Questions* (London: Verso, 1992), Anderson located the source of this phrase as stemming from an argument he had with Isaac Deutscher with the latter accusing Anderson of “national nihilism” due to his refusal to engage with politics “on the ground”. This term is used often by Anderson and his colleague Peter Wollen – see the fifth edition of *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* where Wollen’s alter ego, Lee Russell, deploys the term when speaking about the *NLR* circa 1962. (London: British Film Institute, 2013), p. 527.

⁷⁰ See Larissa Bucholz and Gil Eyal, “From the Sociology of Intellectuals to the Sociology of Interventions”, *Annual Review of Sociology* 36: 117-137. (2010) doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.012809.102625.

century were dismissed as disingenuous and, in fact, were to blame for inculcating a conservative form of reformism within the Labour party. Further effects of this were to be seen within British working-class culture which showcased a paucity of original theoretical thinking, in stark contrast to the forms of Western Marxism emerging elsewhere in Europe. Anderson and Nairn firmly positioned themselves *against* the socialist humanism of E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams whose beliefs were denigrated as mere symptoms of an embedded conservatism, one which was overly sympathetic to fabled notions of “Britain”, and which comprehensively failed to realise a genuine Marxist outlook.

The English ideology was, in summary, a” ‘comprehensive conservatism’⁷¹ – a stultifying compound of “traditionalism” and “empiricism”: one venerated the past, the other abolished the future. Contemporary Britain, Nairn and Anderson continued to argue, consistently bears the stamp of its inheritance, with a social hierarchy that remained deferential, where birth counted for more than ability, where tradition was fetishized - contrasting British moderation with foreign extremism - and where the political and business elite was marked by a patrician aloofness. Accordingly, in a process exacerbated by the success of Empire and sustained by Britain’s immunity from defeat or occupation in the Second World War, the British working class was ‘forced into a corporative mode of existence and consciousness, a class in and for itself’.⁷² Cut off from Europe, divorced from rationalism and the Enlightenment, defeated in the early nineteenth century by joint manoeuvres of the landed gentry and the industrial bourgeoisie, the English working class - so Nairn concludes - “immunised against theory like no other class, by its entire historical experience needed theory like no other.” And, he added, “It still does”.⁷³

⁷¹ Anderson, *English Questions*, p. 41.

⁷² Anderson, *English Questions*, p. 42.

⁷³ Tom Nairn, “The Nature of the Labour Party—1”, *NLR*, 1/27, September/October 1964, pp. 38-65, and “The Nature of the Labour Party—2”, *NLR*, 1/28, November/December 1964, pp. 33-62; reprinted in Anderson and

These essays are remarkable not just for their bristling tone but for setting the groundwork for a form of theory to be introduced, namely the *NLR* and the introduction of Western Marxist thought to Britain. Furthermore, the Nairn-Anderson essays massively undermined the beliefs of E.P. Thompson through an act of remarkably effective self-positioning: in effect, the essays denounce Thompson, castigating him for his insularity, positioning him as intellectually deficient in a fashion which allowed Nairn and Anderson to locate their own position as editors and contributors. This form of “politico-ethical positioning” is merged with intellectual positioning, to demonstrate a more expansive political and intellectual stance, expressed in terms similar to Bourdieu’s call for a “collective intellectual” working towards a form of “scholarship with commitment”.⁷⁴

Against the background of these writings, Nairn and Anderson made it less plausible for *NLR* readers to associate themselves with the viewpoints expressed by Thompson. Within Nairn’s rebuke of Thompson’s *The Makings of the English Working Class* in the pages of *NLR*, historicism and humanism were regarded with hostility. Thompson, and his intellectual positions, were denigrated and dismissed as irrelevant, misleading and politically weak. A further effect of the positioning in the essays is geographical: “France” is the regular comparison against which Britain’s intellectual development consistently fails, a belief underscored by the thrust of the centrepiece essay, “Origins of the Present Crisis”.⁷⁵ This essay sets up a conspicuous comparison between England and France, insisting that the

Blackburn, *Towards Socialism*, pp.159/217, and (as “Anatomy of the Labour Party”) in Robin Blackburn, ed., *Revolution and Class Struggle: A Reader in Marxist Politics*, (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1977), pp. 314-73.

⁷⁴ Baert, “Positioning Theory and Intellectual Interventions”, p. 312.

⁷⁵ “Origins of the Present Crisis”, *NLR*, 1/23, January/February 1964, pp. 26-53; reprinted in Anderson and Blackburn, *Towards Socialism*, pp. 11-52, and (with minor modifications) in *English Questions*, pp. 15-47. All references will be to the last unless otherwise indicated.

“ideological legacy of the English Revolution was almost nil”,⁷⁶ for, being pre-Enlightenment, it embodied none of the radical rationalism that served as a boon to the French revolution, and thus bequeathed to English political culture no revolutionary language or legacy. And at no point in the drawn out transition to modernity was the industrial bourgeoisie compelled to articulate a comprehensive critique of an *ancien régime* and offer a system of modernisation of its own.

1968: Components of the National Culture

While the Nairn-Anderson theses traditionally comprises the work undertaken by both figures during 1963-64, the reach of the theses is, in fact, extended to include Anderson’s own “Components of the National Culture” essay published in 1968. This later essay is an extension of the Nairn-Anderson theses albeit on an exclusively cultural plane: if the earlier essays offer the stark historical diagnosis, this later work essays the contemporary after-effects. Published in the fiftieth issue of the *NLR*,⁷⁷ concurrent with the student rebellion occurring across Europe,⁷⁸ Anderson’s fresh bombardment of the ideological headquarters of

⁷⁶ Anderson, *English Questions*, p. 19.

⁷⁷ *NLR*, 1/50, July/August 1968, pp. 3-27.

⁷⁸ By the mid 1960s, the *NLR* had quickly gravitated towards the student revolutionary milieu, celebrating the 1967 revolt at the London School of Economics as “an important stage in the formation of student consciousness in this country”; the occupation was “an extraordinary achievement. It should not remain unique.” Subsequent student occupations, principally at Hull, Essex, Hornsey Art College, and the LSE again during 1968 resulted in the radicalisation of the student movement. For many key figures at the *NLR*, there would be a significant personal price to pay for their part in the upheaval. Robin Blackburn and Tom Nairn both lost their academic posts, Blackburn as assistant lecturer in sociology at the LSE, Nairn as lecturer in history of art at Hornsey College while Anthony Barnett, Ben Brewster (at the LSE), and David Fernbach (recently recruited to the *NLR* via the agitation at the LSE) were all penalised in different ways. See “Themes”, *NLR* 1/53, May-June 1967, p. 1. This issue of the *NLR* also featured an article entitled “Student Power: What Is To Be

the bourgeoisie opened with a warning: “The task of forging a revolutionary and internationalist political culture in this country has always been a central preoccupation of the Review...if the present stirrings of a revolutionary consciousness are not to relapse into new versions of reformism, the Left must prove itself capable of fighting the enemy both on the ideological front and in mass struggle”.⁷⁹ Thus the main thrust of the “Components...” essay can be rapidly expounded. Anderson’s self-defined remit was “a genuinely revolutionary critique’ of the national intellectual culture which he diagnosed as having an “absent centre”:

Britain – alone of Western societies – never produced a classical sociology unlike, again, France which could call on Emile Durkheim to synthesise Marxism and the working class movement in a social science format. The interplay between theory, philosophy, politics and political economy had generated indigenous Marxisms in Continental Europe yet Britain deviated from this and produced no important Marxist thinker.⁸⁰

While Anderson’s motivation may have been framed through the invocation of Lenin and Gramsci, his more immediate inspiration was Louis Althusser, whose recasting of historical materialism supplied his interpretation of the distinction between sociological and Marxist concepts of social totality: overdetermination and contradiction, and to which we will return later in the chapter. This claim saw France again deployed as the counterpoint as Jean-Yves Calvez’s *La Pensée de Karl Marx* provided the humanist interpretation against which Louis Althusser developed his theoretical practice in the early part of the 1960s. Britain had to make do with Sir Isaiah Berlin’s “haplessly ignorant” *Karl Marx: His Life and*

Done?”, which was authored by three members of the *NLR* board: Anthony Barnett, Gareth Stedman Jones and Tom Wengraf.

⁷⁹ Anderson, *English Questions*, p. 59.

⁸⁰ Anderson, *English Questions*, p. 60.

Environment.⁸¹ The 1930s had “vaccinated British culture against Marxism to this day” and while Western Marxism had developed and flourished on the Continent, “England remained unaffected”.

“The British bourgeoisie from the outset renounced its intellectual birthright,” continued Anderson:

It refused ever to put society as a whole in question. A deep, instinctive aversion to the very category of the totality marks its entire trajectory. It never had to recast society as a whole, in a concrete historical practice. It consequently never had to rethink society as a whole, in abstract theoretical reflection. Empirical, piece-meal intellectual disciplines corresponded to humble, circumscribed social action. Nature could be approached with audacity and speculation: society was treated as if it were an immutable second nature. . . . The cultural limitations of bourgeois reason in England were thus politically rational: the *ultima ratio* of the economy founded both. The deadly mix of “‘podsnappery’ and ‘gradgrindery’ served to inscribe that aristocratic combination of ‘traditionalism’ and ‘empiricism’ which functioned as the hegemonic ideology of a Victorian England wherein capitalist aristocracy and bourgeoisie gradually melded to form the ruling bloc.⁸²

⁸¹ Anderson, *English Questions*, p. 66.

⁸² Anderson, *English Questions*, p. 68.

In essence, Anderson creates a polarity between Continental Europe and Britain through his identification of the basic anomalies of the national culture -- the absence of a classical sociology and its concomitant: the absence of Marxism. Anderson finishes with a damning analysis of philosophy, political and social theory, historiography, economics, psychology, aesthetics, psychoanalysis, anthropology, and literary criticism. Indeed, his most strident criticisms were reserved for the Oxford philosophy of Gilbert Ryle and J.L. Austin:

The linguistic philosophy of the forties and fifties represented a deliberate renunciation of the traditional vocation of philosophy in the West. General ideas about man and society had been the hallmark of all the great philosophers of the past. . . . English philosophy after the Second World War systematically rejected the very idea of intellectual innovation. . . . The cult of common sense accurately indicates the role of linguistic philosophy in England. It functions as an anaesthetic ideology, blotting out the very memory of an alternative order of thought.

But as E.P. Thompson argued, the essays were strengthened by an implicit model of revolutionary and intellectual excellence based on the no-less-specific experiences of “Other Countries”, notably France.⁸³ Indeed, through writing these essays, Nairn and Anderson created a new intellectual climate where a number of new international positions could emerge within the *NLR* field: Russian Formalism and Constructivism were all presented in the journal along with the varying Marxisms of Gramsci, Lukács, Korsch and Althusser who arrived with Lacan as his own primary influence at that time. These new

⁸³ Quoted in “Barrington Moore, Perry Anderson and English social development”, Richard Johnson, *Culture, Media Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, Stuart Hall et al eds. (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1980).

figures were seen generating a vital alternative to the “bland philistinism” of social democracy and were put to work, filling the intellectual vacancy created by the Nairn-Anderson theses which set out the struggle in both historical and historiographical terms and allowed for the field to be extended outwards, to incorporate new foreign actors and relations. The value of the importation of these theories was to be located in their capacity to speak to the theoretical void in British Marxism. But as we will see in the later chapters, the reach of Althusser and Lacan extended far beyond this initial brief. It is important, therefore, to trace their discovery, their suitability and the dynamics involved in this extension of the field as Althusser and Lacan form the background to the subsequent movement of French theory across the channel from Paris to London.

The Emergence of Louis Althusser in the *New Left Review*

At this point in our study, we have witnessed the conditions under which the *NLR* emerged and defined itself as a site for importing western Marxist thought. While the journal introduced a range of theorists during this period, we will concentrate on the emergence of Louis Althusser for a number of reasons. Firstly, Althusser is a hugely important figure in French theory’s journey in Britain. His work not only provided the theoretical underpinnings for the *NLR*’s own form of “theoretical practice” but also served as a ballast for much of the work undertaken by the BFI Education Department and *Screen* journal, as we will see in the following chapters. Althusser came to represent French theory in Britain in a number of ways: his work was seen as difficult, uncompromising, and even “Stalinist”.⁸⁴ Yet his

⁸⁴ Alan Lovell – who, until his death in June 2021, was surely the only surviving person to have served on each of the boards of *Universities and Left Review*, *New Left Review*, and *Screen* – repeatedly referred to Althusser as a “Stalinist” figure during our interview on 12 January 2021.

importation paved the way for further French theorists, particularly Jacques Lacan, to be introduced to British left-culture and the figure of Althusser casts a long shadow over the entirety of this thesis.

Why was Althusser deemed suitable by the *NLR*? This section will elucidate how the project of French theory in the *NLR* was spearheaded by the selection, presentation and translation of the works of Althusser, whose works were relatively unknown, and certainly untranslated, in Britain until the *NLR* presented his essay on “Contradiction and overdetermination” in the January/February 1967 edition of the journal⁸⁵. Althusser was, at the time, deeply influenced by the earlier works of Lacan, the secondary figure in the *NLR*’s introduction of French theory to the British intellectual field and a very important figure for later in our study. “Marx’s philosophical anti-humanism...provides an understanding of the tactics to be adopted towards [existing ideologies]”, declared Althusser in 1963, in a passage translated into English by Ben Brewster at the end of that decade, “...and Marxists know that there can be no tactic that do not depend on a strategy — and no strategy that does not depend on theory.”⁸⁶ As we will see, the *NLR* was to be the vehicle while theory was the vector for a revolutionary, Marxist culture while Althusser’s strategies of theoretical practice were to supply the engine.

From 1967 to 1971, the *NLR* and its publishing offshoot New Left Books [NLB] translated and published a series of essays and books by Althusser: the January-February 1967 issue of the *NLR* presented Althusser’s “Contradiction and overdetermination” essay, framed with an

⁸⁵ Ben Brewster, “Presentation of Althusser”, *NLR* 1/41, January/February 1967.

⁸⁶ Louis Althusser, “Marxism and Humanism”, in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, (London: New Left Books, 1971), p. 241.

explanatory essay by translator Ben Brewster;⁸⁷ Althusser's "Freud and Lacan" essay was translated and published in the May-June 1969 *NLR*;⁸⁸ while NLB published translations of *Pour Marx*, Althusser's 1965 essay collection, a later collection entitled *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, and the aforementioned collaborative work *Reading Capital* between 1970 and 1971. Each of these works were translated by Ben Brewster, a member of the *NLR* editorial board.⁸⁹ The *NLR* also published Jacques Lacan's essay "The Mirror Stage", presented and translated by Jean Roussel, in the September/October 1968 issue of the journal.⁹⁰

These presentations and translations demonstrate the "attaching of a label", in Bourdieu's terms, which "finishes the work [of the circulation of ideas]".⁹¹ Within these instances of presenting Althusser and Lacan in the *NLR*, we receive not just Louis Althusser, but Louis Althusser with a preface by his translator within the *NLR*, Ben Brewster. This is an act of the transfer of symbolic capital, demonstrating that the preface-writer has the ability to recognise new – or, in this instance, un-translated – talent, and the generosity to present his work to a new generation of readers where his influence is to be discerned. Althusser's own acknowledgement of Lacan as a significant influence on his work during the period, as

⁸⁷ "Overdetermination and contradiction" was originally written by Althusser between June and July of 1962 and published in *La Pensée* as "Contradiction et surdetermination (Notes pour un recherche)," *La Pensée* 106 1962, pp. 3–22.

⁸⁸ "Freud and Lacan" was originally published as "Freud et Lacan," *La Nouvelle Critique* 161–162, 1964–1965, pp. 88–108

⁸⁹ When I asked Ben Brewster how he first came across Althusser, he recalled that "the first person who drew my attention to Althusser, in fact, was Tom Nairn, who had read Althusser's essays in *La Pensée* before the publication of *Pour Marx*". Email interview with Ben Brewster, 1 March 2020.

⁹⁰ Roussel is a mysterious figure. No one, including Ben Brewster, could recall who he was when I interviewed them for this thesis. I suggested to Brewster that Roussel could have been a pseudonym as was common practice when writing for the *NLR* during this period. Brewster's response was "I'm afraid I can't be of much help to you -- I simply don't remember. I have the ghost of a memory (but I wouldn't put much trust in it) that the translation was not commissioned by *NLR* but was offered to the magazine on spec by the translator. And if the name is a pseudonym, I don't think it is one that was suggested or imposed by the editors. But that's all, and I also don't remember any further contacts with the translator, whatever his name was". Email interview, 28 February 2020.

⁹¹ Bourdieu, "The Social Conditions...", p. 224.

evidenced by the “Freud and Lacan” essay title, signifies a further transfer of symbolic capital: Althusser’s consecration of Lacan, through the essay, is mirrored when the essay crosses the border into a different national space. The *NLR*’s approach to the presentation of travelling theories contrasts, as we will see, with that of *Screen* journal the following decade. The *NLR* does not suddenly present Althusser or Lacan as singular authority figures to be obeyed, nor are they introduced as purely exercises in bibliography. Althusser and Lacan are presented within a number of contexts: Brewster’s presentation of Althusser in 1967 implies that the importance of introducing this foreign author is a necessity in order to illuminate a way against both “Marxist humanism” and “Stalinist dogmatism”, and Althusser’s work “represents one approach to such a scientific Marxism” which will bring Marxist theory “into line with contemporary conditions”.⁹² A year later, the *NLR* editorial board announced that Lacan was introduced as his work is “widely influential outside his own discipline”, and “it is time it received its due international recognition”.⁹³

These prefaces firmly situate Althusser and Lacan within the programme of theoretical transposition being undertaken by the *NLR* during this time and offer a consecration of their work through this presentation. But the reference in the Lacan introduction to his work’s influence outside its discipline is key for our study: Althusser, and especially Lacan, were now being imported in a manner removed from their immediate concerns. The presentation of Lacan’s work is in an entirely different context, with little in common with the French psychoanalytic community and even further from any form of psychoanalytic practice. The Althusser and Lacan imported by the *NLR* was, therefore, no longer the intellectual property of Francophone Marxists and psychoanalysts but of the *NLR* whose appropriation of these

⁹² Ben Brewster, “Presentation of Althusser”, *NLR* 1/41, January/February 1967, p. 14.

⁹³ “Editorial”, *NLR* 1/51 September/October 1968, p. 4.

authors serve to determine the nature of their further use within a British context. We will explore this more systematically in Chapter Four with regards to Lacan and *Screen* journal but, for now, we will maintain our focus upon the import of Althusser.

The Structuralist Movement

Althusser's theoretical advance was concomitant with the rise of structuralism in France, an ascent which can be traced back to the late 1950s: Roland Barthes's path-breaking *Mythologies* appeared in 1957, stylishly appending steak and chips, wrestling and Greta Garbo to the realm of semiology.⁹⁴ This was followed by Lévi-Strauss's *Structural Anthropology* in 1958 which annexed social practices to a form of semiological analysis. The relative success of these interventions, deploying structuralist techniques to a range of new disciplines, ensured further groundbreaking work: Christian Metz offered a similar process for the cinema and Barthes repeated the trick for fashion and literature.⁹⁵ Lévi-Strauss's publication of *La Pensée sauvage* took these interventions further with its crushing critique of Sartre but this, again, was not in isolation. French theorists were rushing to escape other allegedly pernicious influences, mainly that of Hegel, but Lévi-Strauss used Saussure to free himself from the Hegelian dialectic; Gilles Deleuze deployed Nietzsche as his way out of the Hegelian maze in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*⁹⁶ and Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* also used Nietzsche as a form of "structuralist" hero within the text.⁹⁷ There was a commonality to each of these publications: an attack on humanism and historicism while the

⁹⁴ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1957).

⁹⁵ See Christian Metz's "Le cinéma: langue ou langage?" which appeared in 1964, in the journal *Communications*. See *Communications* 4 (1964), pp. 52-90. This issue also includes Roland Barthes's "Éléments de sémiologie".

⁹⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962).

⁹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

Marxisms of Sartre, Henri Lefebvre, and Lucien Goldmann were in the dock, charged with representing an anachronistic form of thought.

This, therefore, was the intellectual sphere into which Louis Althusser emerged in the early 1960s: a vibrant, competitive arena fuelled by structuralist concepts and the intoxication of freeing oneself from existing orthodoxies, not least the concept of the human subject.

Althusser himself annexed Lévi-Strauss as more of an ally to Marxism than Sartre. While there was no true uniform structuralist position, as Elisabeth Roudinesco insists, it was “an intellectual tendency” and one whose success was “without precedent in the history of the intellectual life of [France]”, even extending to the manager of the French football team who announced a structuralist form of tactics to be employed to ensure the team’s success.⁹⁸

Furthermore, changes in the institutional structure of the academic field in France contributed to this sense of new horizons opening up; a whole new range of disciplines, such as sociology and media and communications studies, semiotics and psychoanalysis, were being established and many new producers had to be accommodated in a discourse where theoretical projects delineating new intellectual orientations met with high demand.⁹⁹ One can also point to a new economy of symbolic production which permitted the diffusion of theoretical knowledge well beyond academic circles: the publishing houses Gallimard, Le Seuil and Les Editions Minuit all played a decisive role along with the appearance of intellectual organs, in particular the emergence of the *Tel Quel* journal as a site for politically-engaged *écriture*. The emergence of these outlets ensured that theory in France was geared to impact upon fields beyond the realm of academic debate and register with a public in search of intellectual orientation in the fields of theory, art, and politics.

⁹⁸ François Dosse, *The History of Structuralism: Volume 1*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. xix. The French football team were not successful in any way during the 1960s, which indicates any structuralist-tactical crossover was not a success.

⁹⁹ See Régis Debray, *Writers, Teachers, Intellectuals* (London: Verso, 1980) for more on these changes in the French university system.

Structuralism, as a movement, had begun to cross a different border, that from Paris to the USA, during this period, marked by the publication in 1966 of a Yale French Studies edition devoted entirely to writers working under the “structuralist” banner.¹⁰⁰ Structuralism formed, in Bourdieu’s terms, a *theoretical trademark* formed within a pre-existing intellectual tradition.¹⁰¹ But Althusser was not part of the structuralist invasion of America: the depth of his influence and reception was minimal in comparison to his impact in Britain. Althusser did not appear at the famous Johns Hopkins conference on The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man in 1966 and, in Philip Armstrong’s term, is “effaced from French theory [in America] and doesn’t really enter into the American scene at all”.¹⁰² This effacement is due to the political context into which Althusser entered the Anglosphere: a thoroughly Marxist one, through the *NLR*, which had no real corollary in an American context. For the editorial board at the *NLR*, eager to locate a form of theory to import to Britain, Althusser, therefore, had huge appeal: both through his role at a superior institution such as ENS but also in his position as the editor of the *Théorie* series at the Maspero publishing house, he was able to commission himself to publish his most influential essays during this period which were compiled as *Pour Marx*, published in 1965 and reviewed very favourably by Eric Hobsbawm in the *Times Literary Supplement* the following year. Hobsbawm remarked that “whether this

¹⁰⁰ See *Yale French Studies* 36/37, 1966. Geoffrey Hartman’s “The Anglo-American Adventure” provided a lucid introduction to the term for American readers, situating it as a “complex and many-faceted intellectual movement, born in Russia and Switzerland, confirmed in Prague, sowing a wild and fertile seed in France, but respecting the separation of disciplines and keeping to America”, p. 148. More recent studies reject this genealogy of French theory, and insist it emerges from cybernetics study in the 1950s. See Lydia H. Liu, “The Cybernetic Unconscious: Rethinking Lacan, Poe, and French Theory”, *Critical Inquiry*, Volume 36, No. 2, (Winter 2010), pp. 288-320.

¹⁰¹ The majority of works which were later counted as the primary programmatic statements of structuralism were published in French in 1966. During this year there appeared Jacques Lacan’s *Écrits* and Michel Foucault’s *Les Mots et les choses*, each of which sold over 100,000 copies in France. This pivotal year also saw the publication of Émile Benveniste’s *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, A.J. Greimas’ *Sémantique structurale*, Pierre Macherey’s *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire* and, at short intervals over the following two years, Jacques Derrida’s *Grammatologie*, Gilles Deleuze’s commentary on structuralism, *Différence et Répétition*, and Julia Kristeva’s *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. For more, see Angermüller, *Why There Is No Post-Structuralism In France*, p. 69.

¹⁰² Lejeune, Mignon & Pirenne, *French Theory and American Art*, p. 224.

approach to Marx is the most fruitful may be doubted. That it stimulates and often illuminates is certain. At the very least it illustrates the remarkable revival of serious intellectual activity within Marxism and more particularly within communist parties once rigidly confined in the dogmatic framework of the Stalin era”.¹⁰³

Closer Readings of Althusser

Hobsbawm’s critique was certainly perceptive and Althusser’s writings spoke directly to concerns already highlighted by Nairn and Anderson. The introduction to *Pour Marx* speaks in terms familiar to the *NLR* editorial board as Althusser recounts the “pitiful history” of French philosophy and its “incredible history and lack of culture” lamenting how the French Communist Party was born into this “theoretical vacuum”.¹⁰⁴ This can be read as sympathetic towards the form of “national nihilism”, deployed by Perry Anderson throughout his “Components...” essay. Althusser further offers a definition of theory as a form of practice which is “essential to the work of Marx [and] simultaneously the work of theoretical elaboration of Marxist philosophy” and one which

enables us to see clearly in Marx, to distinguish science from ideology, to deal with the difference between them within the historical relation between them and to deal with the discontinuity of the epistemological break within the continuity of a historical process; a theory which makes it possible to distinguish a word from a concept, to distinguish the existence or non-existence of a word concept behind a word, to discern the existence of a

¹⁰³ Eric Hobsbawm, “The Structure of Capital”, *Times Literary Supplement*, London December 15, 1966, p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, (London: New Left Books, 1971) pp. 25-6.

concept by a word's function in the theoretical discourse, to define the nature of a concept by its function in the problematic, and thus by the location it occupies in the place of "theory"; this theory which alone makes possible an authentic reading of Marx's writings, a reading which is both epistemological and historical, this theory is in fact Marxist philosophy itself.¹⁰⁵

This "authentic reading" hinges upon two key concepts: the symptomatic reading and the epistemological break. In Martin Jay's terms, a denigration of vision began to emerge: Althusser signalled this new practice of reading known as "symptomatic reading", deploying terminology loaned from Lacan and which reflected a type of engagement which reflected more on the absences in the text rather than the presences.¹⁰⁶ The analysis of gaps, silences, and lacunae represented this denigration of vision: previous readers had *failed to see* an "essential reality". Sight requires structural conditions, the discursive conditions and a knowledge of the entire range of possibilities of what is latent and what is manifest. Althusser also borrowed the concept of the epistemological shift from Bachelard but increased the effect of this rupture by re-terming it an "epistemological break".¹⁰⁷ Whereas Bachelard had identified this notion in quantum mechanics, signifying the gap between scientific knowledge and our perceptual understanding, Althusser used this split to demonstrate the difference between the young Marx, one who was thoroughly Hegelian in orientation, and the mature Marx whose approach was more scientific and became known as the "epistemological shift".

¹⁰⁵ Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 39.

¹⁰⁶ See Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, (California: University of California Press, 1994).

¹⁰⁷ Elliot cites the term "epistemological break" along with "symptomatic reading", "overdetermination", "determination in the last instance", "ideological state apparatuses", "class struggle in theory" and "imaginary relations" as examples of Althusserian concepts that "remain inscribed in life and history". Gregory Elliott, "Louis Pierre Althusser Obituary", *Radical Philosophy* 57, Spring 1991.

This discontinuity further allowed Althusser to perform his own break with the Stalinist standard which saw everything as determined by economic relationships. Within this re-casting of Marxist thought as a scientific field, meaning was a “function of the position of each of the elements of the mode of production”. This enabled the superstructure to be acknowledged as relatively autonomous, an intervention which could rescue the socialist scaffold of the USSR — its “relative autonomy...could, explain quite simply, in theory, that the socialist infrastructure could, for the most part, evolve without being harmed during this period of errors affecting the superstructure”.¹⁰⁸ In Althusser’s compelling new reading, a plurality of structures emerged: “there is no general history, but only specific structures of historicity...the specificity of each of these times and of each of these histories — in other words, their relative autonomy and independence — is based on a certain type of articulation within the whole”.¹⁰⁹

Secondly, Althusser offered a rigorous solution to the question of determination and a tightly argued rationale for the practice of theory, or “theoretical practice”, as it came to be called. But within these essays, not only does Althusser prescribe the procedure for his form of theoretical practice, his words can be seen to legitimise the work of the *NLR*, and later *Screen*, in that they are engaged in a form of theoretical practice which provides an intellectual space where analysis of a cultural form can be undertaken with the knowledge that it can be later located within the divisions of capital and labour along with the ideologies which are implicit in these formations. As the superstructure has a relative autonomy under Althusser’s Marxism, the work undertaken by journals such as the *NLR* allow the journal’s authors to produce detailed critiques of culture without having to relate it back to the

¹⁰⁸ Dosse, *The History of Structuralism Volume 1*, p. 304.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

economic base, at least until it is necessary to do so. Thirdly, Althusser's Marxism allowed *NLR* writers — many of whom worked, or were about to work, within academic institutions — to legitimise these roles under the notion that their political interventions within the institutions were indirectly but ultimately concomitant with wider class struggles in society where the institution existed. Fourthly, the publication of the Althusser and Lacan essays allowed the actors working for the journal to position themselves as the frontier of not just Western Marxist thought but also at a disciplinary frontier: Althusser provided a reading method which assimilated psychoanalysis which was not yet an academic discipline in Britain. Freud and Marx, termed as “masters of suspicion”,¹¹⁰ were arguably two of the most influential figures in twentieth century western thought and the idea of a Marxist psychoanalysis or a psychoanalytic Marxism fit the bill for the intellectual vacancies diagnosed by “Components of the National Culture”. In annexing Lacan for this re-reading of Marx, Althusser had performed an intervention of considerable originality and audacity. He opened up Marxism to the field of psychoanalysis and provided a contingency between Althusser's return to Marx and Lacan's own return to Freud:

Not in vain did Freud sometimes compare the critical reception of his discovery with the upheavals of the Copernican Revolution. Since Copernicus, we have known that the human subject, the economic, political or philosophical ego is not the ‘centre’ of history - and even, in opposition to the Philosophers of the Enlightenment and to Hegel, that history has no ‘centre’ but possesses a structure which has no necessary ‘centre’ except in ideological misrecognition. In turn, Freud has discovered for us that the real

¹¹⁰ This phrase was coined by Paul Ricoeur as *école du soupçon* in *Freud and Philosophy* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1965).

subject, the individual in his unique essence, has not the form of an ego, centred on the 'ego' on 'consciousness' or on 'existence'...that the human subject is de-centred, constituted by a structure which has no 'centre' either, except in the imaginary mis recognition of the 'ego', i.e. in the ideological formations in which it 'recognizes' itself.¹¹¹

The importation of Althusser and Lacan, therefore, was not just for superficial reference purposes but part of a wider programme of research which involved the crossing of disciplinary and geographic boundaries through a process of not so much hybridizing different theoretical traditions but a process much more aggressive: the over-riding of England's abject lack of theory. Brewster's initial presentation of Althusser pre-dates Anderson's "Components..." essay by over a year; the concerns expressed in the latter text did not suddenly emerge in 1968 but were reflective of the wider outlook of the *NLR* during this time. Brewster's presentation offers an account of Althusser's theoretical lineage, classifying his work among the "formalist aesthetics of the Russian school of the '20's, structuralist linguistics, Michel Foucault's histories of ideas, and Jacques Lacan's linguistic psychoanalysis" and defining it as focusing upon the "development of the 'theoretical problematic'".¹¹² The particular essay published by the *NLR*, "Overdetermination and contradiction", is chosen as it "proposes a radical break with [Marx's] earlier humanism...the confusion of humanists is due to a superficial reading of the later works." While Brewster's preface celebrates Althusser's "enormous impact upon the French intellectual left in the last two or three years", Althusser was disengaged from his institutional context and presented as

¹¹¹ Louis Althusser, "Freud and Lacan", translated by Ben Brewster, *NLR* 1/55 May/June 1969, pp. 64-5.

¹¹² Ben Brewster, Presentation of Althusser, *NLR* 1/41, January/February 1967, pp. 11-14.

a canonical and urgent figure engaging in a debate over universal questions in the international human and social sciences.

Juliet Mitchell and “Women: The Longest Revolution”

As we will now see, Althusser’s essay on “Contradiction and overdetermination” was already imported and embedded by Juliet Mitchell as the basis of her essay “Women: The Longest Revolution” which, curiously, appeared in the previous issue of the *NLR*. This is important for our study as it demonstrates a very early use of French theory as a methodological structure for a nascent discipline, that of women’s studies. Up to this juncture, the *NLR* has been content to historicise and, to borrow an Althusserian term, problematize but failed to offer fresh “theory” of their own. The solution to Nairn and Anderson’s essays has been to seek theoretical impulse from western Europe while resisting any temptation to conjure “theory” from within the *NLR* itself. Juliet Mitchell, however, goes against the grain and, as we will see, borrows Althusser’s concepts to describe the unity of woman’s condition as a “specific structure” which itself is a “unity of different elements” – therefore it is always “overdetermined”.¹¹³ Mitchell’s work places her in an unusual position within the *NLR* field: while the editorial board are primarily concerned with translation and presentation of foreign authors, itself a dominant position which wields most of the cultural capital, Mitchell is in a subordinate position, not simply due to her gender, or her position as the only female on the editorial board, but through a combination of these aligned with her challenge to the *rules of the game*. Mitchell positions herself as a theorist, writing on the legitimisation of the women’s movement within the *NLR*, engaging in a form of classification struggle which upsets the orthodoxy of the journal. As early as 1963, Mitchell – the sole female member of

¹¹³ Juliet Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution”, *NLR* 1/40, November/December 1966, pp 10-37.

the *NLR* board -- suggested writing about women for the journal yet her response occasioned a silence.¹¹⁴ This intervention is indicative of the sociological antagonism which becomes a hallmark of the uses of French theory in later chapters, particularly during the *Screen* journal era of the mid-1970s. As we will see, Mitchell is challenged from within her own field as another member of the editorial board criticises her essay within the *NLR* itself, a “conservation strategy”, in Bourdieu’s terms, in the face of Mitchell’s “subversion strategies”.¹¹⁵

But, as we have determined, the Althusser imported into the *NLR* was not the property of French Marxism nor was it the property of the male members of the *NLR* editorial board. While Juliet Mitchell may have encountered “silence” when electing to research the woman’s condition in 1963, the fruits of her research, evident in her essay “Women: The Longest Revolution”, published in the November/December 1966 issue of the *NLR*, occasioned largely internal silence with one lone voice of outrage. Mitchell deploys “overdetermination” – explained more fully in a footnote to her essay – to describe the unity of woman’s condition as a specific structure which itself is a unity of different elements, and therefore is always “overdetermined.”¹¹⁶

To analyse this hugely influential piece of writing in more detail, Mitchell essays the problem of “woman’s condition” as one which has been recorded in socialist literature as “predominantly economist in emphasis, stressing her simple subordinations to the institutions of private property” where the woman’s “biological status” is the basis for her “weakness as a

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Lynne Segal, “Psychoanalysis and politics: Juliet Mitchell then and now”, *Radical Philosophy* 103, Sep/Oct 2000.

¹¹⁵ See David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 124.

¹¹⁶ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution”, pp 10-37.

producer” and “importance as a possession”. This framework is “evolutionist” and avoids a description of a socialist future other than “asserting that socialism will involve the liberation of women as one of its constituent ‘moments.’” The inadequacy of this requires a solution: this, according to Mitchell, is to be found in “differentiating woman’s condition...into its separate structures” which form a “complex...unity” and because this unity is the product of differing structures, “it is always ‘overdetermined’”. Mitchell classifies four structures: Production, Reproduction, Sex, and Socialization of children. These make up the complex unity but Mitchell warns that each separate structure may reach “a different ‘moment’ at any given historical time” and goes on to examine each structure separately. Mitchell quotes Althusser directly in declaring that it is only in the West that “an authentic liberation of women can be envisaged...for this to occur, there must be a transformation of all the structures into which they are integrated, and an ‘*unité de rupture*’”.

While other theorists are evident as influential in the text, including Marcuse and de Beauvoir, the framework for Mitchell’s essay is derived from Althusser’s essay. Within this text, we witness the creative re-appropriation of a French theoretical text in a British context, as a text by a foreign author is deployed to provide theoretical scaffold underpinning a vanguardist movement. Mitchell’s use of Althusser provides a form of intellectual legitimation within the *NLR* field as a robust theoretical framework contributes to the definition and maintenance of a theoretical strategy or practice among her peers at the journal. However, this did not shield her from the stentorian disparagement of some of the members of the editorial board.¹¹⁷ The following issue of *NLR* (41, January/February 1967) – the same issue which featured the presentation of Althusser -- featured a frontal attack on

¹¹⁷ According to the artist Mary Kelly, the women’s liberation movement was considered by the *NLR* editorial board to be a “deviation from the real struggle”. See Mary Kelly, *A Secret Agreement: An Era Defined* by the Events of 1968, <<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/talk/mary-kelly-conversation-hans-ulrich-obrist/secret-agreement-era-defined>>, [accessed 25 May 2021].

Mitchell by Quintin Hoare, then operating as managing editor of the journal.¹¹⁸ While Hoare, somewhat patronisingly, begins by claiming that “there is clearly nothing wrong with Juliet Mitchell’s intentions”, he continues to criticise her “basic assumptions and her method” as “very wrong”, denigrating her decision to “not provide an historical narrative of women’s position” as one which prevents Mitchell from “realizing that the whole historical development of women has been within the family” and “any discussion of the position of women which does not start from the family as the mode of her relation with society becomes abstract”. The contrasting concepts of “history” as opposed to the “abstract” are the primary counterpoints in Hoare’s argument against Mitchell. But at that moment, Mitchell clearly saw herself as tackling “women’s history” and, crucially for our study, from the viewpoint of an Althusserian Marxism. It is precisely the linear concept of women’s history which creates the problem which Mitchell intends to upend through using Althusser’s framework, allowing for a radical plurality of structures which undermine the bourgeois concept of “the family”. Hoare rejects Mitchell’s refusal of a totalizing synthesis, a requirement dismissed by Mitchell as a “Hegelian demand”—therefore, not in line with Althusser’s epistemological break away from a Hegelian form of Marxism. Hoare criticises Mitchell’s account for not being historical when history is the problematic in itself.

The struggle between Mitchell and Hoare represents the highly-charged dynamics of the field and serves as a surrogate for the wider forms of intellectual positioning occurring within the sphere of the *NLR*. Hoare, perhaps unwittingly, represents precisely the type of historical orthodoxy which Mitchell is attempting to displace using techniques purloined from Althusser. It is, however, interesting to note that Mitchell’s use of Althusser for her essay, and Hoare’s intemperate response, occasioned no other mention within the *NLR* – when E.P.

¹¹⁸ Quintin Hoare, “On Juliet Mitchell’s Women: The Longest Revolution”, *NLR* 1/41 January/February 1967.

Thompson later attacked Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn for their supposed Althusserianism he ignored Mitchell's place in the debate, as did Anderson and Nairn in their responses.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, there was no mention of Mitchell's previous use of Althusser during Ben Brewster's "Presentation of Althusser" in the following issue. The scope of Mitchell's essay in the *NLR* was both formidable and ground-breaking. Yet this was a radical example of precisely the type of theorising the *NLR* had been demanding, one which demonstrated a model of intellectual excellence marked by a deep engagement with and deployment of contemporary Francophone Marxism. "It was Althusser's emphasis on the importance of ideology that I found 'most useful'," according to Mitchell. "[It was] his definition of it as 'the way we live ourselves in the world' seemed to me an insistent dimension in any analysis of women. It was one strand that led me forward to my subsequent interest in psychoanalysis".

But what does this argument tell us about the effects of deploying French theory even at this early stage in the development of the corpus? Firstly, Hoare's attack is a precursor to many later attacks on the deployment of these concepts from French thought. Hoare inadvertently highlights the radical nature of the theories simply through his hostile response to the use of the theory: he advocates an account which is steeped in historicism and accepted notions of lived experience. In depicting these conflicts in terms of those who defend "orthodoxy" against those who advocate "heresy", Bourdieu insists that this fundamental structure of conflict is paradigmatic in the cultural field. The orthodox/heterodox opposition is a struggle for the "monopoly of cultural legitimacy".¹²⁰ This eruption of conflict within the *NLR*

¹¹⁹ Gregory Elliott remarks that there is a wider neglect of feminist issues which can be gauged from the consultation of the *NLR* index for the period 1960 – 1990. See Elliott, *Perry Anderson: The Merciless Laboratory of History*, p. 287. See also Donald Sassoon, "The Silences of New Left Review", in *Politics and Power* 3, 1981, pp. 242-45. This neglect began to be remedied from the 1980s onwards, with the establishment of the New Left Books/Verso "Questions for Feminism" series of publications.

¹²⁰ Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, p. 124.

demonstrates the rupturing effect of the deployment of Althusser as it challenges the legitimacy of the dominant group – Quintin Hoare, representing the male editorial board members – to define the standards of the field. The contradiction in terms is starkly highlighted as during the course of a single issue, Louis Althusser is consecrated through his presentation by Ben Brewster; yet, on the other hand, Juliet Mitchell is denigrated for *using* Louis Althusser in her essay.

But this also demonstrates how the effect of French theory was much stronger and much more vivid when activated by a writer, such as Juliet Mitchell in this instance, rather than simply through its presentation and translation. The impact of Mitchell's essay was immense *outside* the field of the *NLR*; picked up by the emerging women's movement, it was pirated all over the world as a pamphlet,¹²¹ later rewriting it as *Woman's Estate* which was published by Penguin in 1971.¹²² The minimalist aesthetics – shorn of graphics, art or any form of visual imagery -- of the *NLR* made the article easily photocopyable. The A5 size of the journal further meant that simple mechanical reproduction of the essay could occur and greatly facilitate the movement of the essay through postal means. Finally, Mitchell's deployment of Althusser was not overt – his own “Contradiction and overdetermination” essay occasioned a brief, simple and uncomplicated summary as a footnote in Mitchell's original *NLR* essay –

¹²¹ “To my joy it was pirated as a pamphlet and in those days it was extraordinary to hold in one's hand something one had written appearing suddenly in Chinese! In New York at the Socialist Scholars Conference, my ‘article was known’ and I was invited to women's meetings which were still experimental.” “Interview with Juliet Mitchell: Looking Back At Woman's Estate”,

<<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1836/juliet/mitchell/looking/back/at/woman/s/estate>> [Accessed 20 January 2020].

¹²² This 28 page pamphlet is still in circulation and available for purchase from booksellers across the world. The listed publishers of the pamphlet vary but most acknowledge one of three radical publishers then-active in the USA: New England Free Press; Bay Area Radical Education Project, San Francisco; Radical Education Project, Detroit. The WLR pamphlet was listed as costing 15 cent and was a largely unadorned photocopy of the original *NLR* article. Later editions also featured revised page numbers as a cover etching taken from *Women: A Journal of Liberation*, Vol 1, No. 1, Fall 1969. See also Kathryn Thoms Flannery, *Feminist Literacies, 1968-75*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005). Also many versions of the pamphlet are to be found in the otherwise unsorted Juliet Mitchell Archive, held at the University of Essex.

but this ensured that his methods could be easily appropriated by others, even if they had not read Althusser at any stage. As we will see in the chapter on *Screen* journal, this system of writing in a fashion reminiscent of the manifesto was to become a defining part of French theory's movement, facility and appeal in 1970s Britain.

Peter Wollen: Hollywood, London

Juliet Mitchell was not the only writer in the *NLR* during this period deploying French theory as the basis for her own writing. We will finish our account of the *NLR* with an introduction to Peter Wollen who wrote for the *NLR* from 1963 until 1967, primarily under the pen names "Lee Russell" and "Lucien Rey".¹²³ Under the latter moniker, he wrote a series of political articles on Iran and Jordan; under the former, he wrote a considerable series of articles on the cinema including thumbnail sketches of a variety of male film directors. Wollen was a contemporary of Perry Anderson at Oxford and an early member of the *NLR* Editorial Board. Perhaps more so than any other agent in this study, Wollen's role in the circulation and dissemination of French theory in Britain during this period is remarkable, particularly during his tenure at the British Film Institute later in the decade. We will briefly sketch out his tenure at the *NLR* before focusing on Wollen's own positioning in the following chapter.

Peter Wollen's writings for the *NLR* represent a synthesis with Nairn and Anderson's disavowal of the poverty of their cultural inheritance but demonstrate a different form of engagement with French theory: one eked out on the terrain of film studies which, like women's studies, was a undisciplined discipline. Wollen's first film article in the *NLR* is an

¹²³ Serge Guilbaut and Scott Watson, "From an Interview with Peter Wollen", <http://www.belkin.ubc.ca/_archived/lastcall/current/page1.html>, [accessed 04 May 2020].

essay entitled “Culture and Cinema”.¹²⁴ Ostensibly a review of *The Contemporary Cinema*, a slimline account of cinematic developments from 1945 to 1963, written by then *Sight and Sound* editor Penelope Houston, Wollen uses his allotted space to immediately launch into an aggressive critique of the “ideology of stupefied traditionalism and empiricism, an anti-ideology which is the enemy of all ideas and all calculation”, mirroring the ideological lassitude which infuriated Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn. Houston is derided as exhibiting “serene indifference”, one that is only shaken when she makes attempts to “cope with the influence of *Cahiers du Cinema*.” Accusing Houston of cultural insensitivity, Wollen insists that her “account of the critical positions and arguments of the *Cahiers* concludes with the old gibe that their enthusiasm for American cinema is partly based on their inability to speak or understand English”. Furthermore, Houston’s apparent inability to adapt to the *politique des auteurs* methodology has led her to make “the most unfortunate judgements on American cinema” and her position is “impressionist relativism at its worst”. All of this occurs even before Houston has the temerity to tackle the French new wave of filmmaking, whereupon Wollen ridicules her for failing to link Jean Luc-Godard’s *À bout de souffle* (1960) with the contemporary work of Samuel Fuller. Wollen’s indignation reaches a state of apoplexy by the article’s close:

Penelope Houston’s fear of theory and ideology, however, reaches even more extreme lengths than failure to understand the critical achievements of *Cahiers du Cinema* [sic]. It leads to a complete abnegation on her part of any kind of coherent approach to the films she does admire. There is no possibility, it seems, of relating anything meaningful to anything, of applying any useful methodology, of seeming to locate any film in any kind

¹²⁴ Lee Russell, “Culture and Cinema”, *NLR* 1/21, September/October 1963, pp. 112-114.

of structure greater than itself, historical sociological or ideological. Films show ‘how people behave and give themselves away in action’. Beyond that nothing can be elucidated.¹²⁵

Wollen’s abrasive panning of Houston’s brief account of contemporary cinema is emblematic of the *NLR* for a number of reasons. Firstly, he displays the near-gleeful “national nihilistic” streak so evident across the journal’s writings during this time, from the aforementioned Anderson-Nairn theses to these more condensed reviews of film and music contained within the *Motifs* section which Wollen edited during this period. Houston plainly represents the bourgeois school of English criticism — both in a writing sense but also institutionally in that her writing is, by association, the voice of the British Film Institute, a government-funded organisation - and is therefore a prime target for attack. Secondly, he derides extant British criticism for its flagrant use of unscientific methods of analysis, its lack of structure and the solipsistic nature of its critique. And thirdly, we see Wollen aligning himself with the need for a deeply intellectual mode of criticism, and displaying the first signs of overarching theoretical influence.

Wollen’s writings during his period at the *NLR* reflect the genealogy of his readings: his primary theoretical influences are derived from the *politique des auteurs* and the Marxist philosopher Lucien Goldmann whose work is not generally considered under the rubric of French theory. Goldmann’s concept of the “world-view”, largely historicist in purview, was eclipsed in France by the work of Althusser and the wider structuralist movement. But Peter Wollen had certainly read Goldmann as early as 1964;¹²⁶ the first mention of Lucien

¹²⁵ Russell, “Culture and Cinema”, p. 114.

¹²⁶ Nicolas Helm-Grovas, *Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen 1963-1983: Theory and Practice, Aesthetics and Politics*, unpublished PhD thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2018, p. 38.

Goldmann in the *NLR* is in a thumbnail review of Clark Griffith's *The Long Shadow*, itself a re-configuration of Emily Dickinson's intellectual standing as that of a tragic poet.¹²⁷ Wollen demonstrates a connection between Griffith's analyses of her poems and Goldmann's work.¹²⁸ Dickinson's search for a "hidden God" while simultaneously fearing that this God whom she so longs to find may not exist, as depicted by Clark Griffith, mirrors Goldmann's work, specifically his own concept of the Hidden God and tragedy, and while Griffith is applauded for mirroring much of Goldmann's critical achievement, he is also cautioned for making "no attempt to relate Emily Dickinson to her class background or to the consciousness of class".¹²⁹ However, it was through Wollen's thumbnail sketches of Hollywood directors that thoroughly put Goldmann's methodology to work. The nine directors chosen by Wollen to write about for the *NLR* were Nicholas Ray, Sam Fuller, Budd Boetticher, Alfred Hitchcock, Jean Renoir, Howard Hawks, Roberto Rossellini, Josef von Sternberg and Louis Malle. Looking back on Wollen's writings on cinema for the *NLR*, we notice that none of the directors he chose to write about were British, aside from Alfred Hitchcock, whose work as a director in Britain is roundly dismissed by Wollen. His inspiration in these thumbnail sketches was the aforementioned *politique des auteurs* as practiced by *Cahiers du Cinéma*: mapping Hollywood cinema in a rigorous fashion and developing readings in the aesthetics of films. There was also a re-writing of the Anglophone film canon; Wollen was eager to write about the aesthetics of hitherto B-movie directors such as Fuller and Boetticher rather than limiting such analysis to Rossellini or Ingmar Bergman. Wollen also refrained from viewing Hollywood as an amorphous morass of "mass culture" and clearly differentiated between the works of the various directors as separate oeuvres. Yet

¹²⁷ Clark Griffith, *The Long Shadow: Emily Dickinson's Tragic Poetry*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964).

¹²⁸ 'L. R.', "The Long Shadow", *NLR* 1/25, May/June 1964, p. 94.

¹²⁹ The concept of the hidden God first appears in Goldmann's *The Hidden God: A Study of Tragic Vision in the Pensées of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine*, (London: Routledge, 1964).

Wollen did not just align the *politique des auteurs* method on to his portraits. “The *politique* was brought to American by Eugene Archer and Andrew Sarris”, reflected Wollen in 1988, “popularized in Britain by *Movie* magazine. The problem with it, as far as I was concerned, was that it was not truly an auteur theory. It was not really theoretical”.¹³⁰ So, in essence, Wollen was in search of a “theory” to underpin his writings on film.

Using his sketch of Sam Fuller as an example, Wollen focuses upon the individual works of art – in this case cinema - within Fuller’s directorial oeuvre, primarily *Run of the Arrow*, the 1957 western helmed by Fuller and starring Rod Steiger as an Irish-American who becomes disillusioned with the USA after the civil war and declares his allegiance to the Sioux tribe. Wollen locates Fuller’s world-view as “a violent world, a world of conflict” and proceeds to identify the collective groups whose desires are given form in Fuller’s films: “Red Indian v. white man; gangster v. police; American v. Communist”. In tandem with Goldmann providing coherency to the collective subjects in Racine’s plays, Wollen locates the aspirations, doubts and fears of these groups within Fuller’s films and continues to develop his own view of Fuller’s world view, a view which, as we have seen, can be incoherent and imperfect but is brought to coherence by the individual: “Fuller is an example of a distinctive creative personality working within a traditional genre to extend and explore both its traditional themes and his own attitudes to them. The genres he has used are the genres which deal with the key areas of American history, and Fuller has used them to confront the problems which are raised by the contradictions of American history. He has not shirked those contradictions but has sought to dissolve them in an extreme case of romantic nationalism”.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Peter Wollen, “Thinking Theory”, *Film Comment*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (July/August 1988), pp. 50-51.

¹³¹ Lee Russell, “Samuel Fuller”, *NLR* 1/23, January/February 1964, pp. 86-89.

Greatly influenced by Goldmann, Wollen's sketches made film like a language, a system or structure analysable in and of itself. Wollen demonstrated a *sui generis* type of criticism which not only answered the Anderson-Nairn demand for theoretical influence but was unparalleled in its day: this rigorous study of film had little comparison in Anglophone criticism. Goldmann afforded Wollen the critical tools to expand his own perspectives beyond the empirical criticism he so roundly detested, but also provided Wollen with a direct link to contemporary Francophone Marxist thinking. Goldmann was the elaboration of a theoretical Marxism which allowed Wollen - also working within a Marxist framework *vis-à-vis* the *NLR* - to use a much wider range of intellectual tools in his film criticism, a field which, so he had claimed in his denunciation of Penelope Houston, was witless and mind-numbingly empirical. The use of Goldmann's "world-view", studied within a body of work as a whole, allowed Wollen to talk about the world-view of Samuel Fuller or Budd Boetticher, rather than merely limiting his investigations to the aesthetics of Fuller or Boetticher, as practiced by *Cahiers* critics.

This emphasis on the structural analysis of film would have important ramifications for the study of film, as we will see in the next chapter. But Lucien Goldmann's own influence on the emergent French theory was to be short-lived, his theories maintaining a Hegelian influence, one which proved especially perilous in the light of Althusser's comprehensive shifts against Hegel. Peter Wollen further repudiated Goldmann, claiming he "no longer find it possible to accept Goldmann's views, least of all his famous 'homology of structures', which is extremely schematic and historicist, to the extent of simply ignoring anomalies".¹³²

¹³² Peter Wollen, "Cinema and Semiology: Some Points of Contact", in *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies*, (London: New Left Books, 1982) p. 17. This essay was originally a BFI Education Seminar paper, to which we will return in the following chapter. It was also published in *Form*, 7, March 1968, the journal edited by Stephen Bann.

Furthermore, Goldmann's concepts of "world-view" appear more readily suited to an in-depth analysis of the novel form rather than the film, particularly when one takes the notion of "genre" into account.¹³³ Raymond Williams later celebrated Goldmann's work as pivotal in developing our understanding of literature and philosophy through a Marxist lens. Williams argues that in the debate in England in the 1930s between the *Scrutiny* school and the English Marxists, the former won a deserved victory for literary criticism against the incursions and investigations of literature by a vulgar Marxism. He wrote that "Marxism, as then commonly understood, was weak in just the decisive area where practical criticism was strong: in its capacity to give precise details and reasonably adequate accounts of actual consciousness: full of rich and significant and specific experience. And the reason for the corresponding weakness in Marxism is not difficult to find: it lay in the received notion of base and superstructure, which in ordinary hands converted very quickly to an interpretation of superstructure as simple reflection".¹³⁴ The work of Goldmann, Williams goes on to suggest, manages to avoid the pitfalls of these earlier Marxist studies and enlarges our understanding of both literature and philosophy without destroying the internal coherence of either. Nevertheless, Goldmann was a humanist, the very adversary whom Althusser, Anderson and Nairn expressed their theories against. For this reason, Goldmann is not judged to have been part of the French theory cadre; his theories and beliefs are anachronistic to the *anti-humanism* of Althusser.

Conclusion: *New Left Review* Activates French Theory

¹³³ This point was made by Laura Mulvey in an email interview, 12 May 2021.

¹³⁴ Raymond Williams, "In Memory of Lucien Goldmann", *NLR* 1/67, May/June 1971, p. 6. See also Lucile Dumont, "From Sociology to Literary Theory: The Disciplinary Affiliations of Literature in Section VI of the École pratique des hautes études (EPHE), 1956-1975", in *Questions of Discipline*, (Vincennes: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes 2019).

But what does Wollen's nascent use of Goldmann tell us about the dynamics of the field of the *NLR* during the 1960s? The journal provided the intellectual space for foreign theories and authors to be translated and presented but also for internal authors to write using these theories as their methodological base. The internal impact of the journal's positioning allowed Mitchell and Wollen to effect their own form of positioning against the prevailing patriarchal models of socialist culture and the stultifying modalities of British film criticism, respectively. This form of dynamism set the tenor and tone for the travelling of French theory through differing sites of reception, as we will see, ranging from educational departments to popular music. The similarity in movement is worth noting: the agent on the British terrain adopts and embeds the theories propagated by the French theorist where it is "not what they say that matters but what they can be made to say".¹³⁵ Mitchell and Wollen, in many respects, operate as what Bourdieu terms the "discoverers",¹³⁶ but they more than discover as they demonstrate a new method of using the fruits of their curiosity. This work also reflects Edward Said's assertion that travelling theories "gain a new power on their arrival in a new place", with "the enigma of fruitful divergences [emerging] between the site of origin and site of reception".¹³⁷ The *NLR*'s strategies of importation and translation encouraged many fruitful encounters which we will explore more fully in the following chapters. But, to conclude, the journal itself continued its programme of facilitating the travelling of theories throughout the early 1970s. The foundation of New Left Books in 1968 allowed for a comprehensive editorial programme of importation to begin: within a few years, significant translations of Althusser, Balibar, et al's *Reading 'Capital'*, Althusser's own *For Marx* and *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Gyorgy Lukacs's *Lenin*, Karl Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy*, a biography of Gramsci while Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Lucio

¹³⁵ Bourdieu, "The Social Conditions of the International Circulation of Ideas", p. 224.

¹³⁶ *ibid.*

¹³⁷ Edward Said, "Traveling Theories" in *The World, The Text and The Critic*, (Harvard University Press: New York, 1981), p. 101

Colletti, and Nicos Poulantzas all regularly featured on NLB's list. This process was the recipient of further ire from E.P. Thompson in 1978 when he declared that the

New Left Review (and New Left Books) hold a particular responsibility for [the influence of transposed Althusserian thought outside of France], since over the past fifteen years they have issued, to the accompaniment of ecstatic 'presentations' and theoretical heavy breathing, every product, however banal of the Althusserian *fabrik*; and from France or about France, they have issued nothing else. So that, whatever esoteric reservations the Review's editors may hold as to Althusser, the imposition has been passed upon an innocent public that the French proletariat = the PCF, a Party supposedly composed of a heroic, uncomplicated militant 'base', adjoined to which are rigorous and lucid Marxist theorists, imbricated in the concrete life of the Party.¹³⁸

Thompson's apoplexy, or "a simple absurdity" in Anderson's terms,¹³⁹ is certainly misjudged in that the publishing outreach of the NLB was far more varied than Thompson's rage attests. Yet perhaps Thompson is more conscious of the after-effects of the travelling theory rather than the theories themselves, particularly in the case of Althusser. The publication of *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* in 1971 featured Althusser's celebrated article on Ideological State Apparatuses;¹⁴⁰ his reputation in the Anglophone world was of sufficient standing for Eric Hobsbawm to account for this popularity as due to a focus upon "abstract

¹³⁸ Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory (Or An Orrery of Errors)*, p. 405.

¹³⁹ Anderson, *Arguments Within English Marxism*, p. 115.

¹⁴⁰ Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster, (London: New Left Books, 1970), p. 20. First published as "Ideologie et appareils idéologiques d'État (notes pour une recherche)", *La Pensée* 151, 1970, pp. 3–38.

argument” combined with a “markedly revolutionary intention with an almost total avoidance of the concrete problems of the world, and indeed a sibylline obscurity about his own views on revolutionary politics”. As identified by Hobsbawm, several features of Althusser’s work defined it as worthy of serious merit, particular its existence within a strong philosophical lineage, its display of startling insight, and the implicit critique of the humanist tradition. These critiques, along with his continued publication and consecration by the *NLR* and *NLB* helped to legitimise “Althusserian” theory and institutionalise it as form of French theory in Britain. But it also allowed Althusserianism, as it came to be known, to develop a life of its own, far removed from Althusser himself – a move which we will see as critical in Chapter Four. But in the meantime, one could argue that Thompson’s sustained attacks on Althusser ensured that the latter’s personal legitimacy grew through this association, providing further unparalleled visibility.¹⁴¹

Finally, I would argue the work of the *NLR* and *NLB* produced a distinctive kind of intellectual product that was not targeted at a specialised academic public of philosophers or historians but that was diffused largely by cultural media such as the *Times Literary Supplement* and, later, *Screen* journal along with the increasing visibility of independent outlets such as *7 Days*, *m/f*, *Shrew* and many others. These intellectuals engaged, and, in part, generated, a wide intellectual public made up from a growing student body in the humanities and the social sciences, a wider effect of the Robbins Report as described in the introduction to this thesis. Althusser benefitted from his association with this intellectual generation both through its access to the cultural media and the general growth of the intellectual public. Moreover, the *NLR*’s unstinting commitment to the translation, presentation and publication

¹⁴¹ Michele Lamont notes that debates between or around French philosophers – for example Barthes and Picard (1966), Foucault and Sartre (1966), Lévi-Strauss and Revel (1957) – were crucial in establishing their reputations. See Michèle Lamont, “How to become a dominant French philosopher: The case of Jacques Derrida” *American Journal of Sociology* 93, (1987) no. 3, pp. 584-622.

of Althusser ushered in a period of theoretical delirium during the 1970s.¹⁴² As Ian Birchall rather sardonically points out, “The journal’s style [of presenting Althusser] did much to create a milieu in which Marxist theory became the pursuit of the latest fashionable thinker. By the late seventies there were coteries of English Marxists where expressing an interest in Sartre or Lukács was like declaring an admiration for Frank Sinatra to a group of punk rockers”.¹⁴³

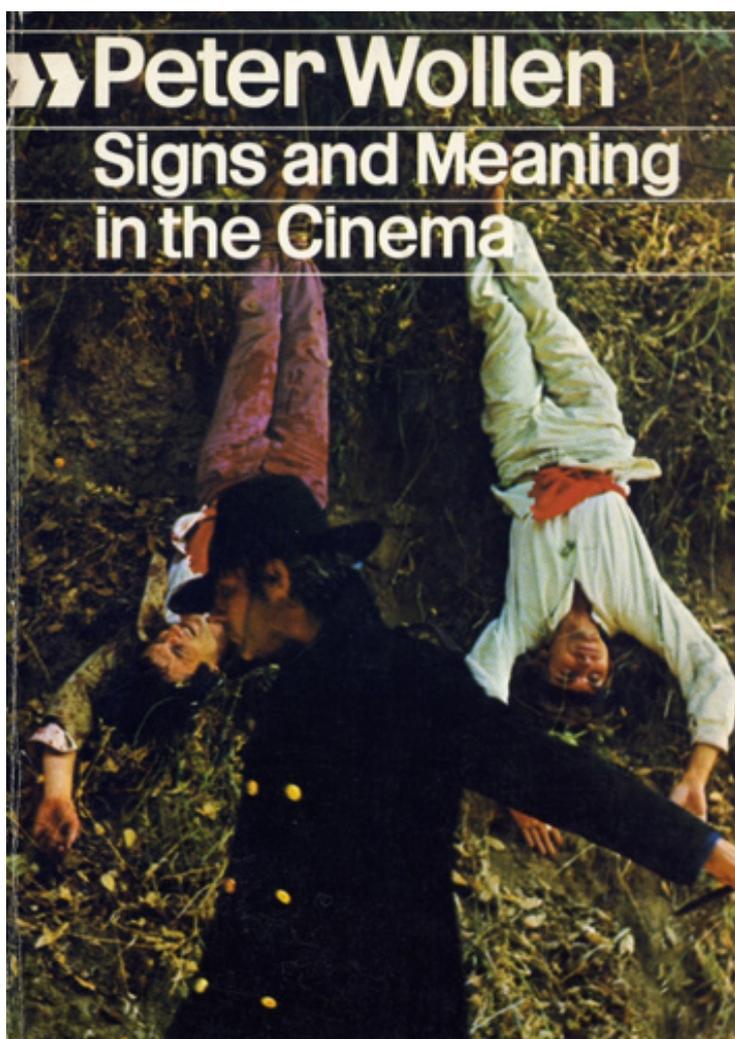
To reprise a distinction made in the introduction to this chapter, it can be fruitless to search for a single empirical beginning, or even a series of beginnings. But this study is concerned with the circulation and dissemination of French theory and this would not have been set in motion without the processes undertaken by Anderson, Nairn and their cohorts in attempting to dismantle the British Marxist traditions and supplant them with a defiantly internationalist outlook. The positioning of these intellectuals in their home country and the impact their positioning had on the immediate field indicate the extension of that field outwards to incorporate not just a transnational sensibility but a transdisciplinary sensibility. Just as Althusserian Marxism weakened the borders of Marxism to accommodate psychoanalysis through Lacan, British contemporary cultural criticism allowed itself to incorporate psychoanalysis and semiotics from French theory through the creation of new disciplines around serious film study and feminism. Moreover, this circulation occurred outside the realm of the academy, transcending the need for academic legitimacy and freeing up the dissemination of these works for further creative re-use. Of course, this means that the gap

¹⁴² I am indebted to Joan M. Miller’s monumental *French Structuralism: A Multidisciplinary Bibliography: With a Checklist of Sources for Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Lucien Goldmann, Jacques Lacan, and an Update of Works on Claude Lévi-Strauss* (New York: Garland, 1981) which provides a remarkably comprehensive account of publications of key figures associated with structuralism, both in French and in translation.

¹⁴³ Of course, Sid Vicious, freshly dismissed from the Sex Pistols, *did* cover ‘My Way’, a song closely connected with Frank Sinatra.

between the original field and the field of reception allows for many forms of appropriation, igniting a form of debate and antagonism which will become even more apparent as our study proceeds to fresh sites of reception for French theory in Britain.

Chapter Two - British Film Institute: Education Department



Introduction: Towards an Expansive Sense of Film Culture

In 1988, *Film Comment* magazine commissioned twenty film writers to write twenty separate articles, each reflecting on the twentieth anniversary of the 1968 student uprising. One of those writers commissioned was Peter Wollen, by now a Professor of Film at UCLA and a respected filmmaker in his own right.¹ Wollen's piece, simply titled "Thinking Theory", begins with a survey of the abject state of film studies in early-to-mid 1960s Britain:

¹ Wollen's sole feature-length film, *Friendship's Death*, was released the previous year. Funded and produced by the BFI Production Board, which at the time was under the aegis of Colin MacCabe whom we will encounter

It is hard now to remember how hopeless and moribund film studies were in the Sixties. Put crudely, the field was divided between ‘literary’ studies of the work of a select few ‘great’ artist-directors (usually European) and ‘mass-media’ approaches, numbingly empirical and effects-oriented, witless compounds of the worst of experimental and statistical sociology with a crass and simple-minded psychology. I don’t know which was worse.²

Wollen’s harsh and blistering tone had not mellowed in the intervening years since his pseudonymous attacks on Penelope Houston in the *NLR*. But his article did offer moments of ‘hope’ which had roused him into his own form of uprising, one conducted within the institution rather than on the streets. First, was the importation of the *politique des auteurs*, as practiced by the critics at *Cahiers du Cinéma* who provided the basis for serious talk about the aesthetics of film directors, irrespective of their national origin. But this lacked a theoretical framework, Wollen asserted, as “the auteur theory...was not really theoretical”.³ Second, and most important for our study, was “the discovery of French theory”. Within the new directions afforded by these ideas from France, Wollen identified that:

In a way, this was an extension from a cinéphile interest in *Cahiers* to a more general interest in French cultural theory, which led me to the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, and Christian Metz. These writers

in the following chapter on *Screen*, the film was set in Jordan during 1970 and starred Tilda Swinton as an alien named Friendship. The film was re-released by the BFI in summer 2021, and was screened out-of-competition at the Cannes Film Festival in July 2021.

² Wollen, “Thinking Theory”, p. 50.

³ Wollen, “Thinking Theory”, p. 50.

had developed a theoretical approach to myth, to popular culture, to the cinema based on the transposition and adaptation of ideas taken from linguistics. Unlike standard linguistics, they dealt with images and narrative and unconscious meaning. They developed a semiotic to encompass the whole range of sign systems from myth to cooking to fashion to cinema. It became known as structuralism.⁴

The trajectory Wollen provides of his own reading is important for this chapter. Through a neat indexing of the specific Francophone theorists who were influential on his own intellectual development, Wollen traces a selective history of linguistics, semiology and structuralism re-contextualised within the framework of film studies. But what Wollen doesn't mention in the article is that he was employed by the BFI Education Department throughout the second half of the 1960s as Publications Officer, and it was under the aegis of this institutional position that Wollen was able to activate his theory-infused re-imagining of film culture in Britain. His role allowed him to develop a series of semi-public seminars, accredited by the BFI, where he and fellow intellectual activists could speak at length about topics such as structuralism and semiology and advocate for the benefits of deploying these French theories within the institutional rubric of British film education and film criticism. Furthermore, as one of the architects of the Cinema One publication series, a collaboration between the BFI and publishers Thames and Hudson, Wollen was able to commission both himself and fellow acolytes of theory to write "little books", publications described by Mark Betz as "pivotal... in the development of film studies", which demonstrated an "expansive sense of film culture" and, in the case of Cinema One, offered a startling new combination of serious film analysis underpinned with theoretical frameworks from contemporary French

⁴ *ibid.*

theory.⁵ The most successful of these little books remains Wollen's own *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, written during the tumultuous month of May 1968 and published a year later.⁶ A pioneering study of Eisenstein's aesthetics, auteur-structuralism theory and the semiology of cinema, the book remains in circulation over fifty years later and is a seminal piece of film writing.⁷ It is also the first Anglophone publication to deploy what we will later call French theory as its intellectual framework.

Much of this work - the transposition of foreign-language texts, the public facing seminars on heady topics such as "Cinema and Semiology: Some Points of Contact",⁸ the publication of specialist texts, filled with obscure references and linguistic terminology - would be more commonly associated with that of an art college or university. But by the mid-to-late 1960s, film was not yet an established academic discipline in Britain.⁹ Accordingly, the study of film did not have its own distinctive style or tradition. It was untethered to any form of robust critical framework and while the BFI played a role in hosting summer schools for film teachers and offering pamphlets and general advice to those wishing to embark on film study, any form of film critique in the BFI was, as Wollen points out, more reflective of "literary" studies of the genre¹⁰ and only focusing on canonical European directors.¹¹

⁵ Mark Betz, "Little Books", in *Inventing Film Studies*, eds. Lee Grievson and Haidee Wasson, (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 320-321.

⁶ Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, (London: BFI, 1969). All further references will be to the fifth edition (London: BFI, 2013) unless otherwise stated.

⁷ See Samuel Wigley, "Looking For Signs and Meaning in the Cinema", <<https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/interviews/looking-signs-meaning-cinema>>, [accessed 26 May 2021].

⁸ This was the title of Peter Wollen's first BFI Education Seminar which occurred in early 1967.

⁹ The first university film department in Britain was opened at the Slade School of Fine Art in 1960 under the tutelage of Thorold Dickinson. See Henry K. Miller, "The Slade School and Cinema", *Vertigo Magazine* (2007), volume 3, issue 5.

¹⁰ One suspects Wollen was also thinking of his own brief dalliance with Lucien Goldmann as evidence of a film critique relying on a theory more suited to literary studies than film studies.

¹¹ Wollen, "Thinking Theory", p. 50.

This touches upon the historical background of the intellectual developments examined in this chapter. Wollen's retrospective writing in 1988 reflects his own rapturous response to the tide of intellectual ideas sweeping across the channel from France, capturing the intoxication of reading Barthes and Lévi-Strauss for the first time and the rediscovery of forgotten Hollywood figures amid the politics of the New Left. But there is a much broader context to this. Wollen's vanguardist new French theory-charged approach to film study did not occur within a vacuum at the BFI. His efforts were enabled and encouraged by the head of the BFI Education Department, Paddy Whannel, a Scottish working-class intellectual who began his career in film at the age of fourteen as the cinema projectionist in his home town of Pitlochry, Perthshire.¹² After working his way through war service and adult education, Whannel's appointment to the BFI in 1957 was a turning point in the institution's history, as he tenaciously fought to "create a flourishing film culture [in Britain]," distinct from the existing mode of "film appreciation" with its implicit hostility to Hollywood narrative cinema.¹³ In order to achieve this, Whannel re-structured the Education Department as a hotbed of intellectual activity, creating an environment which was deeply sympathetic to ideas, especially those adapted from Europe, "a crucible for the future of film theory" as Wollen later put it.¹⁴ This was a vision of film culture operating in parallel with the "White Heat" optimism, outlined by Labour leader Harold Wilson in 1963, to re-purpose socialism in terms of the "scientific revolution", but also on a more practical level through the reforms set out by three separate reports on education in Britain.¹⁵ In particular, the recommendations of the Newsom Report in 1963 and the appointment of Jennie Lee as Britain's first Minister for the Arts in 1964 had significant benefits for Whannel's reforming desires which were now

¹² Alan Lovell, "Appreciation: Paddy Whannel 1922-1980", *BFI News*, 45, October 1980.

¹³ Paddy Whannel, "The State of Film Culture", internal BFI memo, 4 December 1968, BFI Archive, Nicky North/Paddy Whannel files, Box 91.

¹⁴ Mulvey and Wollen with Grieveson, *Inventing Film Studies*, p. 221.

¹⁵ The three reports are the Crowther Report, Robbins Report and Newsom Report, each of which outlined a sweeping range of reforms for education in Britain.

matched by an increase in government funding for the BFI and bolstered by political momentum. While this chapter does not seek to offer a mere social and political history of the BFI, it is impossible to separate the impact of increased resources on the institution which allows for ideas to flourish and circulate in tandem with ease of practical implementation.

This diffusion of ideas was further emboldened by Whannel and Wollen's own intellectual activity outside the institution. We have already studied Wollen's film criticism at the *NLR* throughout the mid-1960s but Whannel was an even more regular contributor to periodicals, particularly *Teaching*, the weekly publication of the National Union of Teachers where he, like Wollen, provided pseudonymous critiques of the prevailing attitudes towards the study of popular culture.¹⁶ These weekly missives, written under the name "Albert Casey",¹⁷ allowed Whannel to embark on these full-frontal criticisms without compromising his position at the BFI. These also yield productive readings when viewed as intellectual interventions in their own right. Baert's methodology for these interventions issues a concern that the "reception, survival and diffusion of intellectual products — whether as research programmes, theories, concepts or propositions", are dependent on not simply the "nature" of the arguments but also on the "range of rhetorical devices" which the relevant intellectuals use to "locate themselves within the intellectual field".¹⁸ Indeed, Baert's attention to the concomitant relationship between rhetorical device and setting are important lines of interpretation for understanding the circulation of theories from France that follow:

¹⁶ See Daniel Horowitz, "From Workers and Literature to Youth and Popular Culture", in *Consuming Pleasures: Intellectuals and Popular Culture in the Postwar World*, (Pennsylvania: UPenn Press, 2012), pp. 235-270.

¹⁷ Whannel was a jazz aficionado and presumably this pseudonym was a reference to the renowned guitarist Al Casey.

¹⁸ Baert, "Positioning Theory and Intellectual Interventions", p. 304.

According to this relational perspective, an intellectual intervention—whether as a book, article, blog or speech—does not have an intrinsic meaning as such; it acquires its meaning in a particular setting; it is dependent on the status, position and trajectory of the author(s) and on the other intellectual products available at the time.¹⁹

Therefore, the rhetorical aspects of Whannel and Wollen’s work at the BFI, encompassing a range of articles, books and seminar speeches, create interesting problems for us. While both Whannel and Wollen, in particular, demonstrated allegiances to specific, if disparate, figures such as F. R. Leavis and Lucien Goldmann, the influence of these figures began to wane as their own readings, particularly Wollen’s, advanced into untranslated territories and a more overtly theoretical realm. While traces of these influences may remain, the supplanting of these influences with apparently superior options represents a fluidity which is accounted for with Baert’s methodology through its view of positioning as an on-going achievement, one which requires “continuous attention and maintenance”.²⁰ This instability is a crucial contributing factor to the circulation and dissemination of Francophone theoretical texts as the reading of one theorist will naturally read to the reading of another, creating a genealogy of French theory’s development and influence within Anglophone film culture. Accordingly, this chapter offers a close reading of the references in Wollen’s essays which elucidate an extraordinarily fluid classification of names and concepts which fuel a sense of textual urgency more akin to a manifesto than a rigorous academic essay.

¹⁹ Baert, “Positioning Theory and Intellectual Interventions”, p. 304.

²⁰ Baert, “Positioning Theory and Intellectual Interventions”, p. 316.

The BFI has been the subject of a mere two full-length critical studies to date. Ivan Butler's *To Encourage The Art of Film: The Story of the British Film Institute* (1971)²¹ offers a benign hagiography of the institution's formations and successes without embarking on any in-depth analysis, preferring a surface-level appreciation of the institution's achievements up to that point.²² More recently, Christophe Dupin and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's edited collection *The British Film Institute, the Government and Film Culture, 1933-2000* (2012) offers a rigorous grand narrative of the institution's history through a series of essays on differing aspects of the institution's history.²³ Of particular interest for this study is Terry Bolas's contribution on "Paddy Whannel and BFI Education", an extraordinarily thorough account of the department during Whannel's tenure, an extension on Bolas's earlier, monumental survey *Screen Education: From Film Appreciation to Media Studies* (2009).²⁴ Despite the richness of its institutional detail, both of Bolas's histories neglect to acknowledge or trace the increasing prominence of pamphlets and seminar topics centred upon semiology and structuralism; nor does he provide an evaluation of any foreign theories within the Education Department during this period. This indicates a general absence in BFI histories to accommodate French theory's cycle of circulation and influence within the institution. Bolas makes passing reference to the "current preoccupations of the Department: authorship, genre and American cinema" without offering any investigation as to what these terms might signify. Furthermore, both of these antecedents fail to account for the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of the BFI, specifically the scope of the Education Department in the 1960s which

²¹ Ivan Butler, *To Encourage the Art of Film: The Story of the British Film Institute*. (London: Hale, 1971).

²² In his DPhil thesis, Robert V. McNamee provides a schematic analysis of Butler's book, demonstrating how it provides next to nothing on the work undertaken by the BFI in 'production, distribution and reception' including criticism and education in film. See Robert V. McNamee, "Writing for Film: the Role of the Production Board of the British Film Institute.", unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, pp. 322 - 325. <<https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:bf4bcf2d/4120/4c59/a196/05d9f771a9dc>>, [accessed 28 April 2020].

²³ Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Christophe Dupin (eds.), *The British Film Institute, the government and film culture, 1933 - 2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

²⁴ Terry Bolas, *Screen Education: From Film Appreciation to Media Studies*, (Bristol: Intellect, 2009).

encompassed summer schools, extra-mural classes in collaboration with the University of London, and a vibrant publishing arm, culminating in the Cinema One series.

This way of thinking about the movement of theory has a number of critical predecessors yet the most comprehensive account of the development of film theory in Britain and the USA remains D.N. Rodowick's *The Crisis of Political Modernism* (1988).²⁵ Rodowick, taking his cue from the film theorist Sylvia Harvey, defines "political modernism" as the combination of "semiotic and ideological analysis with the development of an avant-garde aesthetic practice dedicated to the production of radical social effects".²⁶ While Rodowick's discourse refers to neither a style, nor a theory but a logic common to film theorists and filmmakers since 1968, his account is indicative of a failure in intellectual histories of the era to accommodate the cycle of transposition, dissemination and eventual circulation of theory, particularly in Britain as separately to French theory's emergence in the USA. Further, Rodowick does not account for the role of the institution in legitimising these processes of travelling theories within a transnational field. Therefore, it becomes clear that the study of theory in motion must pay attention to rhetorical devices within the institution, the rituals in which these discourses are embedded and the social contexts in which they are produced. It is also important to demonstrate how French theory's circulation depends on social resources and how their availability plays a major role in influencing the direction of cultural change undertaken at the BFI. While Rodowick insists that the emergence of theory can be traced to debates in French film theory occurring after the student revolts of 1968 which set in motion the programmatic shift of focus resulting in the emergence of *Screen* journal as an off-shoot from the BFI Education Department in 1970, both this and the following chapter suggest an

²⁵ D. N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1994), 2nd edition. See also Sylvia Harvey, "Whose Brecht? Memories for the Eighties", *Screen* Volume 23, Issue 1, (May/June 1981), pp. 45-59.

²⁶ Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, p. 2.

alternative history, less deferential to the international events of 1968 and one which is unique to Britain.

The “Appreciation” of Film

In his brief introduction to Nowell-Smith and Dupin’s history of the BFI, Sir Denis Forman, director of the institute from 1948 to 1955, offers a telling insight into attitudes towards film at the institution during his tenure.²⁷ Commenting on how much film has risen in status since the institution’s foundation in 1933, he curiously states that “if you want proof that film has really arrived, look at that bastion of academe the *Times Literary Supplement* and see how it now gives more space in its arts pages to film than it does opera and theatre. It’s a long way from the *Keystone Kops*”. From this statement, we can infer a number of points, not least that the *Keystone Kops* are not considered by Forman to be of artistic merit but more pressingly, Forman’s belief that cinema is inextricably linked yet deferential towards literature in that the true sign of film’s legitimacy is signified both through academic recognition and coverage in a literature periodical. Forman’s introduction, dated October 2010, could easily read October 1950 as it demonstrates pervading attitudes towards film and, by proxy, literature, at the BFI throughout the early years of its operation.

Pascale Casanova has pointed out that the emergence of literature is often strongly tied to the construction of national spaces, arguing that literary criticism is often uniquely concerned with the study of some particular nation and its national literature.²⁸ While Casanova’s approach does not extend to an analysis of the visual arts or film, her comparison can be

²⁷ Quoted in Nowell-Smith and Dupin, *The British Film Institute, the government, and film culture*, p. 1.

²⁸ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 73-75.

extended to incorporate the emergence of institutions of film; during the 1930s, national institutions of film were founded in London, Berlin, Moscow and Paris, often incorporating national film archives and national film libraries. These robust articulations of nation, film, and educated citizenship were, according to Haidee Wasson, “crucial and transformative projects”, which served to consecrate film’s place in an “emergent and international cultural field”.²⁹ These early institutionalising missions meant that by their very nature, film institutes represented a national appropriation of film, exemplifying a standard set by existing established hierarchies. Casanova’s assertion that “the habit of seeing literature as the outstanding expression of national identity, is peculiarly English...[literature] became one of the principal devices for the affirmation and definition of national identity”³⁰ can also be transposed on to the formation of the BFI itself in 1933, its development emerging as a recommendation from a government-commissioned report on “The Film in National Life” and whose stated aim was “to promote the various uses of the film as a contribution to national well-being” with a specific interest in considering “methods for raising the standard of public appreciation of films”.³¹ As a consequence, the BFI reveals itself as a national field by virtue of its name indicating its function: an institution for film specifically within Britain. As an institution without any direct competition³² and maintaining a remit for developing film education across the entirety of Britain, the BFI maintained a cultural authority in the presentation, dissemination and education of film on a national level. During the early days of its existence, situated in a rented building at 4 Great Russell Street in London, the BFI maintained these standards by promoting the circulation of educational films amongst its

²⁹ Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema*, (California: University of California Press, 2005), p. 7.

³⁰ Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, p. 74. See also Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain*, Andrew Higson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

³¹ Quoted in Nowell-Smith and Dupin, *The British Film Institute, the government, and film culture*, p. 15.

³² By this, I mean there was no other national institution of film operating within Britain at that time. However, there was a very lively culture of film societies operating throughout the country. See Richard Lowell MacDonald, *The Appreciation of Film: The Postwar Film Society Movement and Film Culture in Britain* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2016).

members throughout Britain. As film was a developing art form, the film institute had no specific antecedents yet the case for its creation rested “on the belief that constructive action to encourage films is better than restrictive action to discourage bad ones”.

How did the institute define these terms? Alan Lovell, a key player in the BFI Education Department throughout the 1960s, offered a brief history of the department’s work during the 1950s and 1960s in the light of his resignation from his role in 1971.³³ The role of pedagogy within the BFI, he felt, was an “adjunct of the 1930s documentary movement,” a position which was expressed within publications such as Roger Manvell’s *Film* (1944)³⁴ and *The Film and the Public* (1955)³⁵ along with Ernest Lindgren’s *Art of the Film* (1948)³⁶. The underpinning assumption of Manvell and Lindgren’s work was that films played a crucial role in “the formation of false social and moral values by children and young people” and the film educator ought to operate in a censorious role, and lead children towards “good films’ and away from ‘bad films’”.³⁷ Furthermore, the technical aspects of cinema were understood in terms of the achievements of Sergei Eisenstein’s work, specifically indicating that editing was “the key act in the creation of a film” and that a “direct analogy could be made between film and language such that a shot equalled a word, a sequence a sentence, and so on” and the cinema was, ultimately, a “realistic medium”.³⁸ The underlying message within these publications was that film was key in generating immoral values within Britain’s youth. Lovell quotes the Wheare Report of 1950 as further imposing this view: “A large number of films are exposing children regularly to the suggestion that the highest values in life are riches, power, luxury and public adulation...this general kind of easy and selfish philosophy

³³ Alan Lovell, “The BFI and Film Education”, *Screen*, Volume 12, Issue 3, (Autumn 1971), pp. 13-26.

³⁴ Roger Manvell, *Film*, (London: Pelican, 1944).

³⁵ Roger Manvell, *The Film and the Public*, (London: Pelican, 1955).

³⁶ Ernest Lindgren, *Art of the Film*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1948).

³⁷ Lovell, “The BFI and Film Education”, p. 14

³⁸ *Ibid.*

is fringed with other supporting illusions involving the distortion of history and biography and of people of other nations and their national heroes". Accordingly, the role of those working in film education was to provide a filter between the messages of these films and their consumption by the youth, inculcating an ability to discriminate between "good" and "bad" films. Under this framework, "good films" were deemed to be Eisenstein and the Soviet films of the 1920s, British documentary films of the 1930s, the work of Carol Reed, David Lean, the Ealing comedies and Italian neo-realism. "Bad films" were the crude and "unrealistic" representations of life as depicted by Hollywood narrative cinema.

During the late 1950s and 1960s, film education at the BFI was still regarded as the "decisive shaper of social and moral attitudes and the crucial task of the film educationist was to alert his pupils to that fact".³⁹ Echoing Denis Forman's much later comparisons, Lovell suggested that F.R. Leavis's ideas were "assumptions...which had been derived from a study of literature", were inadequate especially when taking into account Leavis's "basic hostility to technology". But how did Leavis's approach to criticism become relevant within a department of film education? Certainly by 1968, Leavis had become a byword for tradition and obsolete critical methods; an internal memo penned by Paddy Whannel in November 1968, directed towards the BFI Board of Governors, raged at the undue influence of Leavis on the "thinking of film as a subject of study", which, he felt, was giving rise to the idea that "young people must be inoculated against the corrupting standard of mass culture, that, in the words of the Crowther Report, they must be given some 'counter-balancing' assistance".⁴⁰

³⁹ Lovell, "The BFI and Film Education", p. 15.

⁴⁰ Whannel, "The State of Film Culture", BFI Archive, Nicky North/Paddy Whannel files, Box 91.

But there is little in the BFI archives from the period to suggest that anyone other than Whannel himself was consciously acting within Leavisite terms. The BFI's own method of appreciation did not appear to require any further clarification, an approach later described by Colin MacArthur as the "we-know-whats-good-and-don't-need-to-spell-it-out attitude".⁴¹ The concept of "appreciation" as a means of consuming culture was already in use since the late nineteenth century through the popularity of essay collections such as Walter Pater's *Appreciations, With an Essay On Style*, (1889), and, to this day, indicates a certain level of connoisseurship, a shorthand for the detached criticisms of the leisure classes or, more damagingly, a front for disinterested generalisations, a series of close readings without significant context.⁴² Richard MacDonald speculates how "film appreciation" existed in an "ambiguous zone" between possession and process, between the possession of discrimination and sensitivity and a process of study, acquiring knowledge and understanding, involving the acceptance of a pre-defined canon as per the lending catalogue of the National Film Library.⁴³ In Bourdieu's terms, the affixing of a label such as "film appreciation" is crucial to the emergence of fields as the label encourages participants to talk about the field, organise around it and attract resources to develop it. In this sense, the national field of the BFI was centred around "film appreciation", inculcating a process whereby the canonisation of certain filmmakers into a national heritage was made possible through the intervention of BFI's own education system which promoted certain filmmakers over others and almost completely ignored productions emerging from Hollywood. The institutionalisation of film in Britain was, therefore, structured around a hierarchy of good taste or prestige. Within this field, the dominant positions were occupied by the senior staff at the BFI who decided what films were suitable for circulation, often in tandem with power-holding critics who wrote for the BFI's

⁴¹ Colin MacArthur, "Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: Cultural Struggle In the BFI", *Journal of Popular British Cinema* 4. Ed. James Chapman and Christine Geraghty, (2001), pp. 112–27.

⁴² Walter Pater, *Appreciations, With an Essay On Style*, (London: Macmillan, 1889).

⁴³ MacDonald, *The Appreciation of Film*, p. 7.

own *Sight and Sound* magazine.⁴⁴ The implication here is that the BFI played a very dominant position in providing the works and the frameworks, however vague, around which critics should construct their analyses and interpretations of films as an artistic achievement. The film appreciation method was thus fully institutionalised as the extant set of sensibilities, skills, dispositions and knowledge — in short, the dominant habitus, in Bourdieu’s term, for consuming film in Britain.

In this section, I have provided an analysis of the emergence of both the BFI as an educating body and the associated term “film appreciation” which was deployed to legitimise the aims of the institution in promoting the use of film in national life. I will now focus upon a process of intellectual de-legitimation, namely, where a group of intellectuals developed the term “film culture” as a heterodoxy to the orthodoxy of “film appreciation”.

Paddy Whannel and the Beginnings of a “Film Culture”

Deep in the BFI Archives at the Southbank in London lies an undated and unsigned photocopied sheet with the heading “Film Culture: Notes for a BFI staff discussion to be held in the Board Room aton.....”⁴⁵ The sheet lists six points indicating the basis of this proposed discussion. In summary, the intentions are to create a “film culture” which is a parallel to the existing “literary culture” and to provide an accurate definition of “film culture”, one which embraces film as not just an art but as an industry, a form of

⁴⁴According to Terry Bolas, BFI director Stanley Reed would lunch with leading London film critics to glean their responses to current film releases, publishing this as an insert in the NFT programme. See Bolas, *Screen Education*, p. 55.

⁴⁵ Paddy Whannel, “Film Culture”, BFI Archives, Nicky North-Paddy Whannel Files, Box 91. While the memo is unsigned, it is almost certainly written by Paddy Whannel with contributions from Peter Wollen as sentences from an earlier memo from Wollen to Whannel are used wholesale in this “Film Culture” proposal. See Peter Wollen, “Memo to Paddy Whannel”, 04 August 1968, Nicky North/Paddy Whannel files, BFI Archive Box 91.

entertainment and as a means of communication. This fragment provides an indication of the BFI Education Department's attempts to persuade the BFI board of governors to embark on a new kind of intellectual drive underpinning the dissemination and education of film in Britain. The record shows a summary of the prevailing reformist attitudes in the Department during the mid-1960s but curiously one which also swerves a definition for film culture while acknowledging the need for a definition to be decided upon. Nevertheless, it is certain that film culture is an oppositional term, in opposition to "film appreciation", and perhaps can be defined in such a fashion: theoretical, robust, open to Hollywood and foreign influence.

"Film culture" was to be the new vanguard, underpinning the BFI Education Department's modernist approach to film education. On further investigation through the archives, the term is a constant within the BFI Education Staff internal memos during the latter half of the decade, culminating in Paddy Whannel's letter to the Board of Governors in December 1968, outlining "The State of Film Culture" and highlighting that "there is [a] deeper sense in which the work of the Education Department is important to the Institute's long term objective...as the history of cinema indicates, there is a close connection between periods of great cultural activity and intellectual movements".⁴⁶ The ambition and scope of these aims is a far cry from the Education Department's work a mere fifteen years previously which involved producing educational pamphlets with morally-charged titles such as *Are They Safe At The Cinema?*⁴⁷ But what were these intellectual movements? And what would be the BFI's role amid this "great cultural activity"? Whannel's plea to the governors here is to encourage the alignment of the department's initiatives with those of wider intellectual

⁴⁶ Paddy Whannel, "the State of Film Culture", BFI Archives, Box 91.

⁴⁷ Janet Hills, *Are They Safe At The Cinema? A Considered Answer to Critics of the Cinema* (BFI: London, 1953). The book was aimed to provide "uplifting contrast to morally suspect - and ruinously awful - adult audience films that found their way into children's matinees". See I.Q. Hunter, Laraine Porter, Justin Smith eds., *The Routledge Companion to British Cinema History*, (London: Routledge, 2017) p. 203.

developments to further generate this activity. His suggestion reads like a clement sentence, halfway between theory and implementation, an appeal to construct great art out of the intellectual. Whannel indicates that the framework already exists – the institution simply needs to be bold and brave to provide the resources for the flourishing to begin. To be in the vanguard of film meant keeping abreast of foreign intellectual movements where innovative techniques were quickly outpacing and rendering extant modes of criticism obsolete.

Whannel advocates for a form of film education and criticism stripped of its moral obligations, its discriminatory agenda, and its antipathy towards Hollywood. Shaping a “film culture”, Whannel believes, demands institutional support for these intellectual endeavours and innovative processes, developing a wide-ranging school of theory and practice, taking its cue from Hollywood to Paris, from London via Pitlochry. Whannel’s transnational outlook is uncharted, capacious terrain for the BFI, but how did it come about? In Marco Santoro and Gisèle Sapiro’s terms the circulation of theory and ideas occur due to the compulsive component of the “bearer of ideas”: the intellectual producers who play a crucial role in allowing the circulation to initiate through, as Baert calls them, a series of intellectual interventions.⁴⁸ In the following section, I will develop this model to detail how Paddy Whannel’s intellectual interventions, primarily occasioned through his writings during the late 1950s and early 1960s, located him within a specific intellectual field, that of the serious study of popular culture in Britain.

For film culture to emerge as an accepted orthodoxy within the institution, the existing belief systems would need to undergo a validity crisis. In this regard, film appreciation began to lose its legitimacy when confronted with the critiques of culturally engaged intellectuals

⁴⁸ Gisèle Sapiro and Marco Santoro, “On the Social Life of Ideas and the Persistence of the Author in the Social and Human Sciences”, *Sociologica Fascicolo 1* (2017) doi: 10.2383/86980.

operating within the New Left rubric, many of whom we encountered in the previous chapter. Before collaborating with Peter Wollen as the self-styled “intellectual activists” at the BFI during the mid-1960s, Paddy Whannel had already developed a substantial body of writings on media and culture, often but not exclusively within New Left organs such as *ULR* and the Stuart Hall-edited iteration of *NLR*, producing what can now be adduced as a sustained critical analysis of extant modes of cultural criticism in Britain. While others, notably Farred (2007),⁴⁹ Horowitz (2012),⁵⁰ and Bounds (2016),⁵¹ have laid out the terms by which Whannel’s work is considered influential within the history of cultural studies, I hope to demonstrate how his significance stretches well beyond his status as an auxiliary figure to the foundational work undertaken by Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams and extends into playing the definitive role in re-purposing the BFI as a field of reception and dissemination for theoretical texts from France. To accomplish this, Whannel’s own habitus and intellectual trajectory, noticeably different from that of Wollen, bears retelling to connect his intellectual development to the world from which this galvanising approach to film study emerged.

As briefly mentioned, Whannel was born into a working-class family in Pitlochry, Perthshire, seventy miles north of Edinburgh. Whannel finished his official schooling in 1937 at the age of fourteen and immediately commenced work as a film projectionist at the Royal Theatre in his hometown. His wartime national service was as part of the British Royal Navy and he subsequently qualified as a teacher in 1948 whereupon he moved to London, securing a diploma in art history at the University of London in 1948. He also commenced teaching

⁴⁹ Grant Farred, “The First Shall Be Last: Locating the Popular Arts in the Stuart Hall Oeuvre”, in Brian Meeks (ed.), in *Culture, Politics, Race and Diaspora: The Thought of Stuart Hall*. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2007), pp. 85-97.

⁵⁰ Horowitz, *Consuming Pleasures*, pp. 235-270.

⁵¹ Philip Bounds, “From Folk to Jazz: Eric Hobsbawm, British Communism and Cultural Studies”, in Philip Bounds and David Berry (eds.), *British Marxism and Cultural Studies: Essays on a Living Tradition* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 87-105.

work at a number of London secondary schools, teaching media, film and social studies. On his appointment to the BFI in 1957, he was appointed to its Film Appreciation and Distribution Department. On his resignation in 1971, he relinquished the post of head of the Education Department.⁵² Within these fourteen years lay the crucial period of film evolution and groundwork for the BFI Education Department to emerge as a quasi-academic field and, by proxy, for French theory to take hold in the institution.⁵³

Whannel certainly benefitted from close connections with many of those within the emergent New Left whose coffee house meetings, as we have seen, were the site of a resurgent socialist approach to politics and culture. Whannel also existed within a similar structure to Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart in that they were working class intellectuals, operating from the vantage point of different institutions. Whannel was already in possession of a history and set of experiences which allowed him to “speak outside of conventional lines and embrace the culture that had also made [him]”.⁵⁴ Yet there is an implicit danger of empiricist bias in accounting for Whannel’s trajectory through the facts of his biography and, as demonstrated by Horowitz,⁵⁵ this can lead to a paucity of precision towards defining Whannel’s own intellectual enterprise which is a considerably more fluid and public than these previous accounts suggest. Whannel was certainly a very visible presence from early on in his BFI career: he spoke at numerous conferences, wrote and edited a whole series of pamphlets, wrote extensively under the “Albert Casey” alias and published *The Popular Arts* in 1964.⁵⁶

⁵² Alan Lovell, “Appreciation: Paddy Whannel 1922-1980”, *Screen Education* 35, Summer 1980 pp. 3-4.

⁵³ I interviewed Alan Lovell via phone on 12 January 2021. Lovell maintained the importance of Whannel, citing him as “the key figure in the whole [serious intellectual engagement with cinema]”.

⁵⁴ Richard Dyer, “Introduction to the 2018 Edition”, *The Popular Arts* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), p. xvii.

⁵⁵ Horowitz, *Consuming Pleasures*, pp. 235-270.

⁵⁶ I will refer to *The Popular Arts* as TPA from hereon.

But what do the “Albert Casey” articles tell us about Whannel’s positioning at this time? The Albert Casey writings are striking in that they demonstrate a shifting movement between a Leavisite and a post-Leavisite frame of reference. By the latter, I mean that Whannel is keen to maintain the discriminatory notions of good and bad taste while also shifting the emphasis away from tradition to a tentatively more cosmopolitan ambition, one which gave as much cultural importance to the epic westerns of John Ford as it did to the turbulent melodramas of David Lean. Through his writings, “Casey” aka Whannel repeatedly expressed aspirations that the new media — film, radio and television — be properly analysed rather than dismissed for their form over content. Again and again, Whannel demonstrates a need for a critical flexibility which incorporates applying the same measures of judgement to films by not just Ford but also Howard Hawks and Frank Capra: the fascination with the heroic character as a fulcrum for morality. This shows Whannel in an alternative light to Williams and Hoggart whose dislike for Hollywood and the corrupting effects of mass-media was already well documented. These pleas were concomitant with his critiques of advertising — an endeavour scorned for encouraging “greed, fear, snobbery and envy” – and its deployment of corrupting language to mask more nefarious desires on behalf of the advertisers. “The response to the surly aggressiveness of [Elvis] Presley”, he remarked upon in a 1960 essay for the *NLR*, “contains within itself valuable sources of non-conformism”.⁵⁷ Teenagers displayed a unique ability to “size up the world they are dealing with, because it is not the only world they know. The teenage culture”, he concluded, with a sideways glance at Richard Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy*, “does not only consist of coffee bars and juke boxes”.⁵⁸ These positive views of teenage culture were visible across the emerging paradigm of the New Left and, as we saw in the previous chapter, this way of seeing culture in a political light

⁵⁷ Brian Groombridge and Paddy Whannel, ‘Something Rotten in Denmark Street’, *NLR* 1/1, pp. 52-54.

⁵⁸ Brian Groombridge and Paddy Whannel, “Something Rotten in Denmark Street”, *NLR* 1/1, September/October 1960, pp. 52- 54.

was the galvanising source for many disaffected intellectuals on the left. Whannel, therefore, was a key agent in the systematic promotion and dissemination of the serious study of popular culture. His role within the BFI provided him with legitimacy and his pseudonymous writings for *Teaching* endowed him with the freedom to expound upon his beliefs without infringing upon his own institutional position. In essence, Whannel was in a very strong position to establish himself as a paradigmatic influence within the cultural field. His versatility in spreading his ideas through what Baert refers to as “supplementary communication and dissemination channels” incorporating periodical publications, media appearances and public lectures further galvanised the spreading of his ideas.⁵⁹ As we will see, Whannel was particularly adept within the realm of the conference, a mode of communication described by Justus Wieland as a “novel, ritualistic form of postwar discursivity...that crucial space of midcentury knowledge production”.⁶⁰

Visual Persuaders to the *Popular Arts*

In spring 1959, the Joint Council for Education through Art organised an eight-day conference called “Visual Persuaders”, held at the National Film Theatre in London. The aim of the forum, according to its organiser John Morley, was to develop a substantial body of public opinion that will “share our vision of the role of arts in education and the part that this education plays in our mass society”. Following the guidelines of the 1944 Education Act, Morley spoke at length about the crucial connections which need to be strengthened between education and artforms, suggesting that those working in schools need to become more attuned to the nuances of their students’ upbringing and use this as a tool to develop more of

⁵⁹ Baert, *The Existential Moment*, p. 17.

⁶⁰ Justus Wieland, *Happiness By Design*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2020) p. 152.

an understanding of both film and television. Once the forum had concluded, the organisers released a statement announcing that “the potential for research, study and enjoyment of film and television had been emphatically demonstrated”.⁶¹ Attendees of the forum were reportedly drawn from teachers and NFT members while speakers included Peter Worsley from the *New Reasoner* and Alan Lovell, Stuart Hall, Graham Martin and John Berger, all of whom were contributors to *ULR*. Members of the *ULR* clubs were also present among the 5,500 attendees. The significant numbers attested to both the increasing interest in sophisticated analysis of culture and communications and the attendant needs for political mobilisation in the light of the events of 1956. Furthermore, the Visual Persuaders conference actively agitated for a move away from the vagueness of “film appreciation” as a term. An editorial in *Screen Education* noted that “several speakers at the forum bandied about the term ‘film appreciation’ as if it was a dirty expression”. The article also opined that there was “more than a hint of passivity in ‘film appreciation’, a feeling of it being mainly concerned with techniques and technicalities”.⁶² Raymond Williams, who also spoke at the conference, had already highlighted these concerns in an article some ten years prior to the forum. Stating his experience in organising film appreciation classes for the WEA, Williams insisted that the “small body of serious appreciatory work...[was] to one trained in literary criticism...likely to seem inadequate”. He continued: “It is technically expert but this advantage is limited by a common failure to understand the place of technical analysis in a total judgment – the film is interesting because of the emotional judgment with which it deals; it is also, technically, very competent”. Williams’ reservations ran deep; he felt that “appreciation” had generated a method of relating to the arts which was akin to “department classes...what mattered was

⁶¹ Quoted in MacDonald, *The Appreciation of Film*, p. 173. Much of the information on the *Visual Persuaders* is detailed in MacDonald’s account which itself is taken from John Morley, “Visual Persuaders”, *Film*, September/October 1959, p. 6.

⁶² “Editorial”, *Screen Education* 1, 1959, p. 2.

that the uninstructed (the lesser breeds who read the penny papers) should learn under the guidance of experts the finer points of an art which must be accepted as absolute”.⁶³

The Visual Persuaders conference was very much within the British New Left mould of rethinking culture as a keyword emerging from class, agency, experience and value. The conference itself was indicative of a burgeoning awareness on the New Left of cultural analysis, buoyed by the success of Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy* and Williams’ *Culture and Society* published in the previous two years to the conference. Furthermore, the conference itself ensured that ideas of a serious engagement with popular culture beyond film appreciation were able to influence key figures within the broader cultural climate. This desire to create a more progressive pedagogy connected with concerns across the New Left and began to permeate within the collective imagination within the Left-public intellectual sphere. But the spread of this new intellectual doctrine, a tentative move away from Leavisite concerns, could not succeed purely on the basis of a singular conference event. And as we have seen, for a doctrine to take hold, it needs to be coherently packaged and labelled.⁶⁴ In this sense, it was the publication of Hall and Whannel’s *TPA* in 1964, which, in effect, was a packaging of the ideas formulated at the Visual Persuaders conference five years previously, which established this post-Leavisite framework as an intellectual doctrine and to which we will now turn.

The Popular Arts has had a curious history since its publication in 1964. In one of his final interviews, Peter Wollen reflected positively, claiming “it was the first book to use what you might call a theoretical approach to a subject that had no academic standing”.⁶⁵ Colin

⁶³ Raymond Williams, “Film as a Tutorial Subject”, *Rewley House Papers* 3, Summer 1958, p. 188.

⁶⁴ Baert, *The Existential Moment*, p. 21.

⁶⁵ Mulvey and Wollen with Grievson, “From Cinephilia to Film Studies”, p. 218.

MacCabe cast admiring glances towards the book during his inaugural lecture as BFI Head of Production in citing *TPA* as a “more fertile book than Richard Hoggart’s almost contemporary *The Uses of Literacy*”, comparing and criticising the latter for its reconstruction of a “largely illusory stage of working-class culture” in favour of Hall and Whannel’s superior “focus on the working class of the 50s and on the possibilities of developing contemporary working-class taste in radio, film, television and recorded music”.⁶⁶ Reviews contemporaneous to the book’s publication reveal a rather uneven, almost tepid, response. Philip Oakes, writing in the *Sunday Telegraph*, hailed the publication as “a witty, acute, sometimes devastating survey of the powerful influences which help to shape all our lives. Possibly it is the most important work in its field since ‘The Uses of Literacy’”. Eric Hobsbawm reviewed *TPA* for the *TLS*⁶⁷ with cautious optimism indicating that the “industrialisation of culture” was too much for the authors to fully get to grips with while Jonathan Miller, editor of the BBC arts show *Monitor*, was less circumspect in his criticisms, dismissing Hall and Whannel as incapable of developing “enough concentration to stop bathos from getting the upper hand” while admitting that the book does “hover” with a “good-hearted decency, between a rather diluted Orwellian belletrism and the over-familiar pieties of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams”.⁶⁸ Later engagement with the book is mixed; aside from MacCabe and Wollen’s praise, Grant Farred pronounces it as a text which has “long fallen into disuse, if not disrepute”⁶⁹ while Phillip Bounds cites it as a “seminal investigation”.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Colin MacCabe, *On the Eloquence of the Vulgar: Justification of the Study of Film and Television*, (London: BFI Publishing 1993), p. 15.

⁶⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, “Pop Goes The Culture”, *Times Literary Supplement*, London Thursday, December 17, 1964, p. 1137.

⁶⁸ Jonathan Miller, “Anatomy of pop culture”, *the Guardian*, London 13 December 1964, p. 26.

⁶⁹ Grant Farred, “The First Shall be The Last: Locating the Popular Culture in Stuart Hall’s Oeuvre”, p. 85.

⁷⁰ Phillip Bounds, “From Folk to Jazz: Eric Hobsbawm, British Communism and Cultural Studies”, *Critique*, (2012), p. 100.

Certainly, *TPA* appears to have a limited circulation either outside histories of cultural studies or outside histories of Stuart Hall's oeuvre, as per the context of the 2018 reissue. This also ensures that the role of Whannel in *TPA* is consistently overlooked. While it is not indicated in the book which chapter was authored by whom, Garry Whannel, Paddy's son, owns a version of the book, which belonged to his father, with individual sections highlighted with either "PW" or "SH" initials.⁷¹ From this guide, we can ascertain that Whannel was responsible for sole authorship of the chapters entitled "The Media and Society"; "The Young Audience"; "The Institutions"; "Mass Society: Critics and Defenders" and "The Curriculum and the Popular Arts". Accordingly, my analysis of the book will focus on these chapters authored by Whannel. Certainly, we can say that *TPA* was a prescient text, introducing, as Farred states, "the vexed and difficult issue of the aesthetic into cultural studies".⁷² But I want to offer an alternative view, one which places *TPA* as a pivotal pre-history text within the rubric of French theory's movement in Britain in that it generates the shift in critical emphasis which allowed foreign theories to replace extant modes of analysis. As we will see, *TPA* maintains an approach which moves away from Leavis's hierarchies of taste without ever fully extracting itself from his influence. In 2004, Stuart Hall suggested this was more strategic than reflective of a genuine engagement with Leavis, as the authors did not want to disengage themselves from the "strong influence of Leavis among English teachers".⁷³ Whannel himself had commented back in 1959 that "the cinema needs... a Leavis",⁷⁴ a position further remarked upon by Hall as one which "comes out of that tradition of attention to these words in this order, which is very much the T.S. Eliot, Leavis tradition... that kind of close criticism applied to popular culture was really what he was

⁷¹ This is mentioned in Richard Dyer's introduction to *TPA* and was verified in a personal interview with Garry Whannel on 15 December 2018.

⁷² Farred, "The First Shall be The Last: Locating the Popular Culture in Stuart Hall's Oeuvre", p. 96.

⁷³ Bolas, *Screen Education*, p. 111.

⁷⁴ Paddy Whannel "Towards a Positive Criticism of the Mass Media", *Film Teacher* 17 May 1959, pp. 28–30.

wanting to do, and that was sort of what I was wanting to do at that stage too”.⁷⁵ This sense of strategic positioning undertaken by the authors provides an important context for Whannel: his work in *TPA* and his association with Stuart Hall, an increasingly visible figurehead for the New Left, strengthens his position in the field of cultural criticism as he unites himself within a collaborative, intellectual endeavour operating at a political frontier: the relationship of education and popular culture to socialist politics. As evidenced by the reaction to the earlier Visual Persuaders conference, the term “film appreciation” was already in peril and perhaps expectedly, it is given short shrift in *TPA*.

The first chapter, authored by Whannel, concerning “Definitions”, remarks that

...the divorce between art and life is often reflected in school as a distinction between the ‘work’ subjects...and the ‘recreative subjects’ which prepare us for our leisure time and in which the emphasis is on ‘creativity’ and ‘appreciation.’ The arts come to be regarded as sugar on the pill, relegated to the fringes of our lives, rather than as essential ways in which we can articulate experiences. Good Taste is acquired as an additional accomplishment in a kind of finishing-school process once the business of understanding the real world has been completed. This is the well-rounded-man view of culture which always involves the separation of moral values from what are called the aesthetic qualities.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Stuart Hall with Maya Jaggi, *Personally Speaking: A Long Conversation with Stuart Hall*. dir. Mike Dibb, (Northampton Mass.: Media Education Foundation DVD transcript), <www.mediaed.org/transcripts/StuartHallPersonallySpeakingTranscript.pdf> [accessed 05 May 2020]

⁷⁶ Hall and Whannel, *TPA*, .p. 28-29.

This attempt at a definition indicates that the “theory” behind Whannel’s study was still halfway between a Leavisite and a tentative post-Leavisite tradition, and still “wedded to the critical apparatus that literary studies provided”. Nevertheless, *TPA* engineered a discourse which not just introduced the aesthetic into cultural studies, as Farrar has observed, but provided a roadmap for film studies itself to emerge. In this sense, we can view *TPA* as an ur-text: tackling film and popular culture in a manner prescient to the work of Peter Wollen but as yet untouched by intellectual theories emerging from France. Whannel’s chapters brought John Ford and genre studies of the Western into the rubric of serious cultural analysis, topics which were later expanded upon by Peter Wollen in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1969) and Jim Kitses in *Horizons West* (1969).⁷⁷ Furthermore, the publication of *TPA*, under Whannel’s own name rather than the Albert Casey pseudonym, firmly positions him as an intellectual within the emerging field of cultural analysis but further distances him from the extant field of film appreciation as practiced within the BFI. Through the narrative generated by *TPA*, Whannel set the terms from which the serious study of film could emerge: pointing towards an engagement with a modernism which Leavisite studies critically lacked. The work was emphatically pedagogical — a distinction shared with the Cinema One publications and the later *Screen* enterprise — but retained a clarity of expression arguably lacking from its more illustrious progeny.

One of Whannel’s frequent preoccupations was the Western, a topic which he covered throughout his Casey writings as well as devoting an entire chapter of *TPA* to the genre, stating that “for all its stereotyping, the western is capable of presenting an image of the tragic life — the lonely, roaming hero destined to disappear as the reign of law settles over the West or as his scattered past catches up with him in some dingy bar-room” while he later

⁷⁷ Jim Kitses, *Horizons West*, (London: BFI, 1967).

cautions that “most Westerns are too crude even to operate on the level of myth”. The opportunity to analyse the Western as a form of myth is passed up by Whannel but is prescient considering that Wollen and Kitses work on precisely this model through the prism of Lévi-Strauss. Furthermore, Whannel proves himself a skilled film critic, writing knowledgeably about the Western, conscious of authorial intention, visual style and technical mastery while remaining critical: the story of *My Darling Clementine* (1946) is “predictable” and “flawed by a subplot”, and John Ford’s films are, in general, “uneven” and “easily slip into sentimentality”.⁷⁸ Nevertheless the Western was summoned from critical disrepute and provided with pedagogical legitimacy: the film had a function beyond escapism or entertainment and its rituals have a “code, a certain way of life”.⁷⁹ In Whannel’s terms:

the Western seems to offer something to urban peoples everywhere. In part the response to the feeling of freedom evoked by the great beauties of the landscape, but primarily it is a response to the westerner as hero...[the tragic hero] lives under some form of moral compulsion, ‘doing what he has to do’ because of some deadly necessity. The Western describes a man’s world, but the hero honours women and in his relation with them exhibits a graciousness and reserve. It is this, alongside the moral element in the image of the lonely man pitted against injustice, that allows us to speak of this man as a latter-day knight, the only equivalent we have for the chivalrous hero in popular myth today.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Hall and Whannel, *TPA*, p. 109

⁷⁹ Hall and Whannel, *TPA*, p. 100

⁸⁰ Hall and Whannel, *TPA*, p. 101

Whannel's promotion of the Western as a legitimate site for serious analyses distances him from then-prevalent activities around "film appreciation" at the BFI and points to a future for popular culture criticism, untrammelled by implicit hierarchies and dismissive attitudes towards American film.

This terms of this future were most explicitly laid out in the final chapter of the book yet this was left out of the 2018 reissue. Dyer notes in the introduction how the "last eighty pages provided practical information for teachers in terms of classroom plans and guidance on reading and teaching audio-visual material", a slight which underplays the importance of the final chapter, as I argue it offers the clearest demonstration of Whannel's own views along with a remarkable sense of vision for the future of popular culture and pedagogy in Britain. Titled "The Curriculum and The Popular Arts", and entirely authored by Whannel, the chapter situates the current state of film pedagogy within the contexts of the Newsom Report of 1963, which Whannel quotes as highlighting the "considerable demand that the curriculum be made more 'realistic' and 'practical'".⁸¹

Echoing concerns made in the first chapter, Whannel offers the most powerful articulation of his position, operating both within and outside Leavisite concerns, insisting that:

the power to discriminate is the power to analyse and evaluate our experiences...A great deal of teaching in the arts is still taste-changing. Much of it is carried out with the best of intentions, but however worthy the motive, however admirable the standards, it is still of course

⁸¹ Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel, *The Popular Arts*, first edition, (London: Hutchinson Education, 1964), p. 389.

imposition...there are standards, but they cannot be imposed, only discovered. It is the teacher's task to assist that discovery, to make individual growth possible. Such an aim implies certain methods.⁸²

While Whannel fails to embark upon any explanation as to what these methods involve, by questioning the role and function of "taste" within film pedagogy, he was casting out the remit of his field into new, if undefined, territories. Whannel's positioning is interesting here in that he is not the person who is insisting upon or accomplishing an intellectual intervention; he is merely describing and assessing the current state of film pedagogy, generating a pre-intervention: a diagnosis without a remedy.

Whannel concludes the chapter by further quoting from the Newsom Report: "...in a very large field of popular culture...pupils can learn, with guidance, to sharpen their perceptions."⁸³ While the report does continue to encourage positive discrimination, "it would be wrong to leave pupils with the idea that everything they like is bad, or that all criticism is negative. A sound, positive judgement must start with valuing properly the good things they enjoy".⁸⁴ The chapter ends with two recommendations: a full-time course, in popular culture, lasting a year which would produce a minority of experts who could continue teaching in their own locality; and the establishment of a permanent study laboratory with a staff of four lecturers, each with a different bias, accommodated in a residential building for twelve to eighteen students with a book and film library and a cinema/theatre equipped with both 16mm and 35m projectors. This laboratory would have three functions: firstly, teaching; secondly, servicing the local community in league with the local Adult Education authority

⁸² Hall and Whannel, *The Popular Arts*, first edition, p. 391.

⁸³ Hall and Whannel, *The Popular Arts*, first edition, p. 395.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*,

and present “cinema, jazz and folk-music”; and thirdly, provide a centre for research and study. This aspect would take account of:

the work of sociologists and psychologists but would place its emphasis on developing critical methods, and in particular it would explore the no-man’s land that at present exists between mass-media research and criticism. It would try to establish what contribution might be made by the disciplines of criticism to, say, content analyses where the techniques of research are disturbingly clumsy. Clearly, anyone engaged in probing the relationship between the media and the audience should not only be skilled in the methods of research but also sensitive to the way a medium works as art. We are still at the stage of evolving, for example, the language for handling the complexities of film art. What we need now are studies in depth: detailed analyses of particular films, TV programmes, etc., alongside equally considered examinations of individual response studied over a long period. Research could also be carried out into methods of training appreciation and discrimination with a view to finding out which are the most effective. The study laboratory would provide a much-needed centre for developing work in teaching and criticism.⁸⁵

With this conclusion, Whannel sets out the parameters for a transnational field of cultural criticism operating within an intellectual climate which is open to investigating art forms across the spectrum of contemporary media, from film art to television. In this respect, Whannel develops a narrative within the intellectual field highlighting a deficiency in its

⁸⁵ Hall and Whannel, *The Popular Arts*, first edition, p. 400

current state but crucially which is dependent on what is left out: his pleas for a laboratory of arts research demands “critical methods” but fails to explain what these methods would consist of. While the development of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham partly fulfilled these aims, Whannel is also pointing towards a re-calibration of film pedagogy, and inadvertently marking out the BFI Education Department as receptive cultural terrain for transnational ideas to create an impact. Whannel’s rhetoric also serves as an indication of his own view of film studies in the mid 1960s. While there is no direct ideology at play within the text itself, *TPA* is unquestionably a New Left project which could be purloined from the Stuart Hall-edited iteration of the *NLR* but certainly from not the later Perry Anderson-commandeered *NLR*, which might have lambasted Whannel for his theoretical paucity. But *TPA*’s pedagogical function extended beyond the classroom: it served as the base text for the serious study of film in Britain but also provided the culmination of Whannel’s writings and conference interventions, serving as a significant statement of his New Left allegiances, operating within the Hoggart and Williams mode. The fact that *TPA* was co-authored with Hall suggests a willingness on Whannel’s part to share the work, a willingness to relinquish overall control. In signifying a codification of disenchantment with “film appreciation”, *TPA* is the first public ? indicating the fluidity of Whannel’s position and providing a framework for a move away from appreciation to culture.

BFI Education Seminars

We will now turn to the developments in the BFI Education Department which suggest the constitution of an inter-disciplinary subculture of diffusion, consumers and users of French theories in Britain. This section is also crucial in providing the first demonstration of the alignment of the values we have discussed so far: key figures from the *NLR* and the BFI co-

mingle within the space of the BFI Education Department's initiatives from 1967 onwards. The existence of this subculture is consequential for understanding the process of legitimization of interpretive theories: if French theory is consumed by producers from different disciplines, in this case the serious study of film, despite strong substantive differences among the particular French theories, we can infer that these producers are interested in French theory as a "genre" or in the intellectual style common to these theories. This section will also demonstrate that because of the significant differences among the theories, we can conclude that the consumption of French theory is not purely motivated by scholarly rationale and that the producers in this instance partly use French theory as a form of cultural capital to bolster film studies as a legitimate object for academic study along with their own status within the BFI.

In January 1966, Paddy Whannel appointed Peter Wollen to the role of Head of Publications within the BFI Education Department on the recommendation of Alan Lovell.⁸⁶ Wollen secured the position on the basis of the thumbnail film sketches he had been producing for the *NLR* over the previous three years.⁸⁷ Jim Kitses had replaced Harcourt as deputy head of department while Wollen was joined by Alan Lovell as Editor of Film Materials. Two Teacher Advisers were also appointed: Victor Perkins and Alex Richardson who was also secretary of the Society for Film in Education and Television.⁸⁸ The education department itself was based in premises at 70 Old Compton Street in Soho and contained a screening room in the basement and was within walking distance of the BFI's primary premises on Dean Street, the Soho screening rooms on D'Arbly Street where all the major Hollywood

⁸⁶ "I started to read Peter's stuff in the *NLR* as he had a political interest while writing about Hawks. So I said to Paddy Whannel: let's try to get Peter on the BFI staff". Interview with Alan Lovell, 12 January 2021.

⁸⁷ Guilbaut and Watson, "From an Interview with Peter Wollen".

⁸⁸ See Terry Bolas, "Screen Education: A Timeline 1930-1993" in *Screen Education*, p. 358-369 for a full account of BFI Education related staff appointments during this period.

films were pre-screened for industry and press, and Meard Street which housed the offices of the *NLR*. This proximity aided the ease in which key figures from across the left-leaning cultural and political sphere were able to attend and participate within the Education Seminars. These “semi-public”⁸⁹ talks were held in the basement screening room in the Old Compton Street building which, according to Laura Mulvey, meant that the participant sat in the cinema seats and the speaker addressed them from in front of the cinema screen.⁹⁰ While the seminars themselves are remembered as pivotal events by those who attended, there is practically no scholarship available on these events. They are relegated to footnotes within the Nowell-Smith and Dupin history of the BFI, an oversight which does not tally with the anecdotal importance attached to the events elsewhere. “Clearly the thing which had the biggest impact [on the BFI during this period] was the seminars”, reflected Alan Lovell in 1999. “I can remember Peter [Wollen] doing the first paper on semiology and nobody had a clue what semiology meant, desperately looking in dictionaries! Those seminars were pretty open, and a number of people from *New Left Review* came, like Tom Nairn and Jon Halliday. All the ideas of semiology, psychoanalysis, Marxism came out of those seminars, that’s my really vivid impulse”.⁹¹

Nevertheless, the Education Seminars are very well represented within the BFI Archive Collection. In a bulletin circulated to BFI members in 1970, the seminars are described as follows:

⁸⁹ Laura Mulvey states that the seminars were certainly not open to anyone and would have been largely invite only. Email interview with author, 05 May 2020.

⁹⁰ Email interview with author, 02 May 2020.

⁹¹ John Gibbs “Interviews: Ian Cameron, V.F. Perkins, Charles Barr, Alan Lovell”, *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism* (8). pp. 38-71, (2019) <<http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/84433/>>, [accessed 01 May 2020]

The BFI Education Department organises a series of seminars designed to bridge the gap between film criticism, film education in the schools and the orthodox academic disciplines in the universities. Copies of the papers presented at some of these seminars are available, free of charge, on request to:

B.F.I. Publications Department, 72 Dean Street, London W1V

5HB. Titles available are:

‘Film: Technology and Technique’ by Victor Perkins

‘The Western’ by Alan Lovell

‘Luis Bunuel’ by Alan Harcourt

‘Eisenstein’s Aesthetics’ by Peter Wollen

‘Marshall McLuhan’ by Tom Nairn

‘Film as a Means of Communication’ by Cyril Barrett

‘Aims of Film Education’ by Alan Lovell

‘Auteur and Genre: Anthony Mann’ by Jim Kitses

‘Totems and Movies’ by Sam Rohdie

‘Literary Criticism and Cinema Criticism’ by John Ward

‘The British Cinema: the Unknown Cinema’ by Alan Lovell

‘Genre and Iconography’ by Colin MacArthur

‘Jean Luc-Godard: Politics and Humanism’ by Brian Darling

‘The Concept of Communication(s): A Draft For Discussion’

by Peter Wollen

‘Style, Rhetoric and Genre’ by Sam Rohdie

‘Words and Pictures’ by Gary Herman

‘Film in the Humanities’ by Jim Hillier and Andrew
McTaggart⁹²

As both a pedagogical exercise and intellectual intervention, the Education Seminars provide the most clear exposition of Paddy Whannel’s idea of the Education Department as a laboratory for the ferment and exchange of ideas, in a setting which encouraged both debate and conflict. Speakers were comprised of current BFI staff, *NLR* writers or outsiders such as the Irish Jesuit priest, Fr. Cyril Barrett, one of the founding members of the philosophy department at Warwick.⁹³ These seminars were an early venture in interdisciplinary communication, convening various film, literature, and philosophy specialists under the institutional drive of the BFI Education Department. They also operated as a Research and Development process for travelling theories and film culture, a knowledge production and dissemination factory within the self-styled “laboratory” of the BFI Education Department. Reflecting on this in 2000, Wollen remarked that

the purpose of the Education Department in the BFI was to launch film education in English schools and universities as a serious subject, alongside the other arts. Painting, literature, music—it was taken for granted that they would be part of the curriculum. So one of the basic goals of the Education Department was to support anyone who wanted to teach film in schools or universities. And one way to support them was by publishing books which they could use in class. So that was the context in which *Signs & Meaning*

⁹² “BFI Education Seminars”, BFI Education Seminar Papers, Bill Douglas/Peter Jewell Collection, Bill Douglas Cinema Museum, University of Exeter. All subsequent references to BFI Seminar Papers are from this archive folder.

⁹³ While no female speakers are listed in the 1970 bulletin, an earlier article by Wollen in *Screen Education* does list a seminar entitled “Sociology and Film” by Terry Lovell which occurred at some point in early 1967.

in the Cinema was written. There was also a French influence because already the journal *Communications* had been launched in France, where it introduced the ideas of semiology and structuralism.⁹⁴

Furthermore, many of the talks delivered at the Education Seminars were made available for free for teachers to use at their own discretion. And while it is near impossible to re-construct the take-up of these seminars amongst film teachers at the time, their consistent availability across libraries in the UK, USA, Australia and further afield suggest their dissemination was widespread. This work, which, to this day, demonstrates a strong sense of urgency, was, particularly in the case of Wollen's *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, heightened by their political context: the student uprisings of 1968. But the BFI Education Department was staging its own revolution on the terrain of film pedagogy. According to Wollen:

If people were going to teach film in schools and universities there had to be books, because you can't teach a subject which no one has written any books about. And on the analogy of the other arts, there should be books which describe the history of what it is, and there should be books that are monographs, and there should be books that approach the subject seriously and more theoretically

followed by the disclaimer:

I wasn't that much of a structuralist. After all, the semiotic theory in *Signs & Meaning* comes from Charles Sanders Peirce and not from Saussure. In

⁹⁴ Guilbaut and Watson, "From an Interview with Peter Wollen".

fact, I was critical of Saussure. But if I hadn't been aware that all these French writers were writing about Saussure I wouldn't have read Peirce and written about him.⁹⁵

But what effect did this assemblage of people and ideas have on the role and positioning of the Department? Many of the seminars, like Wollen's introduction, found a home in *Screen Education* as well as availability as guides for film educationists wishing to engage with the topics addressed; indeed, the framework for the entire series was laid out in "Towards a New Criticism?", an article written by Wollen for *Screen Education* in the September/October 1967 edition.⁹⁶ Spread across two pages and illustrated with a still from John Ford's western *Wagon Master* (1950), the article is subtitled "The first series of Film Seminars" and announces the arrival of cinema as "a new force". The cinema is a medium where the extant methods of criticism without recourse to "sociology, literary criticism, aesthetics and psychology" ought to be dismissed as it will merely leave us with a "primal and innocent blankness" and "a heuristic void". To fill this void, Wollen provides a brief review of the BFI Education Department's "experimental series of film seminars" which encompasses "film critics, film teachers and university teachers and researchers" who maintain a shared aim to investigate "what kind of interconnections could be made" between the traditional modes of film criticism incorporating close readings of individual films and directors alongside contemporary work in "mass media sociology, linguistics and semiology, etc.." Wollen writes approvingly of the seminars, highlighting his own "Semiology and the Cinema: Some Points of Contact" alongside those by Victor Perkins, Terry Lovell, Peter Harcourt, Andrew Tudor and Alan Lovell as indicative of the "clearest idea of the trend of the seminars". The

⁹⁵ Guilbaut and Watson, "From an Interview with Peter Wollen".

⁹⁶ Peter Wollen, "Towards A New Criticism?" *Screen Education* 41, September/October 1967, pp. 90-91.

initiative was further deemed a success by Wollen as they succeeded in “confronting different approaches, voicing questions, introducing new concepts and revealing fundamental disagreements” which resulted in a departure from the “privileged territory of individual taste” and a re-connection of “judgements” to more “general, and more abstract, considerations”. Nevertheless, Wollen revealed, “huge new areas of confusion became apparent without actually being cleared”. A second series of seminars was announced for autumn 1967 whereby questions would continue to be asked around a rather confusing combination of “theory scientific and (singular) from film aesthetics normative and (plural) and a typology of aesthetic systems”. The answers to these pressing questions, Wollen warned, formed the basis of the “shimmering and elusive surface of our momentary judgments and remarks”.

Wollen therefore positioned the seminars within a framework beyond the national and in a context where exchange of ideas is encouraged across national and administrative boundaries. Through this exchange, the BFI Education Seminars emerged as a knowledge producing laboratory — like a miniscule university with micro-departments representing the fields of literary criticism, sociology and politics from which a new field could emerge from this interdisciplinary exchange. It was in this context that the collision of film studies and theories from the continent occurred; Wollen’s own positioning, informed first by Lucien Goldmann but now by Charles Sanders Peirce via Levi Strauss through Roland Barthes and Christian Metz, extended his own reach as he could commission himself, educate, and advocate through the fluidity of his positioning at the BFI, all the while encouraged by Whannel who otherwise took a back seat in the seminars.⁹⁷ The format of these seminars also

⁹⁷ “I would be very surprised if my father was not fairly directly involved although Peter may well have programmed them...one of my father’s skills was as animateur – he was good at employing people and encouraging them – so I would imagine the seminar series had his support and active engagement. I remember

implies an audience which appears to have been selected from the immediate milieu of the culturally engaged New Left, incorporating collaborations with the CCCS in Birmingham.⁹⁸

We can also view these seminars as intellectual interventions: the type of positioning involved, according to Baert and Morgan, indicates that Wollen as the primary actor carefully selected the audience as the seminars were “semi-public”, consisting of like-minded, if not always entirely sympathetic, intellectuals from the left cultural and political sphere.⁹⁹ That the seminars also took place within a specific setting – the offices of the BFI Education Department - imposes a certain meaning on the seminars as it denotes institutional ownership of the initiative in a manner reflective of the literary salons from the Enlightenment era. Wollen, as host, plays a further important role in legitimising these seminars through his “ownership of the seminars”, as Laura Mulvey put it, and therefore imprinting his own credentials, formed at the *NLR*, on the proceedings.¹⁰⁰

The rhetoric employed by Wollen in his *Screen Education* introduction is worthy of further investigation. The carefully crafted logic of Wollen’s argument does not emerge *ex nihilo*; there is an implicit set of oppositions between modernism, represented by the cinema and emergent disciplines, and tradition represented by ‘intellectual isolationism’ which implicitly references Perry Anderson’s critiques of the national culture in the *NLR*. Furthermore the article is indicative of a deliberate intellectual intervention as it is directed to the future — represented by both further seminars operating within the rubric of this topic but also a future where an interdisciplinary film grammar is defined. Wollen writes clearly and free from

[that time] as a 17-year-old, him trying to explain some of the basic principles of semiotic analysis to me”. Email interview with Garry Whannel, 05 May 2020.

⁹⁸ Alan Lovell’s paper on “The Western” was delivered jointly with the CCCS at the University of Birmingham.

⁹⁹ See Baert and Morgan, *Conflict in the Academy: A Case-Study in the Sociology of Intellectuals*.

¹⁰⁰ Laura Mulvey confirmed that “Peter was very definitely the moving spirit behind [the seminars]. So there’s no doubt about his ‘ownership’. So far as I remember (a bit hazy, I’m afraid) he organised the seminars quite formally. They were held in the basement screening room in the Old Compton Street building (where the BFI Education Department was), which meant that the participant sat in the cinema seats and the speaker addressed them from the front”. Email interview, 01 May 2020

abstruse theorising or obscure references, yet he leaves the space for the application of ideas and terminology from external disciplines such as linguistics to be incorporated through these debates. While Wollen answered his own call through the publication of *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, his rhetoric at this earlier stage also allows for the opportunity for others to play a role in defining the terms of this new grammar of film so that consumers of film may benefit from this intellectual work undertaken by the department.¹⁰¹ In this sense, we can see the seminars as the basis for a visionary proposal to re-calibrate the terms of how film is studied in Britain. But where is the French element and how is this the beginnings of French theory's movement within the institution? To answer this, we can turn to the text of Wollen's first seminar topic: "Cinema and semiology: some points of contact".

First presented at a BFI Education Seminar in 1967¹⁰² and later published in *Form*, and in Wollen's 1982 collection of essays, *Readings and Writings*, "Cinema and Semiology: Some Points of Contact" is, in Nicolas Helm-Grovas's terms, "one of Wollen's early attempts to develop a semiotic account of the cinema".¹⁰³ The essay makes reference to Roland Barthes along with Umberto Eco and Pier Paolo Pasolini but, more significantly, represents an engagement with a perspective on cinema through the prism of Ferdinand de Saussure as demonstrated by Christian Metz, a figure Wollen refers to as "the major pioneer of film semiology". We know from Wollen's later interviews that he had read Metz's essay, "The Cinema: Language or Language System?" ("Le cinéma: langue ou langage?") which we briefly encountered in the last chapter.¹⁰⁴ However, Wollen was not in entire agreement with Metz's arguments, a position which exemplifies his stance throughout "Cinema and

¹⁰¹ There is a caveat here though - it wasn't just anyone who was allowed to take up this important work. It was limited to those working within specific fields, and primarily men.

¹⁰² My citations refer to the version in *Readings and Writings*, pp. 3-17.

¹⁰³ Helm-Grovas, *Theory and Practice*, p. 61.

¹⁰⁴ Guilbaut and Watson "From an Interview with Peter Wollen".

Semiology”. In this essay, Wollen traces a history of semiology, beginning with the work of Saussure and proceeding through subsequent attempts to develop his methods, primarily through Barthes’s work on fashion. He declares the latter’s take on Saussure to be the “correct” take but rhetorically ponders whether the same task should be undertaken for the cinema, a question which underpins the remainder of the essay. Wollen follows this by providing an analysis of “film grammar”, through the work of Eisenstein and André Bazin, the contemporary British film critic Charles Barr and, in particular, Christian Metz. Wollen warns that if we are to follow Metz, we are in danger of over-simplifying film grammar as Metz does not see linguistics anywhere other than through narrative technique. Wollen instead proposes that we investigate “the work of Lévi-Strauss [which] is of great interest and it is interesting that he has applauded the cinema’s capacity for conveying the myths of our own civilisation”. Wollen ends by providing a rationale for his dismissal of Lucien Goldmann’s work which he now describes as maintaining a “schematic and historic” focus within his homology of structures, a function which serves to ignore anomalies with the text. This also indicates that Wollen had been reading Althusser as “historicism” is one of the tenets through which Althusser attacks extant interpretations of Marx’s work. Furthermore, Goldmann’s attempt to “save Lukács’s thought by rescuing it from social realism and re-endowing it with the nouveau roman has really meant nothing more than exchanging one necessity for another”. In 1997, Wollen reflected on his reading during this period:

Structuralism and semiology hit Britain in a big way — Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes. Barthes’ *Elements of Semiology* swept me off my feet when I read it first in French in *Communications*, and then when it came out in translation as a Jonathan Cape pocket-book. Barthes was still a militant structuralist and so I naturally turned back to reread Lévi-Strauss,

who I hadn't looked into since his great ethnographic memoir, *Tristes Tropiques* (A World on the Wane). Rereading Lévi-Strauss, I saw how your work could be configured by using Lévi-Strauss instead of Goldmann.¹⁰⁵

Wollen indicates the scope of his reading here but on re-reading Wollen's original 1967 essay on cinema and semiotics, the sheer weight and range of references across the entire piece of writing is remarkable. Through the course of a single rhetorical act, Wollen references, by name, the following theorists: Saussure, Morris, Peirce, Bazin, Eisenstein, Barr, Metz, Barthes, Mill, Hjemslev, Coleridge, Richards, Mukarovsky, Rousseau, Vico, Venturi, Hamann, Marx, Meyerhold, Lenz, Long, Garrick, Lévi-Strauss, Foregger, Tretyakov, Shklovsky, Althusser, Freud, Mathesius, Veltrusky, Balazs, Lavater, Olrik, Propp, Dundes, Eco, Pike, Jakobson, Nash Smith, Dilthey, Cassirer, Kant, Simmel, Wolfflin, Riegl, Sarris, Balibar. While some – Coleridge, Freud and Marx, for instance – would be familiar names, one assumes that the vast majority, purloined from fields as diverse as the Prague School of Linguistics and German neo-Kantianism, would not be so recognisable.¹⁰⁶

What does this signify for our study? Firstly, Wollen models the range of his own reading if also demonstrating a propensity, as remarked upon by Adrian Martin, for breathlessly mentioning a reference before dismissing said reference by the time of the essay's conclusion.¹⁰⁷ Secondly, these criticisms hint at an important point of departure for French theory. Through the skilful use of quotation, Wollen achieves, in François Cusset's term, not

¹⁰⁵ Peter Wollen, "Afterword (1997), Lee Russell Interviews Peter Wollen", *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, p. 466.

¹⁰⁶ Alan Lovell recalled this seminar as providing his "first contact with French theory...Peter Wollen gave a paper on semiology and none of us had ever heard of semiology. None of us had ever heard of this stuff: what was this stuff?", phone interview, 12 January 2021.

¹⁰⁷ See Adrian Martin, "[Review of] *Paris Hollywood*", <http://www.filmcritic.com.au/essays/book_paris.html> [accessed 05 May 2020] for a less-than-complimentary reflection on Wollen's propensity for resorting to sweeping lists of names in his essays.

a “possession” of the theoretical referent, be it Saussure, Bazin or Metz, which would indicate “closure” but, instead, provides a “capture” of the cited idea as it “speaks otherwise the discourse of the other”, a move which serves to the “possession of the other than of oneself”. Through the process of being quoted, the “empirical” individual eventually cedes to the “doxic” individual, the name which provides a heterodoxy, before finally to the “epistemic” individual which Cusset refers to as “the index of a classification of knowledges, and the almost anonymous source of a chain of conceptual innovation”.¹⁰⁸ Therefore the field in Wollen’s accounts travels far beyond mere film appreciation and adopts a resolutely continental cast, underpinned by a chain of primarily Francophone theoretical references which, through a range of skilful rhetorical turns, manages to turn those references into “common nouns”. The “Saussure” and “Metz”, for example, quoted by Wollen and produced within the terms of his scientific analysis of cinema and semiology is not, strictly speaking, the same as the name which we would use in everyday life to denote the authors of their respective works; in this context, “Saussure” and “Metz” are signifiers or nouns in a lexicon of referential discourse. This lexicon, in combination with *oppositional chic*—the opposition in the form of French denoting non-English, non-empirical -- forms the very basis of French theory in the Anglophone sphere. Peter Wollen’s trenchant discourse in *Signs and Meaning* adheres to this syntactic structure and demonstrates the rupture and rapture of the deployment of French theory in all its urgent vitality. Wollen posits a sociological construction of these theorists within a theoretical domain which Wollen is both instigating and operating within; an act of intellectual positioning, inaugurated and galvanised by his own position as Publications Editor at the BFI. We will witness a similar form of intellectual intervention in the final chapter of this thesis, in a very different context, through Green Gartside’s own skilful rhetoricism as frontman of the pop group Scritti Politti.

¹⁰⁸ Cusset, *French Theory*, p. 92.

A third effect is that the BFI Education Department was now actively using continental theories to theorise rather than simply providing translations and historical context as per the *NLR*. Wollen's prescription is to test as many concepts and theories as possible at the current state of film criticism and pedagogy in order to unblock the logjam, the "witless compounds of film appreciation and mass media".¹⁰⁹ This approach is also quite some distance from the positions taken by Hoggart and Williams, perhaps deliberately so, as Wollen admitted to never understanding the appeal of their approach to culture and society – in contrast to Whannel - and placed it within the tradition of conservative radicalism incorporating T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis. He felt that Orwell, Hoggart, Williams were far too anti-American and did not agree that Britain's culture was under threat from American culture. He welcomed the American influence: "In effect, I felt that British culture was stifling, from top to bottom, across classes and my conclusion was that it needed input from abroad to break up its provincialism and insularity. Hence, my interest in Hollywood cinema and French theory came from the same root. It was a kind of pincer movement — low art from across the ocean, high theory from across the Channel".¹¹⁰ But there is another angle in which we can view Wollen's intervention, which is from a transnational perspective. The geographic range of his references extends the limited vision of the BFI's national field into unexplored territories. In his efforts to adapt a suitable theoretical framework to underpin film studies in Britain, Wollen's approach is conspicuously un-British, reflective of the "national nihilism" approach we encountered at the *NLR* in the previous chapter. And while *The Popular Arts* is mentioned

¹⁰⁹ Wollen, "Thinking Theory", pp. 50-51

¹¹⁰ Wollen, "Afterword (1997): Lee Russell Interviews Peter Wollen", *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, p. 499.

briefly in “Cinema and Semiology”, Wollen’s seminar renders this text immediately parochial in its outlook.¹¹¹

The Education Seminars also demonstrate the intellectual reach of the BFI Education Department, and its ability to call in people and ideas from the worlds of Marxism, analytical philosophy and film criticism. This is important as the theories expounded upon by Wollen were not intended as a single doctrine which was to be taken as gospel by attendees. The seminar setup encouraged and fostered debate and interpretation, and generated a scenario where these strange terms could be personally introduced and discussed. There is also the sense of the seminars developing within the effective positioning of teamwork around a recognisable label of “theory”: Wollen was able to operate with the support and encouragement of his superior, Paddy Whannel, but also colleagues such as Jim Kitses and, later, Sam Rohdie who were fellow acolytes in promoting theories from the Continent but not always entirely on the same level. But specifically for Wollen, the BFI Education Seminars allowed him to position himself amongst his peers. Amid the array of theorists, the primary instigators of his own intellectual development were Francophone theorists: Lucien Goldmann towards Christian Metz via Levi Strauss and Barthes and finally away from Metz towards new horizons. The fluidity of movement is French theory in action, a constant

¹¹¹ The BFI Education Seminars did also produce a “little book” of its own. *Working Papers on the Cinema: Sociology and Semiology*, edited by Wollen, contained five seminar papers, published in 1969 by the BFI but which appears to have had limited circulation. Certainly the presentation of the book – a 36 page collection of mimeographed versions of the five selected papers *sans* commentary and devoid of any illustrations -- indicates it was not for wider public consumption, but it does demonstrate Wollen’s keenness to formalise the theoretical discourse undertaken at the seminars. Andrew Tudor, who later penned a Cinema One publication on *Theories Of Film* (1974), was a key member in the construction of the Working Papers booklet although was operating at that point as a sociologist at the University of Essex along with Terry Lovell. Certainly no reviews of the booklet exist although Tudor recalls that Wollen instigated the publication in order to formally introduce new theoretical ideas, specifically from sociology, into the discourse. Tudor confirms that “Terry Lovell, Frank West, Paul Filmer and myself all came from sociological backgrounds of course, Terry, Frank and me having known each other in the Leeds sociology department, and we three also being associated (Terry part-time because she had just had a baby) with sociology at Essex in the late 60s”. Email interview with Andrew Tudor, 08 October 2019.

connection and reconnection of differing theorists to the film horizon until finding one which is most effective within the given moment. Within the rhetoric of the seminar, we witness the seeds of French theory being fused with a form of articulacy which suggests vivid alternatives to current forms; the seminars present theory in its most exciting context, in a network of movement, translation and application and very much alive to the intellectual currents of the contemporary moment.

The Cinema One Series

We will now turn to the final part of our analysis of the BFI Education Department's transnational approach to film pedagogy and criticism in late 1960s Britain through the Cinema One series of publications. This programme of film books offers a revealing window into the role of French theory within the institution as it allows for key texts to be commissioned, authored, and published by the BFI, offering a hitherto unprecedented seal of legitimacy to theoretical film writing in the Anglophone world. The Cinema One series, attractively packaged and competitively priced, enabled the public circulation of theories and theorists far from their source; names such as Roland Barthes, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Christian Metz and theories such as structuralism and semiotics were referenced and deployed in a select number of Cinema One publications, crossing both a range of disciplines and institutional agendas in the process. We have already witnessed how the BFI Education Department provided a receptive cultural terrain for French theory to impact upon its operations and I will now demonstrate how the Cinema One series indicates that French theory provided more than just cultural capital for the key producers associated with comprehensively re-structuring film studies in Britain; in fact, certain Cinema One publications highlighted the shift of emphasis to a new, transnational space where film

studies was still productively undisciplined yet allowed for fruitful interdisciplinary crossings, fuelled by these theories from France.

The Cinema One series of publications was both an external collaboration between the BFI and Thames and Hudson and an internal collaboration between the BFI Education Department and *Sight and Sound* magazine. The concept was inaugurated by Paddy Whannel and Peter Wollen who proposed “a program of theoretical film books”. This initiative alerted *Sight and Sound* magazine which, by the mid 1960s, had ceased publishing its own books, and the two factions – BFI Education Department and *Sight and Sound* – came together to develop Cinema One as a joint series with publications commissioned and edited autonomously by representatives of each department. Peter Wollen had primary responsibility for commissioning from the BFI Education Department while Penelope Houston and Tom Milne, editor and deputy editor of *Sight and Sound* respectively, had responsibility for commissioning writers from their wing of the BFI. The tagline for the series was “a serious and discriminating venture bringing good critical writing on the cinema to a wide audience”. Each volume boasted more than 80 illustrations, the paperback version sold for 15s while the clothbound was 30s., and, as Wollen points out, this was a very good situation for the publishers as they managed “a whole range of books, not just a series represented by *Sight and Sound* writing. Many of [the BFI Education Department’s] volumes were not only quite different from the *Sight and Sound* tradition but even consciously antagonistic to it”.¹¹²

¹¹² Peter Wollen, “Structuralism implies a certain kind of methodology...”, interview with Gerald Peary and Stuart Kaminsky, *Film Heritage* 9:4 (Fall 1974), p. 23. I am grateful to Nicolas Helm-Grovas for providing me with a scan of this article during the lockdown period.

This antagonism is important: the proximity of *Sight and Sound* provided an immediate and direct orthodoxy for Wollen to direct his antagonisms. *Sight and Sound* was “anti-auteur, anti-experimental and anti-theoretical, yet completely dominated British film criticism”. The network of influence within which the magazine operated was also troubling to Wollen, who dismissed *Sight & Sound* film critics as “...also the people who wrote for the national daily and weekly newspapers and magazines. They all knew each other and provided a training ground for young writers to fill the same mold”. In this respect, Wollen describes the intrinsically national field which constituted film criticism at this point in the 1960s: one which was traditional, self-serving, and unduly dominated by gatekeepers, as represented by *Sight & Sound*. Wollen continues his attack on *Sight & Sound*, dismissing the magazine as one which “meant intelligent, cultivated people who shared an ability to ‘write well’, although in a very subjective, impressionistic style, and who regarded the cinema as an important part of ‘culture’...young dissident critics had no choice but to polarize against it”.¹¹³

This polarisation was reflected in the split between the Cinema One publications. While studies on Jean-Luc Godard by Richard Roud, Billy Wilder by Axel Madsen and Buster Keaton by David Robinson represented a traditional approach to film criticism, Wollen’s commissions, particularly his own *Signs and Meaning* along with Geoffrey Nowell-Smith’s *Visconti* and Jim Kitses’s *Horizons West* demonstrated, in sometimes tentative fashion, this startling new theoretical approach, informed by Francophone structuralism. The theoretical film studies which appeared as part of the Cinema One series were a natural development from the BFI Education Seminars; indeed, much of the theoretical material had already been

¹¹³ Wollen, “Structuralism implies...”, p. 24-5. Wollen’s criticisms of *Sight and Sound* mirror the earlier criticisms, within the BFI Education Department, of the F.R. Leavis approach to culture, one which is hierarchical and deferential to a pre-defined canon.

tested through the format of the seminar including Wollen's essay on Sergei Eisenstein, which later appeared as the first chapter in *Signs and Meaning*. The majority of people Wollen commissioned for Cinema One had offered papers at the seminars or were in attendance; accordingly, Wollen's own pool of resources is arguably similar to the *Sight & Sound* cadre he was so roundly dismissive of in that his commissioned writers shared an ability to engage with French theory and their opinions were shaped through the Education Seminars, just as Wollen derided the *Sight & Sound* writers for having their own ideas shaped by the film festival circuit.

Nevertheless, the structuralist influence on the Education Department's Cinema One publications was immense. Not only were writers such as Wollen and Kitses deploying structuralist techniques to film criticism, there was a structuralist impulse within the editorial directions: Wollen insisted that the books have a "theoretical point" and refused for any account of a director to be written in chronological order; instead they were to be constructed synchronically, demonstrating the structure of a director's work rather than his career.¹¹⁴ We will now turn to the Cinema One publications in more detail, highlighting Wollen's own *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* as the key theoretical text in the series, with brief recourse to Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's *Visconti* and Jim Kitses's *Horizons West*.

Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's *Visconti* was the third Cinema One publication in late 1967.¹¹⁵ His introduction offers a brief account of structuralist criticism as it ought to be deployed within film:

¹¹⁴ Wollen, "Structuralism implies...", p. 24.

¹¹⁵ Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Visconti*, (London: BFI, 1967).

the purpose of criticism becomes therefore to uncover behind the superficial contrasts of subject and treatment a structural hard core of basic and often recondite motifs. The pattern formed by these motifs, which may be stylistic or thematic, is what gives an author's work its particular structure, both defining it internally and distinguishing one body of work from another.¹¹⁶

These terms, derived largely from Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology, are grafted onto extant modes of auteur theory -- we are now instructed to look for recurring patterns and structures internal to films rather than a single creative source, as practiced by the auteur critics. Surprisingly, Nowell-Smith casts doubt on the ability of this form of auteur-structuralism to critique Visconti's work and instead relies on a more traditional auteur approach. Nowell-Smith criticises the structural approach for reducing the "field of inquiry almost too radically, making the internal (formal and thematic) analysis of the body of works as a whole the only valid object of criticism".¹¹⁷ This, according to Nowell-Smith, serves to ignore the fluidity of an director's work as it neglects "the possibility of...work changing over time and of the structures being variable and not constant" while also dismissing "the non-thematic subject matter and...sub-stylistic features of the visual treatment". While my purpose here is not to evaluate the effectiveness or otherwise of structuralism as a method of critiquing the work of a film director, Nowell-Smith's statement, the first to appear in Anglophone film criticism which explicitly mentions the structuralist method,¹¹⁸ casts the use of French theory, in this case structuralism, as an ideological challenge to an existing mode of film criticism within the Anglophone film sphere. Nowell-Smith himself has criticised the

¹¹⁶ Nowell-Smith, *Visconti*, p. 10.

¹¹⁷ Nowell-Smith, *Visconti*, p. 11.

¹¹⁸ John Caughie (ed), *Theories of Authorship*, (London: BFI, 1981), p. 136.

chronological analysis of publications in order to deduce “who started it”¹¹⁹ but this is important for our study as we see French theory entering a field of reception, one which has institutional legitimacy afforded by the BFI and the potential for significant dissemination through the Cinema One series. Nowell-Smith’s mention of structuralism can also be viewed as a transnational exchange where, as Bourdieu states, a producer is “bringing a message, a position of force from a different field, which they try and use to shore up their own position...one can often use a foreign thinker to attack domestic thinkers in this way”.¹²⁰

Furthermore, Nowell-Smith’s definition of structuralism provides us with the beginning of an internal discourse around French theory between his publication, Wollen’s *Signs and Meaning* and Kitses’s *Horizons West* as each book either pre-figures or references the other in a visible network of textual influence from each other. This exchange, involving the movement and acknowledgement of each other’s work, endows symbolic capital upon each other, even if the direction in which the symbolic capital is travelling is somewhat circular. This also represents a tentative period for French theory, in this case represented by auteur-structuralism within the field of film studies. Structuralism is applied either tentatively (and, ultimately, not at all) by Nowell-Smith or informally by Wollen in *Signs and Meaning*. As Warren Buckland points out, Wollen’s chapter on auteur-structuralism is “programmatic: it only applied structural analysis informally and schematically to the comedies and dramas of Howard Hawks, and more rigorously but still schematically to the Westerns of John Ford”.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, “I Was A Star-Struck Structuralist”, *Screen* Volume 14, Issue 3, (Autumn 1973), pp. 92-99. Nowell-Smith’s article was a response to a severe criticism of a school of British structuralism by Charles Eckert, an American critic. Nowell-Smith denied such a school ever existed.

¹²⁰ Bourdieu, “The Social Conditions...”, p. 223.

¹²¹ Warren Buckland, “La Politique des Auteurs in British Film Studies: Traditional versus Structural Approaches”, *Mise au point* [En ligne], <<http://journals.openedition.org/map/2014>>, [accessed 12 April 2021].

But a closer analysis of *Signs and Meaning* reveals an even more sophisticated genealogy of French theory at play throughout the publication. For the purposes of this study, I would like to re-constitute *Signs and Meaning* as an example, perhaps the first Anglophone example, of the intellectual genealogies of French theory in Britain, specifically, through Wollen's chapters on auteur-structuralism and the semiology of the cinema. Within the body of these two essays, Wollen's positioning is impressive: he voraciously and variously takes up the methods of Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, Bazin, Barthes and Metz, demonstrating an extremely fluid showcase of both adapting and dismissing aspects of each theorist's work in order to advance his own ideas on auteur-structuralism and the semiology of the cinema. In 1982, Wollen reflected on his thinking on writing the book in 1968, noting that 'structuralism seemed to be an exciting way of going even further with the re-evaluation of popular art' and highlighting "Lévi-Strauss's analysis of myth" and "Barthes's semiotic approach in *Mythologies* to popular culture itself" as critiques of popular culture which did not patronising it. In his chapter on the auteur theory whose goal was to confront the existing strands of auteurism with the emerging strands of structuralism, Wollen cites how the auteur theory developed "rather haphazardly" and could be "interpreted and applied on rather different broad lines", a development which he insists resulted in "flagrant misunderstandings" within Anglo-American criticism amid an ignorance which was "compounded by a vein of hostility to foreign ideas". Wollen locates the terms of his argument, not dissimilar to Perry Anderson's "Components of the National Culture", in a vein where France is seen operating as the vanguard of ideas — in this case the *Cahiers du Cinema* developing the *politique des auteurs* — and Anglophone culture weakly limping behind, unable to keep pace with the sheer pace and methodological superiority of its cross-channel counterparts. Wollen lauds the auteur theory as it allowed for the "re-evaluation of second, Hollywood careers of [European directors]" while offering a sceptical approach to

the “American director whose salvation has been exile to Europe”. The movement of ideas and value judgments is key here; the auteur theory reverses the trend whereby “American Renoir was contrasted unfavourably with French Renoir, American Fritz Lang with German Fritz Lang” and Wollen is stating that the auteur theory is most effective when critiquing movement from a Francophone or Germanophone culture to an Anglophone culture, mirroring the movements of auteur theory and structuralism from France to Britain and America.¹²²

Wollen explicitly mentions Roland Barthes’s *On Racine* as an emblematic study, suggesting, in relation to the Westerns of Howard Hawks, that the film critic can “construct a *homo hawksianus*” in a similar fashion to Barthes’s creation of “a species of *homo racinianus*”.¹²³ This sentence is symptomatic of Wollen’s quest to overlap an existing field — film study — with a methodology purloined from an entirely different field — that of Francophone literature. It further demonstrates a consistent feature of French theory in Britain: a transposition of a concept (not necessarily translated) from one field across the channel to another, which, in effect, creates an interdisciplinary relationship between the two fields. This use of a French intellectual tradition critically undermines a stable position, as Eugene Brennan states.¹²⁴ Wollen’s adaption of a new critical vocabulary, as evidenced in the latter two *Signs and Meaning* essays, reflects the desire to use French theory to signify that geographical borders were open for negotiation, a move which was taken up and extended considerably through the work of *Screen* journal, as we will see in the following chapter.

¹²² Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, p. 145.

¹²³ Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, p. 150.

¹²⁴ Eugene Brennan, “Post-Punk Politics and British Popular Modernism: The Reception of French Theory Within A ‘Renegade Tradition’ of Music Journalism”, *Palimpsestes* [Online], 33, (2019), <<http://journals.openedition.org/palimpsestes/4649> ; DOI : 10.4000/palimpsestes.4649>, [accessed 12 June 2020].

The publication of *Signs and Meaning* was quickly followed by Jim Kitses' *Horizons West*, also in 1969. If we view *Visconti* as the foundational text and SM the central text within the trio of theoretical film books produced by the Cinema One series between 1967 and 1969, *Horizons West* extends the deployment of French Theory into a full-length study of three directors of Westerns – Budd Boetticher, Anthony Mann and Sam Peckinpah – through the prism of auteur-structuralism. But rather than quote or paraphrase Lévi-Strauss, Kitses simply quotes Peter Wollen and his auteur-structuralist analysis of John Ford's films, a move which serves to consecrate Wollen, rather than Lévi-Strauss, as the primary figure in this vanguardist new theory. Kitses was an American who had studied anthropology at Harvard and was arguably the best-equipped figure in the BFI Education Department – where he worked under Wollen – to embark on a study of film through the lens of Lévi-Strauss.?, Kitses makes no explicit reference to any French theorist in his study, preferring to cite Northop Frye and Henry Nash Smith as the source for his analysis, yet the influence of structuralism is clear in that Kitses deploys a structuralist grid to map out the repeated motifs which underpin the Western, or, as Kitses puts it, “an ambiguous cluster of meanings and attitudes that provide the traditional thematic structure of the genre”.¹²⁵

Considering that we have now surmised how texts deploying French Theory tend towards a classification of names and concepts, Kitses's reference to Wollen is important to reflect upon. In effect, Peter Wollen has become the stand-in for French theory. This form of collaborative positioning is crucial to the rapid spreading of ideas particularly through, as Baert says, these “intricate connections within the world of critics”.¹²⁶ In this instance, Wollen and Kitses are both critics and departmental colleagues and the former's ideas and

¹²⁵ Jim Kitses, *Horizons West*, p. 11

¹²⁶ Baert, *The Existential Moment*, p. 17.

concepts find immediate approval and recognition through the latter's key referencing. The power of these immediate networks demonstrates a level of paradigmatic influence within the cultural sphere in London which was further exemplified by the reception afforded to Wollen's initiatives, to which we will now turn.

Signs and Meaning in the Cinema had a mixed reception on publication. Wollen's colleagues Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Sam Rohdie reviewed the book for the *TLS* and *NLR* respectively; Nowell-Smith offered a favourable account, concluding his review by lauding the publication as potentially "the beginning of a new era in the intellectual criticism of a major art form of the twentieth century"¹²⁷ while Rohdie was more pugnacious in his criticisms, praising Wollen's audacity but criticising his use of the structural grid as an "impoverishment to the movies, and to the [structuralist] theory".¹²⁸ Curiously, Wollen did not directly respond to Rohdie but Ben Brewster, whose translation of Althusser's "Freud and Lacan" appeared in the same issue, did issue an intemperate rebuttal, hailing the "more scientific" nature of Wollen's book.¹²⁹

In 1972, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* was re-issued with a new afterword by Wollen. This signalled a number of new shifts in Wollen's thinking: a move away from film education and pedagogy towards avant-garde filmmaking as his own form of "theoretical practice"; and a shift towards a new form of structuralism, one where "reading becomes problematic" and a practice in itself which "disrupts the myth of the reader's own receptive consciousness". This reading of texts allows for a plurality of interpretations: the texts are "open" rather than "closed", "multiple" instead of "single" and "productive" rather than

¹²⁷ Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'The Script and the Film', *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 June 1969, pp. 13-14.

¹²⁸ Sam Rohdie, "Signs and Meaning in the Cinema", *NLR* 1/55, May/June 1969, pp. 66-70.

¹²⁹ Ben Brewster, "Comment", *NLR* 1/77, May/June 1969, pp. 70-73.

“exhaustive”.¹³⁰ Wollen thus re-defined his theory of the film text, proposing that they were indeterminate and their meaning was produced by the viewer rather than having intrinsic meanings of their own, influenced by his reading of Jacques Derrida’s *Dissemination*, published in English the same year.¹³¹ There is a sense with this afterword that French theory has supplanted the auteur-structuralism of the previous edition of SM, allowing for Wollen to continue his interventions within the realm of avant-garde filmmaking as opposed to purely from a pedagogical standpoint. Wollen’s re-calibration of his own thinking also brings him into close alignment with the strategies wrought by *Screen* journal, as we will see in the following chapter.

Signs and Meaning in the Cinema quickly acquired the resonance of an important text. By 1973, the book was cited by Charles Eckert as being “after *Film Form* and *What Is Cinema?*, the most widely read work on film theory among present-day film students”.¹³² By 2010, *Sight & Sound* magazine polled critics for the best books ever written about the cinema. The publication was a constant presence on the ballot sheets, 40 years after it appeared in its first edition. Film critic Nick Roddick remarked that “if there is one book to rule them all, it is Peter Wollen’s *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*. The revised and enlarged edition of 1972 is the most concise, lucid and inspiring introduction to thinking about film ever written”.¹³³ On Wollen’s death in December 2019, the book was hailed by both *The Guardian* and *New York Times* as a “classic text” and a “film bible” while the Twitter announcement of Wollen’s death by the BFI called him a “prophet of British film theory”.¹³⁴ Amid this retrospective

¹³⁰ Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, pp. 140-141.

¹³¹ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson, (London: Athlone Press, 1972).

¹³² Charles W. Eckert, “The English Cine-Structuralists”, *Film Comment*. 9, No. 3 (1973), p. 47.

¹³³ Samuel Wigley, “Looking for signs and meaning in the cinema”, <<https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/interviews/looking-signs-meaning-cinema>>, [accessed 08 April 2021].

¹³⁴ “Peter Wollen obituary: a prophet of film theory”, <<https://twitter.com/bfi/status/1209046748439683073?lang=en>>, [accessed 12 April 2021].

acclaim, it is easy to forget that *Signs and Meaning* was intended as a guide book for film educators in Britain. Wollen, in his original conclusion, states that he hopes he has “done something to encourage further study of the cinema, at least by suggesting possible points of departure or stimulating disagreement...implicit cross-references make themselves felt, which point towards new areas, new zones of study”.

While these new zones of study, fuelled by French theory, were certainly hailed as revolutionary some fifty years after the publication of *Signs and Meaning*, Wollen’s initiatives did not encounter such praise at the time. But let us return to the BFI Education Department and Paddy Whannel. The latter element induced a further consequence with particular implications at institutional level: a sociological antagonism towards orthodoxy. This antagonism to French theory to this was felt at directorial level at the BFI, to which we will now return via the archive.

The Sociological Antagonism of French Theory

The sociological antagonism of French theory comes into stark evidence on reading through the Education Department archive from the era. The “Frenchness” of the work being undertaken by the department began to receive particular notice. A hostile article written by Eric Rhode appeared in *The Listener* in late 1969 criticised the BFI Education Department for not just taking American cinema seriously but also for its “strange theories imported from France”, dismissing Peter Wollen’s *Signs and Meaning* as merely “esoteric”. Rhode’s lengthy rebuke occasioned a stern response from Whannel, dated 01 December 1969 and recorded in his papers at the BFI Archive, where he dismissed Rhode for his own dismissal of American

cinema, especially directors such as Budd Boetticher. “Such assertions of taste are themselves worthless”, Whannel retorted,

because there is no arguing with them. In place of that we have tried to offer description and analysis and if this implies worth it need not imply that we think these are major directors or that their work is perfect. Equally, it seems simply an evasion of the challenge represented by Peter Wollen’s book to describe it as esoteric. To take one example, it contains the most systematic and elaborated account of an auteur position published in English and which is a model of clarity....I cannot see anything useful, far less how any intellectual grist, can come out of such an insular attitude.¹³⁵

Unfortunately for Whannel, Rhode’s comments on the department’s new-found critical position was only to be the beginning of a much larger unrest. Further anxious signals exist within the archive. A memo dated 23 August 1968 written by Peter Wollen to Paddy Whannel, signals the need “to stress formally, in writing, what has often been said in discussion or informal conversation”. Wollen’s memo takes up the cause of the final statements in *SM* – “...the cinema has an extraordinary richness, an extraordinary range and vitality. We have just begun to study it” – and insists there is “an urgent need for fundamental research” in order to continue the Education Department programme of “courses on the cinema, lectures, study units, books for the Cinema One series, educational publications, information dossiers, filmographies, etc.” Wollen proposes three action points: viewing facilities made more easily accessible for teachers and researchers; research grants should be applied for in order to aid further research; dialogue should be encouraged between the

¹³⁵ Paddy Whannel, “Letter To Eric Rhode”, 1970, Nicky North/Paddy Whannel Files, BFI Archive Box 91.

“critic”, the “theorist” and the “teacher in the school or college”. Wollen further warns that criticism “isolated from schools and colleges and universities always runs the risk of sliding into self-indulgence and modishness” while teaching which is ignorant of “developments in criticism” quickly becomes “arid and pedantic”. Wollen concludes his memorandum by offering a brief, critical survey of the paucity of reception for “the growth of film culture” in Britain; perhaps acknowledging the differing approach offered by *Sight and Sound*, Wollen remarks that the “dull and inert critical response [by the magazine] is only part of a rather depressing picture” before casting his gaze longingly to Europe in querying “where is our *Cinema E Film* or our *Communications*?”¹³⁶

A presentation dated 4 November 1968, by Paddy Whannel to the BFI Board of Directors was intended to describe the work of the Education Department to senior staff, bemused at the activities in Old Compton Street. The papers in the archive indicate that Whannel explicitly brought F.R. Leavis into the debate, hailing him as the “key figure in this tradition [of culture and society]” before insisting that within the Leavisite influence, a “serious engagement with film is impossible” and, following Wollen’s prompting, re-iterating the need to engage with funding for potential Research Fellowships which would be operated in tandem with a university department. Whannel further noted that members of the Education staff were already “engaged in research into aesthetic and critical problems. To that extent the Department operates like a University Department”.

But, according to Terry Bolas, it was Whannel’s repeated insistence on referring to the department as a “university” which began to bring him into conflict with the BFI governors.

¹³⁶ Peter Wollen, “Memo to Paddy Whannel”, 04 August 1968, Nicky North/Paddy Whannel files, BFI Archive Box 91.

In January 1969, the Education Department was moved from its Old Compton Street base and assimilated into the primary BFI building housed at 81 Dean Street where it shared a floor with *Sight and Sound*. Whannel's presentation during the previous November was not met with agreement, the minutes of the meeting indicating that the governors considered Whannel's report to be "too prescriptive" and "limiting in its relationship to the wider aspects of film in education".¹³⁷ While Whannel spent the summer of 1969 on sabbatical at Northwestern University, the antipathy only increased; and in April 1970, the BFI governors elected to undertake a comprehensive review of policy at the entire BFI.

Accordingly, the Education Department was subjected to an investigation by a sub-committee on 'Educational Services'. While no copy of the sub-committee's report – entitled "Report of the Review Committee on Education Services" – exists in the archive, it is reported by Bolas that Asa Briggs insisted upon a "more streamlined Education Department playing a less important role than hitherto". The report was accepted by the governors yet Whannel refused to cede ground and negotiations between Whannel and Stanley Reed, the BFI director, became fraught, with Ernest Lindgren having to operate as intermediary.¹³⁸ The notes in the BFI Archive indicate that the report was discussed at a board meeting in April 1971; surprisingly, no record of such a meeting exists and while it is impossible to deduce what exactly was discussed we can ascertain, as noted in the governors' minutes from April 1971, that in his attempts to extricate film pedagogy and film criticism out of a Leavisite cul-de-sac of appreciation, Whannel found himself in a cul-de-sac of his own. The Institution were unwilling to further fund his experiments, and the Governors' Sub-Committee of Enquiry chaired by Asa Briggs recommended – in an almost parodic assertion of English

¹³⁷ See Bolas, *Screen Education*, p. 183.

¹³⁸ Bolas, *Screen Education*, p. 185-186.

empiricism over “foreign theory” –that the department should be renamed the Educational Advisory Service, should cease to be concerned with ideas, and should simply respond to the expressed needs of teachers with regard to service and materials. Whannel was specifically upbraided by the board for the BFI Education Department’s role in the Cinema One series and ultimately resigned in August 1971.¹³⁹ In a letter dated that same month, the new BFI chairman outlined the issues the Board of Directors had with the Education Department which, specifically, centred upon the department’s desire “to shape a film culture”. It was this very term, according to Bolas, which was the key to their disgruntlement: “...the term that Whannel had long promoted and his repeated references to it seem to have been conflated in Governors’ minds with what his department was up to – of which they were perpetually suspicious”.¹⁴⁰ This confirms the systemization of opposition between orthodoxy and heterodoxy within the institution, with the Board of Directors keen to preserve the dominant activity in the face of the transnational challenges posed by the work of the Education Department. As late as 1972, Ernest Lindgren was still reflecting upon the “subversive activity of the past and present Education staff” adding his belief that their activity was “politically motivated”.¹⁴¹

Whannel’s resignation letter was circulated to BFI staff and found a home within the newly re-constituted *Screen* journal. The journal had been founded in 1969 by SEFT with the intention to “provide a forum in which controversial areas relevant to the study of film and television can be examined and argued” followed by the disclaimer: “It is by no means clear what the nature of Film Study should be”.¹⁴² Initially edited by Terry Bolas and Kevin

¹³⁹ See “Correspondence connected with the resignation of Whannel and others”, Box 91, Nicky North/Paddy Whannel Files, BFI Archive.

¹⁴⁰ Bolas, *Screen Education*, p. 186.

¹⁴¹ See “Correspondence connected with the resignation of Whannel and others”, BFI Archive, Box 91.

¹⁴² “Editorial”, *Screen* Volume 1, Issue 1, (January 1969), p. 3.

Gough-Yates, the journal was overhauled in January 1971 with the appointment of Sam Rohdie as editor. We will return to Rohdie's editorship of *Screen* in the following chapter but for now, it is important to note Rohdie's publication of Paddy Whannel's resignation letter in the Autumn 1971 edition of the journal. Whannel's letter couched the mutual antagonism between his Education Department and the BFI Board of Governors in national terms:

it has often been said that this hostility to ideas and uneasiness about theory is something peculiarly English. But even this is changing. Peter Wollen's book *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* was either ignored when it was first published or subjected to abuse. In fact it has had very wide sales especially among younger people and is likely to be one of the very few books, perhaps the only one, of the Cinema One series to require continual reprinting. There would seem little likelihood that a project such as Wollen's would find acceptance in the present climate.¹⁴³

This autumn 1971 issue of *Screen* also contained an article by his former BFI Education Department colleague Alan Lovell on the conflict within the department and a full-blown editorial detailing the current crisis at the BFI which was also impacting upon *Screen* as the institute was threatening to cut its grant to £500 "so long as it remains a predominantly theoretical and critical publication". Their previous grant was approximately £6,000. The media coverage was not limited to internal reports; the crisis at the department led to reports in *The Guardian*, *The Times* and *Time Out*. Much of the vitriol was directed specifically at Lindsay Anderson and Karel Reisz, once the iconoclastic trailblazers of Free Cinema but now

¹⁴³ Paddy Whannel, "Open Letter To BFI Staff", *Screen* Volume 12, Issue 3 (Autumn 1971), p. 38-43.

two of the primary BFI Governors up in arms at the work being undertaken by Whannel and Wollen. While the threat to Screen's funding was not carried out, BFI chairman Denis Forman did, according to Nowell-Smith, express interest in pulping the entire Autumn 1971 edition of the journal when he learned of its contents. But *Screen* and its own management at SEFT maintained their position and continued throughout the decade to promote precisely the type of film culture which so enraged the BFI Board of Governors.

The above delineation of the antagonism generated by the use of French theory within the BFI Education Department is a very clear effect of the collaborative positioning of Wollen, Whannel and their colleagues. Whannel's positioning is most interesting due to its fluidity, beginning with Leavisite sympathies and concluding by the end of the 1960s with a strong allegiance to French theory through Peter Wollen who, again, operates as a 'stand-in' for much of this French intellectual work within the BFI. As Baert points out, this form of positioning "rarely goes uncontested" and it is evident that the BFI Board of Governors aggressively attempted to dissociate the institution from the work undertaken by these intellectuals within the Education Department. The Board united around an agenda reflective of the BFI in the 1940s and 1950s, aligned with 'film appreciation' and different factions starkly emerged within the institution. These different factions have a significant effect on one's position in the institution; "the more secure and established one's position", notes Baert "the less one needs to rely on teamwork".¹⁴⁴ Clearly, the positions of the Education Department staff were not secure as Whannel resigned in 1970 to take up a teaching position at Northwestern University in Chicago and Wollen left the institution the same year.

¹⁴⁴ Baert, *The Existential Moment*, p. 179.

Conclusion: Semiotic Counter Strategies

Within this chapter, I have re-positioned the BFI Educational Department as a transnational field, and have shown how the geographic boundary of the field of the BFI itself came to be the site of struggle. The forces underpinning distinct national fields were counteracted by transnational dynamics: in this case the construction of a film culture with a distinctive theoretical heft from French theory. In this respect, the BFI Education Department becomes a sub-field, operating at the intersection between an academic and a cultural field, that was both heterogeneous and unified around specific issues and a specific form of competition. This intersection between different points of view and types of extra-cinema¹⁴⁵ knowledge helped to forge a space of possibilities within the study of film in Britain while subverting certain extant hierarchies among the BFI's then-current modes of educational and intellectual production. There is a sense, too, that the criticisms of "film appreciation" are redolent of the oppositions expressed in the *NLR* towards the "common sense" approach of British historians who were insistent on maintaining a connection between Marxism and "the real".¹⁴⁶ This is further marked by the teamwork between BFI Education Department staff members and

¹⁴⁵ The term "extra-cinema" is used by Peter Wollen in an internal BFI memo from 1968 to describe the activity undertaken by the Department outside of the black box of the cinema space, incorporating *inter alia* seminars and publications. The term re-emerges in an undated list created by Wollen of cinema and extra-cinematic movement of the 1970s. The cinema section reflects key film releases; the extra/cinematic section reflects articles in *Screen*, related art exhibitions etc. This was displayed as part of *Art at the Frontier of Film Theory* exhibition of Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey's film work, Peltz Gallery, 43 Gordon Square, May 2019, curated by Oliver Fuke and Nicolas Helm-Grovas. "Extra-cinema", in this usage, almost certainly is taken from Christian Metz's use of the term to describe the larger "cinematic system" of codes which make up the language of cinema. See Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

¹⁴⁶ Certainly, E.P. Thompson falls into this category with his denials of French theory in the 1970s but we can also see traces of this in Eric Hobsbawm's wariness of what he calls the "postmodernist intellectual fashions...[which deny] the distinction between fact and fiction, holding that 'facts' are simply intellectual constructions". Hobsbawm, in a tone markedly different from his earlier enthusiasms for Louis Althusser, also offers praise for Joyce Appelby, Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob, the authors of *Telling The Truth About History*, for their insistence on "what historians investigate are real" and the historian Richard Price for "deliberately avoiding references to Barthes, Bakhtin, Derrida, Foucault et al" in *Alabi's World*, his study of the Dutch colony Suriname. See Eric Hobsbawm, "Escaped Slaves of the Forest", *New York Review of Books*, 06 December 1990, pp. 46-48.

those at the *NLR* who were working within a hundred metres of one another in London's Soho district.

French theory at the BFI, therefore, had both a formative and combative function. It was formative in the sense that the teamwork between Whannel and Wollen provided a platform for the former to address gaps in the present state of film education and a platform for the latter to deploy his own interest in French theory to design a new framework for the serious study of film in Britain. It also demonstrated its antagonism; similar to the opprobrium Juliet Mitchell experienced at the *NLR*, the use of these theories provoked hostility from the orthodox elements of the institution. But the BFI Education Department also indicated the move of French theory from reception and dissemination to an actual mode of impact.¹⁴⁷

Meanwhile, Peter Wollen, who had already left the BFI by the time of the crisis in 1970, was remarking that “[the publication of the book] changed things rapidly for me, at least. You got people who supported it – ‘about time too, now we have a proper book of film theory in England,’ and people who hated and loathed it – ‘what is all this garbage? We don't need all this to understand and appreciate film!’ It certainly created some controversy”.¹⁴⁸ Wollen's positioning of himself therefore had the inverse effect of Whannel's; while the latter was forced to resign and take the heat for the Education Department's excursions into foreign theory, Wollen succeeded in finding a significant role within the university strand.

Nevertheless, the two were soon reunited in 1974 at Northwestern University in Illinois when

¹⁴⁷ This is mirrored by events outside the institution and within the academy. From 1968, Frank Kermode inaugurated literary theory seminars at University College London which became the primary meeting point for anyone who wished to discuss French literary theory within an academic context. Attendees included Jonathan Culler, Jacqueline Rose, Christopher Norris, each of whom were instrumental in shaping the nature of French theory in Britain over the course of the 1970s and 1980s albeit from a more traditionally academic standpoint than the majority of figures prominent in the present study.

¹⁴⁸ Guilbaut and Watson, “From an Interview with Peter Wollen”.

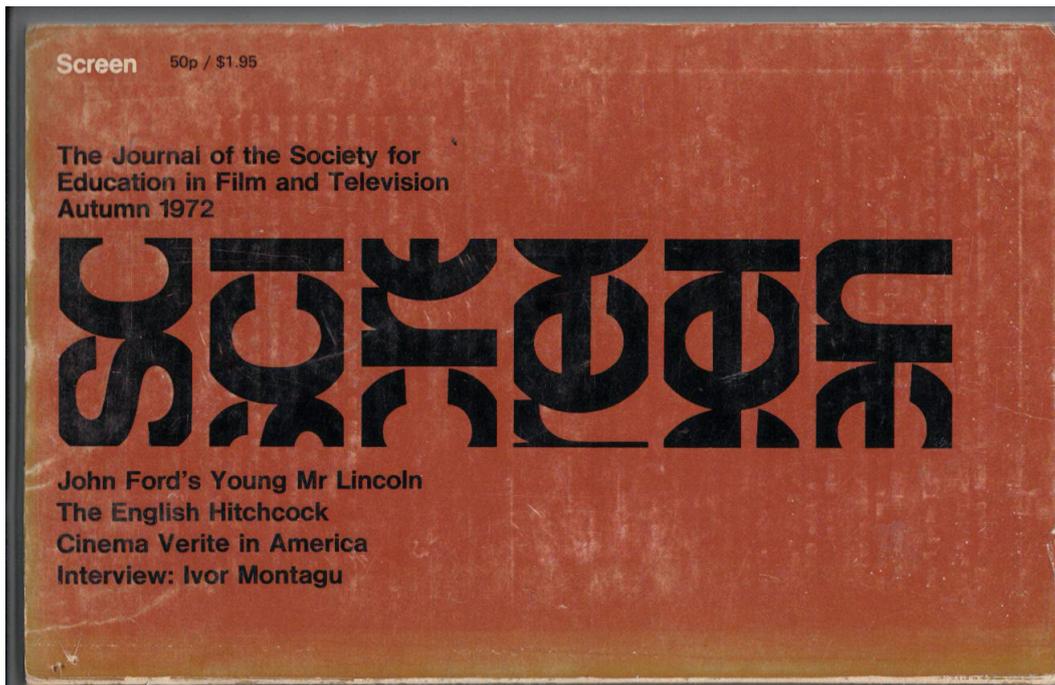
Whannel invited Wollen to take up a teaching post at the university. Whannel continued to encourage Wollen's work by providing the facilities for him to embark upon his first feature film, co-directed with Laura Mulvey, *Penthesilea*, filmed entirely using the University's equipment.¹⁴⁹

Wollen's subsequent filmmaking career continued to intertwine theory with cinema albeit on a practical level, operating within a framework he described as "counter cinema" where he employed a series of "semiotic counter strategies" both in theory and in practice.¹⁵⁰ But the pioneering work of the BFI Education Department also marks a point of departure for French theory in the institution in that it secured a position within institutional life and continued to play an antagonising role within the BFI, as we will see in the next chapter. It also indicates an intensification and sharpening of intellectual engagement with French theory and provided a platform for names such as Lévi-Strauss, Barthes and Metz to become interlinked with a vanguardist approach to film pedagogy and film criticism. The purview of film education had increased dramatically and the excitement and risks of French theory were now more visible, and about to reach an apotheosis with the development of *Screen* journal in the 1970s.

¹⁴⁹ *Penthesilea*, Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, 1974.

¹⁵⁰ See Wollen, "Preface", in *Readings and Writings*, (London: New Left Books, 1982), p. vii.

Chapter Three - *Screen* Journal



Introduction: Screening French Theory

The previous chapter considered the BFI Education Department, and in particular the roles played by Paddy Whannel and Peter Wollen, as a key component in connecting ideas and concepts from contemporary French theory with the nascent field of serious film study.

Through a tracing of the historic connotations of the term “film appreciation” through to its re-purposing as “film culture” under the auspices of Whannel and Wollen, I argued that the import of French theory triggered the emergence of a transnational cultural field from which a new disciplinary formation of film could emerge. This next chapter traces an extension of the use of French theory through *Screen* journal, a direct by-product of the theoretical work undertaken at the BFI Education Department during the late 1960s.

While *Screen* has been hailed as one of the most significant journals in the history of film theory,¹ it is somewhat conspicuous by its absence from intellectual and cultural histories from the time, often relegated to a filmic curio in the margins.² Despite the richness of the *Screen* endeavour, no full-length account of the journal's history exists bar a couple of important, if brief, essays: Philip Rosen's "Screen and 1970s Film Theory" provides the most cogent account of the journal's heady intellectual trajectory, while a very brief editorial history is provided on the journal's current website.³ Even though *Screen* was a recipient of grant-in-aid funding award from the BFI, it is not granted a separate chapter in Christophe Dupin and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's aforementioned *The British Film Institute, the Government and Film Culture 1933-2012* (2012) while Terry Bolas's otherwise comprehensive *Screen Education: From Film Appreciation to Media Studies* concentrates on *Screen*'s sister journal, *Screen Education* (2008).⁴ Bolas, who along with Kevin Gough-Yates, was the very first editor of *Screen* in 1969, is thorough in his reconstructions of the era but retains a certain contemptuous tone towards *Screen* and the intellectuals who steered the journal's positioning. Accordingly, this chapter attempts to rescue *Screen* both from the margins of British cultural history and from purely film history and to reconstitute the journal

¹ See Philip Rosen, "Screen and 1970s Film Theory", in Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (eds), *Inventing Film Studies* (Duke University Press, North Carolina: 2008).

² Recent popular cultural histories of the 1970s abound: Dominic Sandbrook's trilogy *State of Emergency: The Way We Were: Britain, 1970-1974* (London, Penguin: 2011); *Seasons in the Sun: The Battle for Britain, 1974-1979* (London, Penguin: 2013); *Who Dares Wins: Britain, 1979-1982* (London: Penguin, 2019) make no mention of the *Screen* project nor does Alwyn W. Turner's *Crisis? What Crisis?: Britain in the 1970s* (London: Aurum Press, 2013). As we will see, there were occasions when *Screen*-related publications crossed over into the public realm, primarily through television, an occurrence usually deployed to rage against *Screen*'s apparent incomprehensibility through its free deployment of French theoretical models.

³ See also Mark Jancovic, "Screen theory", in *Approaches to Popular Film*, ed. Joanne Hollows and Mark Jancovic (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 123-50. *Screen* is now operated by the University of Glasgow as an academic journal; my study views the journal as operating within a para-academic position, as it was largely under the auspices of the BFI during the 1970s and 1980s. For more, see the history on the website, hosted by the University of Glasgow, available at <www.Screen.arts.gla.ac.uk/pages/history.html>.

⁴ In his introduction, Bolas himself remarks that "While [*Screen*'s] theoretical positions have generated extensive and learned responses, curiously there has been little interest in how the journal came about and how, in a decade when film/cinema journals were created, blossomed intermittently, faltered and disappeared... indeed some of those who were closely connected with *Screen* lacked curiosity as to its provenance as comments by Heath, MacCabe and Wollen in subsequent years revealed". See Bolas, *Screen Education*, p. 8.

as a pioneering Anglophone theoretical enterprise, fuelled by the energy of new alliances built upon the infusion of French theory into British intellectual culture.

As in the previous chapter, the development of *Screen* brings together a series of intellectual interventions conducted on the terrain of French theory. It can also be viewed as an extension of the transnational field which emerged through the BFI Education Department in the late 1960s. Many of the key players from the BFI carried over to write for *Screen* — Peter Wollen was an editorial board member throughout the decade although the regularity of his writings decreased; Geoffrey Nowell-Smith⁵ and Alan Lovell also worked at an editorial level — while members of the *NLR* editorial board, particularly Ben Brewster,⁶ also played important roles in the journal's intellectual development. As we will see, there were key extensions to this core group of intellectuals comprising the journal: Stephen Heath and Colin MacCabe joined the editorial board in 1973 while simultaneously teaching modernist literature at Cambridge, and the absence of female voices within these circles was somewhat alleviated through the writings of Claire Johnston and Laura Mulvey, both of whom were instrumental in developing a discourse for women's cinema, an achievement which employed radical re-readings of Althusser and Lacan. *Screen* was unique in providing a institutionally-affiliated platform for both film theory and French theory. While the work of Althusser was a constant reference, underpinning the theoretical practice of the journal, his influence was

⁵ Geoffrey Nowell-Smith was interim editor of *Screen* from 1976-77; Alan Lovell was on the editorial board until 1976 before resigning; he did, however, return to write for *Screen* in the early 1980s.

⁶ Ben Brewster was, briefly, a member of both editorial boards before resigning from the *NLR* position in late 1971. His resignation letter, published in the Nov/Dec issue of the journal indicated his unhappiness with the journal's political direction: "In the last few years, *New Left Review* has been a journal publishing theoretical and political analyses representing a broad range of viewpoints within a roughly Marxist perspective. However, in recent months this perspective, as represented in the choice of articles and especially in editorial comment in the Themes, seems to me to be diverging more and more from my own perspectives, and from what I regard as a Marxist/Leninist political and theoretical position. I therefore find it impossible to continue to take editorial responsibility for the political positions adopted by the Review and ask you to accept my resignation from the Editorial Committee". Ben Brewster, "Communication on Ceylon and China", *NLR*, 1/70, November/December 1971, p. 111. Brewster found a more apposite home for his translation work in *Screen* and edited the journal at various points throughout the 1970s, often in tandem with Elizabeth Cowie.

matched and superseded by Lacan, whose psychoanalytic theories, as yet untranslated into English, became *de rigueur* for a period of time during the mid-1970s. This would prove much to the chagrin of certain members of the editorial board who quit in protest at *Screen*'s consecration of Lacan.

This chapter also highlights *Screen* as a viable realisation of the wishes expressed by Paddy Whannel and Stuart Hall in *The Popular Arts* for a “study laboratory”; nevertheless, both figures were ultimately critical of “the *Screen* project”, a term coined by Stuart Hall in a critical essay: “Recent developments in theories of language and ideology: a critical note”.⁷

Hall defines the *Screen* project as follows:

This body of work (hereinafter, for convenience, “*Screen* theory”) draws extensively on recent French theoretical writing in a number of different fields: film theory (early semiotics, the work of Christian Metz, the debates between the journals *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Cinétique*), the theory of ideology (Althusser), the psychoanalytic writings of the Lacan group, and recent theories of language and discourse (Julia Kristeva, the *Tel Quel* group, Foucault).

In Chapter One, I demonstrated how the NLR's “national nihilist” attitude to British culture heralded a new influx of translations from Francophone Marxism to alleviate this theoretical paucity. These attitudes to importing, translating and deploying French theory made names and concepts such as Althusser, Lacan and the mirror stage circulate amongst a certain group

⁷ Published originally as a Working Paper in Cultural Studies by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham and reprinted in *Culture, Media and Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies 1972 - 79*, eds. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, Paul Willis (London: Routledge, 1981), pp. 147-153.

of culturally-engaged intellectuals in Britain and continued to inform the activities of the BFI Education Department as evinced in Chapter Two. In working toward the aforementioned antagonisms, this chapter traces how French theory reached a certain apogee of influence through *Screen* journal, as certain theorists, like Althusser but also Lacan, became encoded into this transnational field. In the field of *Screen*, ideas of ideology, narrative space and psychoanalysis, each deployed from French theory, transformed the nature of intellectual and discursive enquiry into film. *Screen* became one of the most significant journals in the history of film theory but its own theoretical drive, variously referred to as “*Screen* theory”, “Grand Theory”, “1970s Theory”, or more ominously “SLAB Theory”, was a “tissue of intersecting, sometimes mutually contested, arguments and discourses about cinema written by many individuals” yet maintained a “recognisable intellectual constellation, which set the terms of advanced debate in film scholarship”.⁸

Accordingly, this chapter also maps the relationship between French theory and the intellectual interventions of a number of *Screen* writers which brought about different forms of positioning. Sam Rohdie, Claire Johnston, Stephen Heath, Colin MacCabe and Laura Mulvey all deployed terms and concepts, primarily from Lacanian psychoanalysis, to develop fresh approaches to the serious study of film. Mulvey’s internationally famous essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Culture” began its circulation in the ideologically charged space of *Screen* journal yet its relationship to French theory, and specifically an article first translated in the *NLR* in 1969, is a story largely untold. The chapter also reconfigures *Screen* as a high-point of French theory in Britain, emerging as a synthesis of *NLR*’s translation policies and

⁸ Rosen, “Screen and 1970s Film Theory”, p. 267. “Grand Theory” is a term advocated by David Bordwell in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), his largely negative account of film theory. “SLAB Theory” was coined, also by Bordwell but in tandem with Noël Carroll, to describe the predominance of Saussure, Lacan, Althusser and Barthes in film theory in the 1970s. See also David Bordwell “Historical Poetics of Cinema,” *The Cinematic Text: Methods and Approaches*, ed. R. Barton Palmer. (New York: AMS Press, 1989) pp. 369-98.

the BFI Education Department's commitment to theoretical approaches to cinema, an autonomous field which, in Randall Collins's terms, served to modify the cartography of knowledge, extending its disciplinary power to adjacent fields, activating "border disputes" and making "borders into topics".⁹ This process of "theorising the borders" between film and semiotics and film and psychoanalysis helps to keep the intellectual current of French theory alive, an intellectual development advanced by three phenomena: the fresh, Anglophone interpretation of texts, primarily by Jacques Lacan; an institutional offensive, courtesy the BFI allowing *Screen* the freedom to pursue these theoretical lines of inquiry; and the augmentation of its purview towards a new field centred upon the serious study of film.¹⁰

For the purposes of this chapter it is necessary to be selective and pinpoint key articles and disputes which indicate the remarkable influence of French theory as the key intellectual and discursive mode underpinning the theoretical inquiries of the journal. I argue that *Screen* is the synthesis of the *NLR* and BFI Education Department's importation strategies and furthers the approach of applying their theories to a specific area of film which has already proved receptive terrain for French theory. As this synthesis of this, largely Francophone, theory and film study as a new field, I demonstrate how the geographical boundaries which were weakened and made transnational through the efforts of the BFI Education Department now demarcated a space where structuralist and psychoanalytic ideas were unified through a

⁹ Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*, (New York: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 78.

¹⁰ By 1967, Lacan had published a mere two pieces in English. The first was the transcript of a lecture on the ego he had presented to The British Psycho-Analytical Society in May 1951, which did not receive any attention in the English-speaking world at all, save a vitriolic *précis* of its contents by the American psychoanalyst Henry Harper Hart, who took Lacan to task for rambling "from Hegel to grasshoppers" and for descending into a state of "neo-confusionism". The other was a short book chapter on fetishism co-authored with Wladimir Granoff, which had in reality been written by Granoff alone, on the basis of extensive notes taken at Lacan's lectures and seminars in Paris. For more, see Dany Nobus, "The Irredeemable Debt: On The English Translation Of Lacan's First Two Public Seminars", *Psychoanalysis and History* 19(2), (2017), pp. 173–213. I am also grateful to Dany Nobus for providing assistance in tracing Lacanian theory in Britain.

combination of moves or operations within a common field; in short, the operation of French theory within the transnational field of serious film study in Britain.

Cambridge Detour: *Signs of the Times*

In the *Times Literary Supplement* edition of April 30, 1971, a short, unassuming advertisement appeared announcing “*The Signs of the Times: An introductory reading in textual semiotics*”. Below, a brief text appeared, promising “hitherto unpublished and untranslated articles by Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Philippe Sollers”. This mysterious publication could be purchased for 50p from an address at King’s College, Cambridge. No other information was provided as to who was behind the initiative. Those who dared send the requisite sum to the address provided would have received a 96-page A4 mimeographed series of essays written by, as the advertisement claimed, Barthes, Kristeva and Sollers but also Cleanth Peters, Stephen Heath, and Colin MacCabe.¹¹ The latter two figures were listed as editors, along with Christopher Prendergast, and the presentation was generally text-heavy and stark in appearance, aside from a striking advertisement for a series of Francophone books published by Seuil editions under the *Tel Quel* imprint, including *S/Z* by Roland Barthes, *La “Creation”*, a novel by Jean-Louis Baudry, then literary editor of *Tel Quel*, and *Semiotike: Recherches pour une sémanalyse* by Julia Kristeva.¹²

¹¹ “Cleanth Peters” is an anagram of Stephen C. Heath; therefore, one assumes this is a pseudonym for Heath himself.

¹² Kristeva gave a talk at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 1971 on the topic of subjectivity (source: interview with Jonathan Benthall, director of talks at the ICA, 01 February 2017). Kristeva was also interviewed by Frank Kermode for *The Listener* in late 1970 on contemporary developments in French avant-garde literature with a particular focus on the work of the *Tel Quel* group. When asked by Kermode if Marshall McLuhan is of interest to this group, Kristeva curtly dismisses the association, explaining that “we have in France another theory on writing, a more philosophical one, elaborated by the philosopher Jacques Derrida and I think it’s more serious, more scientific”. Frank Kermode, “Traditional Avant-Garde”, *The Listener* (London, November 05, 1970), Vol. 84, pp. 9-10.

Recounting the story of its creation, Colin MacCabe recalls that the book was originally conceived through the existence of an article by Kristeva which had been commissioned but subsequently rejected by the *Cambridge Review*.¹³ The article fell into the hands of Stephen Heath who was MacCabe's tutor and had been regularly attending the Barthes lectures in Paris which had led to the publication of *S/Z*, Barthes's influential close reading of Balzac's short story "Sarrasine". MacCabe, who was editing the *Granta* literary magazine, a position he found "boring", was entranced by the "originality" of Heath's lectures in deploying methods from the Barthes seminars in his own Cambridge seminars, a process which MacCabe dates back to the Michaelmas term of 1970. Heath's contacts in Paris secured the involvement of the *Tel Quel* brigade - Kristeva and Sollers - along with Barthes who provided what appears to be his first significant interview translated into English, conducted with Heath in Paris. The publication conforms to the French theory texts we have encountered thus far in that it conveys a sense of urgency and a dogged insistence on the necessity of a theoretical approach; the form and production and indeed authorship appear to be determined by the desire to engage with these vanguardist Francophone theorists. The preface to the "little volume" announces that:

It has been conceived not as a group of discrete articles, but as a play of texts offering in their interaction the possibility of the opening of a certain general comprehension, that will include in the distance between the texts of Barthes, Kristeva, and Sollers and our own, the recognition, the tracing, of the points from which we must now begin to learn and to work.¹⁴

¹³ "My first engagement with these [French] thinkers was in these lectures by Stephen Heath". Interview with Colin MacCabe, 09 March 2020.

¹⁴ Stephen Heath, Colin MacCabe, Christopher Prendergast eds., *Signs of the Times: Introductory Readings in Textual Semiotics*, (Cambridge: Instaprint, n.d), p. 3. No date is listed on the publication but from the advertisement in the *TLS*, we can conclude it was published in 1971.

A number of collisions which are of paramount importance to this chapter are evident in the presentation of *Signs of the Times*: the encounter between semiology and psychoanalysis as evidenced in Kristeva and Heath's essays; the close proximity of *Tel Quel* in setting the context for bringing contemporary French thought together on the terrain of cultural criticism; and, as MacCabe concludes his essay in the publication, "the effort...to grasp the processes of the production of sense, to think, through the work of the those thinkers presented here, as well as that of such as Foucault and Lacan, the possibility of a theoretical perspective from which we may begin to criticise our history, to read, let us say, our situation".¹⁵

While *Signs of the Times* may have had a limited print run, it was noticed in London by two members of the fledgling *Screen* journal editorial board. "After the publication, I went to the École normale supérieure and studied with Althusser and Jacques Derrida", remembers MacCabe. "Here I [also] attended classes by Barthes. And then I came back and Peter Wollen and Sam Rohdie asked me out to lunch at Lee How Fuk which was the smartest and coolest restaurant [in London] at the moment. Then they quizzed me incredibly intelligently about everything in Paris; they really knew what they were doing. And they asked me to join the *Screen* board. And I knew practically nothing about film but I knew a lot about this stuff which they wanted to get to know".¹⁶

Rohdie and Wollen's gesture did not simply result in MacCabe writing for the journal; it also created a space for MacCabe's mentor, Stephen Heath, to also begin contributing to *Screen*.

¹⁵ Colin MacCabe, "Situation", *Signs of the Times*, (Cambridge: Instaprint, n.d.), p. 15.

¹⁶ Interview with Colin MacCabe, 09 March 2020.

By this point, Heath was already writing for *Tel Quel* and about to embark on a series of translations of Roland Barthes essays which were later collected and published as *Image-Music-Text* in 1977. Heath remembered these years as

a tremendous learning process, however tiring the continual intellectual and political questioning and battling could be. I have instant physical memories of long evening hours spent in the [*Screen*] office we had in Old Compton Street, with Soho lights and street noise as backdrop to the intensity of our debates. There was a sense of inventing a cultural politics around education and the media, of thinking about what the critique and transformation of film and then television might be.¹⁷

This extension of *Screen*'s editorial board allowed it to widen its theoretical scope and demonstrate a certain degree of allegiance, however remote, to British intellectual history: Heath's supervisors and teachers at Cambridge included Raymond Williams, Frank Kermode and Terry Eagleton while MacCabe was concurrently working on his own PhD project, supervised by Heath, a re-consideration of James Joyce's work through the prism of French theory. This also further indicates how the journal was a collective enterprise and certainly one with shared motivations in the early part of the decade — the inculcation of MacCabe and Heath into the *Screen* project was a crucial moment in the journal's intellectual development. As we will see, both men were unafraid to use French theory to bolster their own intellectual positioning within film theory, despite MacCabe's hitherto professed lack of interest in cinema, and the work undertaken by both figures was radical in that it signified

¹⁷ See "Interview with Stephen Heath" in *Conversations With Critics*, ed. Nicolas Tredell, (London: Sheep Meadow Press, 1994), p. 178.

Screen's shift away from a period of presenting translations from Marxist and film history and towards original theoretical writing. Indeed, *Screen*'s trajectory throughout the 1970s can be divided into approximately three sections: the early translation period of 1971 - 1975 where the journal produced an extraordinary number of Anglophone translations of foreign-language texts, culminating in the 1975 double edition dedicated to the translation of Christian Metz's "The Imaginary Signifier"; the Lacanian period mid-decade; and the aforementioned theoretical battles towards the end of the decade which resulted in an entirely new strategy adapted from 1979 onwards, to which we will return at the end of the chapter.

In this section, I have concentrated upon the *Screen* project from a conceptual and historical viewpoint in order to place it within the context of the previous chapters. I will now zoom in, as it were, to offer a more detailed account of specific issues and articles published by *Screen* in the 1970s. This will take a largely chronological approach, beginning with an analysis of the first issue under Sam Rohdie's editorship in 1971 before returning to the work of new recruits Heath and MacCabe later in the decade, then turning to Claire Johnston and Laura Mulvey's pioneering work within feminist film theory.

Sam Rohdie and A New Vision for *Screen*

In spring 1971, *Screen* launched its first edition of the new year. The journal boasted a new, modernist design by Gerald Cinamon, who was simultaneously designing book covers for NLB publications and had previously worked at Penguin, including working on *A Fortunate Man*, John Berger and Jean Mohr's influential account of a country doctor on the Forest of

Dean.¹⁸ A single vertical strip bisected the page with the *Screen* letters arranged in a fashion resembling their horizontal motion; to read *Screen* one had to read vertically yet the other information on the cover, including the titles of specific articles, was written at a right angle to the *Screen* title. Immediately, this collision of axes indicated that *Screen* was not planning on making it easy for its audience. The journal's new editor was Sam Rohdie, an American and, by all accounts, a frighteningly intimidating character.¹⁹ Rohdie's influence is overlooked in most contemporary accounts of *Screen* but his influence on the journal's direction is immense during the early part of the 1970s. Rohdie was responsible for giving space not just to Heath and MacCabe but also female writers such as Claire Johnston, Terry Lovell, Kari Hanet, and he even had the *chutzpah* to criticise and undermine articles published in the journal which he disagreed with. Moreover, Rohdie certainly appeared to have the capacity and confidence to effect considerable change; as Terry Bolas states, "during [Rohdie's] editorship of *Screen*, the status of SEFT, the project of *Screen*, and the scope of BFI Education changed fundamentally",²⁰ a view shared by *Screen* editorial board member Alan Lovell who simply stated "Sam Rohdie was the guy who really plunged us right into the middle of French theory".²¹

¹⁸ "I suppose one of the editors noticed my designs for Penguin covers and thought that *Screen* should modernise its covers. I'm sure there was NO design brief from the editors. Clearly I tried to suggest film *movement*", reflected Gerald Cinamon when I interviewed him via e-mail on 27 September 2020. "I think I had lunch with Sam Rohdie in the very early days. He seemed to be 'in charge' of design matters...I don't think I ever met the others, but...every time I phoned there seemed to be arguments going on in the background". Follow up email interview with Gerald Cinamon, 12 October 2020.

¹⁹ Sam Rohdie died in 2015. Many of his obituaries testify to his difficult character; see, for example, Adrian Martin's account where he describes Rohdie as "aggressive and provocative inside the classroom, just as he could be more than a little sociopathic and monstrous outside it; he was impatient with having to be 'the teacher' (let alone an administrator). This seems to have remained his teaching mode, more or less, to the end of his life (he was about to retire from the game in May 2015 – a cycle of financial gambles, bad investments and disasters throughout his life had prevented him from leaving any earlier)". Adrian Martin, "Sam Rohdie", <<http://www.filmcritic.com.au/essays/rohdie.html>>, [accessed 10 August 2020].

²⁰ Bolas, *Screen Education*, p. 180.

²¹ Lovell remarked that he "knew Sam Rohdie [when we both worked at] Sheffield Hallam [University]. I knew his partner, Jean McConnell from Oxford and the *Universities and Left Review*. I encouraged him to apply for the *Screen* editor's job which he did". Interview with Alan Lovell, 12 January 2021.

This first edition under Rohdie's stewardship featured a stark editorial, signed by the "Editorial Board". The piece insisted that "this opportunity must be seized by *Screen* to develop theories of film study, to analyse theories of education as these affect film study and by these operations help to define methods and techniques in both film study and film education. This emphasis in *Screen* on theory is crucial".²² This brief editorial is followed by an authoritative Rohdie piece entitled "Education and criticism: Notes on work to be done".²³ "Auteurs are out of time", announced Rohdie, "The theory which makes them sacred makes no inroad on vulgar history, has no concepts for the social or collective or the national". Ominously, Rohdie adds that "the practical work of *Screen* is education. It is not primarily a journal for professional intellectuals, film critics, cinephiles, but for practising teachers. For it to be intellectualist would not only be sterile in itself, but it would not serve its supposed educational practice". These two opening salvos provided the rationale for *Screen*: a rigorous approach to questioning film education and criticism. Rohdie, in particular, positions himself as an authoritative intellectual, speaking with great moral authority on the state of film education in Britain without necessarily having the expertise to make such pronouncements, other than his editorship of the journal. This positioning was matched in two further articles in this issue to which we will now turn.

Ben Brewster, fresh from his translating work at the *NLR*, reviews the publication of the papers from the highly influential Johns Hopkins Conference on the Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man, the conference held in Baltimore in late 1966.²⁴ Brewster's review, subtitled "Structuralism In Film Criticism", provides a sweeping account of contemporary

²² "Editorial", *Screen*, Volume 12, Issue 1, (Spring 1971), pp. 4-5.

²³ Sam Rohdie, "Education and Criticism: Notes on work to be done", *Screen*, Volume 12, Issue 1, (Spring 1971), pp. 9-13.

²⁴ For a recent account of the conference's organisation, see Bret McCabe, "Structuralism's Samson", <<https://hub.jhu.edu/magazine/2012/fall/structuralisms/samson/>>, [accessed 10 August 2020].

French theory. Brewster queries the use of “structuralism” as a an appropriate term for the “emergence of a new generation of anthropologists, philosophers, semiologists and critics in France”, a movement which he admits has been slow to ignite interest in Britain due to an apparently “irrational notion that the French writers are enormously obscure and difficult, partly because of the diversity of approaches which all seem to be included under the rubric ‘structuralism’”.²⁵ Freshly importing Barthes, Derrida, Lacan and Foucault into the pages of the journal, Brewster’s review points the way forward for the *Screen* project, steeped in transnational readings of writers and philosophers largely unavailable in English. A new field of research was being shaped through the “capturing”, as per Peter Wollen’s seminars in the previous chapter, reworking and translation — if not literally then figuratively — of different intellectual resources drawn from disciplines that were usually separate — as Brewster indicates in his query around the suitability of the term “structuralism” — and inhabited by different groups of scholars. This is an important early step for *Screen* in that Brewster’s intellectual positioning immediately aligns the journal with contemporary French theory and denounces British dismissals of these foreign works, showing that these views of theories share a provincial attitude and lack of cultural ambition.

France remained an explicit reference point in this issue of *Screen*. The polemical exchanges which occurred in 1969 between *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Cinéthique* were reprinted in both this and the subsequent issue of *Screen*. It is worth looking at this process more closely: both sides in this debate were utilising the theories of Louis Althusser, in particular his essay on “Contradiction and overdetermination” which we first encountered in Chapter One. These new debates, penned in the shaken aftermath of May 1968, represented two opposing approaches to Marxism. *Cinéthique* advocated for an “explicitly Marxist-Leninist film

²⁵ Ben Brewster, “Structuralism In Film Criticism”, *Screen*, Volume 12, Issue 1, (Spring 1971), pp. 49-58.

review” while the *Cahiers* approach was “Marxist, political, scientific”. Yet when translated by Susan Bennett for *Screen*, the differences were overshadowed by the Althusserian framework which bound both approaches to the human sciences: both sides conceptualised ideology through Althusser and both maintained that the ideological power of cinema is not simply the reproduction of socially dominant ideas but goes further by embedding reality within these same ideas. This embedding of reality, both insisted, was implicit in the understanding of cinema by both audiences and practitioners. Accordingly, the theoretical and practical demystification of the illusion of reality through film is a political project. From this summary of the earlier debate in the French film journals, one can ascertain another key underpinning of the *Screen* project: the questioning of meaning between image and referent. The appearance of these translations in *Screen* also immediately identified a theoretical kinship between *Screen* and their Francophone brethren, developing a line of inquiry which, as Rosen points out, was central to *Screen* for the entirety of the 1970s.²⁶

Completing our survey of this pivotal issue of *Screen*, it is worth noting the first contributions of Claire Johnston to the journal. Johnston’s work is often overshadowed in histories of *Screen*; she is largely absent from many accounts and often entirely overshadowed by Laura Mulvey’s contributions which are comparatively few.²⁷ In offering an comparative overview of film journals in Britain and France, Johnston, again, deploys France in direct opposition to Britain: “Compared with its French counterpart, film criticism in Britain seems almost primitive, and attempts to alleviate the situation have been isolated and spasmodic”, a sentence which could be purloined from the *NLR* through the “national nihilistic” tendencies it exhibits. Johnston’s article also serves an important purpose within the field in that she

²⁶ Rosen, “*Screen* and 1970s Film Theory”.

²⁷ Claire Johnston, “Film Journals; Britain and France”, *Screen*, Volume 12, Issue 1, (Spring 1971), pp. 49-56. See also Rachel Fabian’s exemplary account of Johnston’s work: “Reconsidering the Work of Claire Johnston”, *Feminist Media Histories* 4 (3), (Summer 2018), pp. 244-273.

essentially vilifies other intellectual products within the British field of film studies in order to further legitimise *Screen*'s endeavours.²⁸ Johnston deploys Roland Barthes to dismiss *Sight and Sound* — “in Barthes’ words, ‘the bourgeois ideology...will state a fact or perceive a value, but will refuse explanation. The order of the world will be self-evident or ineffable; it will never be meaningful’” — while later she is more direct, castigating the magazine for its “empiricism and superficiality”. *Movie* magazine was denounced for its recourse to a “Leavisian method” and for “making moral judgments”; *Brighton Film Review* lacks “a critical policy”; *After Image* “has not, as yet, been able to formulate its critical principles” while, even in France, *Cinéthique* has “fallen into the trap of over-simplification”. These intellectual interventions, evident from the first issue of the new regime, demonstrate a dogged pursuit of a new agenda, which could be described in oppositional terms: un-English, un-empiricist or simply theoretical.

In terms of an opening salvo, this new iteration of *Screen* could not have been more forthright as to where it positioned itself: as an extension of the field, taking up the position of the *NLR*, following the transnational moves of the BFI Education Department with Althusser as the key figure behind the *Screen* project. The foregrounding of ideology in Althusser’s work not only lay the groundwork for the introduction of Lacanian psychoanalysis, but was crucial in that Althusser afforded *Screen* intellectuals a language to speak about the production of imagery in cinema and to view it as part of a much wider apparatus which produced ideological subjects. Althusser was also crucially important for those working in institutions in that his theories enabled a form of positioning which was deeply political, as Victor Burgin says: “...it was about what ever institution you work in, whatever aspect of the institution you happen to be in; there’s a form of politics specific to it, so there’s a form of politics

²⁸ Baert, “Positioning Theory and Intellectual Interventions”, p. 315.

specific to art practice”, or the cinema, in the case of *Screen*.²⁹ This point is further elucidated by Colin MacCabe who insisted that Althusser had not just served as a theoretical master but as a “political example” under whose command one could “struggle within various institutions, particularly institutions of education, without necessarily taking up positions automatically designated as left by some outside political agency ... Althusser enabled one to take institutions and ideas seriously while still genuinely retaining a belief in the reality of class struggle and revolution”.³⁰ While MacCabe has insisted that “there was never any active engagement with Althusser’s thought in the pages of *Screen* and his work was rarely quoted”,³¹ this is not reflected in an analysis of *Screen* journal issues across the whole of the 1970s, which reveals Althusser as one of the most quoted theorists in the journal along with Christian Metz and Jacques Lacan. Nevertheless, MacCabe does correctly point out that Althusser’s work provided “the conceptual space in which a specific analysis of a cultural form, in this case film and cinema, could be carried out in the conviction that, at a later date, this specificity could be related to the fundamental divisions of capital and labour and the ideological formations which played their part in the reproduction of that division”.³²

Screen, from the off, unapologetically annexed French theory for its theoretical imperative and used this as a weapon to aggressively dismiss other film journals for their comparative lack of theory. But for the most part, the early-1970s issues of *Screen* concentrated on a policy of translation similar to that of the *NLR* in the previous decade. The journal presented translations with a brief introductory preamble, indicating the importance and relevance of the chosen text. This strategy of translation, described by Philip Rosen as “aggressively

²⁹ Lejeune, Mignon & Pirenne eds, *French Theory and American Art*, p. 208.

³⁰ Colin MacCabe, “Class of ’68: Elements of an Intellectual Biography”, in *Tracking the Signifier: Theoretical Essays: Film, Linguistics, Literature*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 13.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

polemical”, certainly took its cue from the *NLR*’s translation strategies of the previous decade and, in many instances, the translations were produced by Ben Brewster who was key in bringing Althusser’s texts to an Anglophone audience. This policy was “intended to implant alternative modes of thought in the midst of British film criticism and culture” yet also implied a hierarchy of selection: a significant proportion of these texts identified for translation were purloined from historical Marxism including Russian Formalist and Futurist texts on cinema as well as an entire issue in 1974 dedicated to Bertolt Brecht and the spring/summer 1973 double issue which focused upon the work of Christian Metz. The latter issue placed questions of textuality at the forefront of *Screen*’s concerns — Metz’s 1971 doctoral thesis, *Language and Cinema*, reconfigured cinema as an arena where a number of codes and subcodes interacted in a textual system of cross-reference, each of which are manipulated into a flow of image and sound — but original theoretical writing from the *Screen* editorial board was generally conspicuous by its absence at least until 1974. The journal continued to print translations of textual systems in cinema from Raymond Bellour and Thierry Kuntzel but it was not until 1975 when *Screen* published Stephen Heath’s extensive textual analysis of *Touch of Evil*, inspired by Barthes’s *S/Z*, that original English-language contributions to theory began to achieve prominence in the journal.³³ But by this point, the textuality of Metz’s work was engaged with through Lacanian psychoanalytic language, a development which indicates the beginning of *Screen*’s second phase.

³³ Stephen Heath, “Film and System: Terms of Analysis, Part One,” *Screen* Volume 16, Issue 1 (Spring 1975), pp. 7-77, and Stephen Heath, “Film and System: Terms of Analysis, Part Two,” *Screen* Volume 16, Issue 2 (Summer 1975), pp. 91-113. See also the monumental analysis of John Ford’s *Young Mr. Lincoln*, undertaken by the editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, translated and published as “John Ford’s Young Mr. Lincoln”, *Screen* Volume 13, Issue 3 (Autumn 1972), pp. 5-44.

The Appropriations of Jacques Lacan

From 1974-1976, *Screen* published a series of articles which demonstrated an extensive and divisive engagement with Lacanian concepts, re-calibrated towards cinematic representation. This major implementation of Lacanian theories resulted in a number of articles which became hugely influential in film theory. It also resulted in the damaging resignation of key editorial board members, a split described by Colin MacCabe as “disastrous”.³⁴ But we will return to this in due course. For now, it is useful to carve out two separate ways in which intellectuals writing for *Screen* positioned themselves using Lacan’s work. One, as demonstrated by Heath and MacCabe, is an extraordinarily dense routing of filmic vision through Lacan’s mirror stage and the intermingling of ideology, signification and psyche. It is these writings which were to provide much of the ammunition for those who felt that *Screen*’s position had become irredeemably difficult and elitist. The second, as exemplified by Johnston and Mulvey, takes the form of a polemic or manifesto and exists very much in the lineage of Juliet Mitchell’s “Women: The Longest Revolution” and Peter Wollen’s writings in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*. While MacCabe and Heath were resolutely academic in their writings, Mulvey, in particular, was avowedly non-academic, according to Mandy Merck, having “scraped” a third in her History BA at Oxford and spent the intervening years working in a bookshop, never attending graduate school or holding a teaching post, at that time.³⁵ Mulvey’s most significant publications prior to her “Visual pleasure...” essay in *Screen* were a couple of pieces in *Spare Rib*, a “mass-market feminist magazine that got articles about fetishism in the art of Allen Jones onto the shelves of W. H.

³⁴ Interview with Colin MacCabe, 17 March 2020.

³⁵ Mandy Merck, ‘Mulvey’s Manifesto’, *Camera Obscura* 66, Volume 22, Number 3.

Smith”.³⁶ Heath and MacCabe, on the other hand, were teaching at Cambridge.³⁷ But what kind of texts are MacCabe, Metz, Heath and Mulvey producing in *Screen*? Are they pieces of film criticism, as their history within film studies anthologies would suggest? Or are they creative uses of French theory which happen to focus upon the cinema as it is receptive territory for the imposition of these concepts? Ultimately, I want to ask how we can place these writings – in particular, essays which deploy concepts from Lacanian psychoanalysis – in French theory’s trajectory in Britain. To achieve this, I will consider first MacCabe and Heath’s work, and secondly, Mulvey’s essay, arguing that these examples demonstrate two divergent methods of engagement with French theory, a divergence borne out by the differing trajectories of these essays in their subsequent circulation outside of *Screen*.

By this point in the mid-1970s, Jacques Lacan’s works had yet to be fully translated into English; it was not until 1977 when his *Écrits* was translated and published by the Tavistock Institute.³⁸ He had achieved minor coverage in Britain through an extensive 1968 piece written by Barthes’s translator Annette Lavers on *Écrits* in the *Times Literary Supplement*, which admired Lacan’s work for the potential “dialogue which such challenging ideas call for” but ultimately cautioned against his “profoundly conservative, not to say reactionary, attitude”.³⁹ Yet he had gained some positive traction through the publication of Anthony

³⁶ See Laura Mulvey, “You Don’t Know What Is Happening, Do You, Mr. Jones?” *Spare Rib* 8 (February 1973) (reprinted in *Spare Rib Reader*, ed. Marsha Rowe (London: Penguin Books, 1982) pp. 48-57. Mulvey also wrote about the multimedia artist Penny Slinger – see Laura Mulvey, “The Hole Truth”, *Spare Rib* 17 (November 1973), p. 3.

³⁷ MacCabe spent the mid-1970s writing his PhD on James Joyce, supervised by Jonathan Culler while also teaching at the University.

³⁸ According to Joan Miller’s structuralism bibliography, Jacques Lacan’s *Écrits: A Selection* was the first book-length translation in English. Whereas in 1966 the original publication in France had caused an unexpected sensation in the French bookstores, selling 5,000 copies in less than two weeks, -- see Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*. (New York & London,: Columbia University Press, 1997 [1994], p. 328 -- the heavily abridged English version failed to attract a large readership. See also Nobus, “The Irredeemable Debt: On The English Translation Of Lacan’s First Two Public Seminars”.

³⁹ Annette Lavers, “Healing Words: Dr. Lacan’s Structuralism”, *Times Literary Supplement*, London, January 25 1968, pp. 73-5.

Wilden's *The Language of the Self*, published in Britain in 1968⁴⁰ and *The Language of Psychoanalysis* by Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, translated into English and published in Britain in 1973.⁴¹ The latter, according to psychoanalyst Dany Nobus, was "wildly successful" because "nothing like this had been published [in Anglophone psychoanalysis] ever before".⁴² Even so, his appearance in a film journal was puzzling as Lacan's key writings, most of which dated from the 1940s and 1950s, had precisely zero engagement with cinema. Writing in 1990, Shelly Turkle's view is that "the take-off of Lacanian psychoanalysis as a French social phenomenon was tied to the events of 1968"; specifically, the failures of the uprising resulted in the politicisation of Francophone psychoanalytic thought which facilitated its infiltration into French culture. But why was Lacan politicised? As Turkle further argues, May 1968 was an "explosion of speech and desire". It was a rising which rejected the traditional politics of the party system and turned instead towards a politics of the self. The abrupt cessation of the revolutionary events of 1968 left radical, intellectual thinkers with a void: how does one continue to think about self-expression as part of a revolutionary movement now that the movement no longer exists? Lacan provided a way through this conundrum in that his theory integrated both society and individual and allowed one to "think through the events". His concepts around the transition from the imaginary to the symbolic realm were crucial in assisting those on the defeated Left to think of the notion of the private self as a construct of capitalism and suggest that any distinction between the private and the public is mere bourgeois ideology.⁴³ While Turkle insists that such an interpretation is far from Lacan's original intention, the subsequent

⁴⁰Anthony Wilden, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, (London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968).

⁴¹Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (London: Hogarth Press, 1973).

⁴² Email interview with Dany Nobus, 15 July 2020.

⁴³ Shelley Turkle, "Dynasty", *London Review of Books* Vol. 12 No. 23, 6 December 1990, <<https://www-lrb-co-uk/the-paper/v12/n23/sherry-turkle/dynasty>>, [accessed 12 April 2021].

deployment of Lacanian psychoanalysis in the field of film pedagogy and criticism demonstrates an even further shift from these theories' original concern. The presentation of Lacan in *Screen* poses a significant problem, which was to have a major effect on its outlook. The journal assumes, but never fully demonstrates, that Lacanian psychoanalysis needs to be articulated with historical materialism; as David Macey points out, the "scientificity of psychoanalysis is established by connotation rather than by demonstration".⁴⁴ This is in contrast to the promotion of Althusser and Lacan in the *NLR* where a rationale was provided, through the introductory prefaces to their work. *Screen*, in effect, is site to an exploitation of his work, often through an appeal to the authority of Althusser. This highly assertive form of appropriating French theory is best demonstrated through a closer analysis of Colin MacCabe's essay on realism and the cinema.

MacCabe's article is extremely useful for our study in that it showcases the Althusserian scaffold upon which the journal's theoretical practice was constructed for much of the 1970s.⁴⁵ In creating an overt link between film and the realism of the nineteenth century novel, one where "there is a hierarchy among the discourses which compose the text and this hierarchy is defined in terms of an empirical notion of truth", MacCabe moves into familiar territory: empirical notions of truth denotes a disingenuousness within the very concept of the realist novel as the narrator, and narrative prose, represents "a metalanguage that can state all truths in the object language", but the narrative prose never announces itself as a metalanguage, thus hiding its position as a dominant ideology in the text. MacCabe transfers this to the contemporary film whereupon the role of the camera is revealed as concomitant to the narrator and the narrative prose, and, reflecting Althusser, this form of realism is unable to

⁴⁴ David Macey, *Lacan In Contexts* (London: Verso, 1988), p. 20.

⁴⁵ Colin MacCabe, "From Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses", *Screen* Volume 15, Issue 2, (Summer 1974), pp. 7-27.

deal with the “real as contradictory...the classic realist text ensures the position of the subject in a relation of dominant specularity”. The narrative generated by the realist text is fundamentally unable to demonstrate any form of tension between the meta-language and the focus of its language, or “object discourse”. Through this argument, MacCabe reveals that the metalanguage’s impetus derives from ideology. However, he does allow space for the metalanguage and object language to eschew the dominant ideology of society through a unified critique: “the classic realist text (a heavily ‘closed’ discourse) cannot deal with the real in its contradictions...it fixes the subject in a point of view from which everything becomes obvious. There is, however, a level of contradiction into which the classic realist text can enter. This is the contradiction between the dominant discourse of the text and the dominant ideological discourses of the time”.

This is important in that MacCabe is effectively demonstrating the Althusserian framework underpinning and legitimising the *Screen* project: if cinema, as an object, is ideological practice then *Screen*, the journal, can construct a knowledge of it through theoretical practice. MacCabe’s concerns with ideology are steeped in Althusser’s theories but these fail to take into account how the spectator absorbs the ideological cinematic code, particularly when one considers the influence of wider issues such as the image, language itself, and the place of film within wider society. The paradigm which provided a solution to this is Lacanian psychoanalysis. One passage states that:

Freud’s theory is a theory of the construction of the subject: the entry of the small infant into language and society and the methods whereby it learns what positions, as subject, it can take up. This entry into the symbolic (the whole cultural space which is structured, like a language, through a set of differences and oppositions) is most easily

traced in the analytic situation through that entry which is finally determining for the infant, the problem of sexual difference.⁴⁶

David Macey indicates a number of issues with MacCabe's use of theory in this passage. First, MacCabe avoids defining Freud's theory despite promising to do so but second, MacCabe shows a "sleight of concept [which is] astonishing: the theory ascribed to Freud is Lacan, pure and complicated". Macey remarks that Freud never used "consecrated" terms such as "like a language" as the "science of 'modern linguistics' was not available to him", nor does he use "the symbolic in its Lacanian or Lévi-Strausseau sense".⁴⁷ In this sense, MacCabe is playing rather fast and loose with French theories: the authority of Lacan's writings, even when re-assigned to Freud, are taken as axiomatic while remaining undefined in their relevance to film study. But this form of positioning does have an effect within the local context: as MacCabe is working within a team, he is actively positioning himself by centring around a central issue, the association of an Althusserian form of theoretical practice with psychoanalytic concepts derived from Lacan.

But there is a consistent fluidity to MacCabe's work. MacCabe's later essay "Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure", showcases a more explicit form of positioning as he underlines and develops his stated commitment to unpacking the ideological functions which underpin the cinematic text.⁴⁸ While MacCabe's writings do not come close to the spiralling lexicon of theorists favoured by Peter Wollen, his range of references are now from familiar sources: a contemporary *New Left Review* arguing against the work of Lukács; Stephen Heath's essays on the cinematic apparatus and

⁴⁶ MacCabe, "From Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses", p. 17.

⁴⁷ Macey, *Lacan In Contexts*, p. 19.

⁴⁸ Colin MacCabe, "Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure", *Screen*, Volume 17, Issue 3, (Autumn 1976), pp. 7–27.

identification in film; Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"; Christian Metz's essay 'The Imaginary Signifier', first translated in *Screen*; a mimeographed BFI Educational Advisory Service paper by Jacqueline Rose titled "The Imaginary, the Insufficient Signifier" and no fewer than three of his own previous articles in *Screen*: "The Politics of Separation"; "Presentation of the Imaginary Signifier"; and the aforementioned "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on some Brechtian Theses". Similar to the work undertaken by the Cinema One series in the previous chapter, this circular movement of referencing across *Screen* articles serves to legitimise work in a network of influence. As Baert points out, the efficacy of an intervention depends on the actions of other individuals at play within the same field. MacCabe's field of transnational film scholarship relies upon Mulvey, Heath, and Rose — each of whom operate within the same milieu — to bolster his own positioning.

What does this essay say about MacCabe's positioning in 1976? Firstly, by arguing that the spectator of realist cinema is in alignment with empiricist epistemology, an effect which occurs due to the implicit, unmediated evidence of a real available to perception, which centres all on an unquestioned subjectivity, MacCabe effectively and comprehensively dismisses all existing classical film theory under this epistemology. His article takes aim at Andre Bazin and Sergei Eisenstein's montage theory, for "presupposing the unifications of text and subject based on the underlying empiricist assumptions of the classical realist text".⁴⁹ MacCabe's vilification of earlier intellectual products, in this case Bazin and Eisenstein, is indicative of the *Screen* project particularly during its Lacanian phase.

⁴⁹ Colin MacCabe, "Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure", *Screen*, Volume 17, Issue 3, (Autumn 1976), pp. 7–27.

In this simple equation, MacCabe indicates a key points of French theory in Britain, one which can be traced back to its roots in the *NLR*: empiricism is worthless and ought to be supplanted by Althusser's scientific materialism. MacCabe's essay argues that film ought to be considered as a representation of contradictory discourses rather than a singular vision towards reality:

...I argue that film does not reveal the real in a moment of transparency, but rather than film is constituted by a set of discourses which (in the positions allowed to subject and object) produce a certain reality. The emphasis on production must be accompanied by one of another crucial Marxist term, that of contradiction.⁵⁰

As we saw in Chapter One, contradiction, in the Marxist sense, was introduced to the discourse through Ben Brewster's translation of "Contradiction and overdetermination" in the *NLR*, and it is through this prism that MacCabe announces both his reading and his interpretation of Lacan who provides "an analysis of vision which is of great relevance to any attempt to understand the reality of film". Lacan, we are told, "privileges vision as a basis to an imaginary relation of the individual to the world.... Language in the realm of the imaginary is understood in terms of some full relation between word and thing: a mysterious unity of sign and referent".⁵¹

Thus MacCabe now links his Althusserian view of film back through Lacan's realm of the imaginary which, in effect, brings him up to speed with the vanguard aspirations of

⁵⁰ MacCabe, "Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure", p. 11.

⁵¹ Ibid.

psychoanalysis and film theory. But there was a further bridging work that linked all of these theories together in a more formalist sense: Christian Metz's essay "The Imaginary Signifier", translated by the ubiquitous Ben Brewster and published in *Screen* 16, summer 1975.⁵² Remarkably, the original version, "Le signifiant imaginaire" was first published in May of 1975 in *Communications* 23⁵³ meaning Brewster's translation was near concomitant with the publication of the original work — a sense of the urgency of *Screen* in that it was almost on a par for the first time with its French counterparts. Metz's essay begins with a specific question: how can psychoanalysis help explain cinematic signification? In considering his turn to psychoanalysis as a continuation of his previous work which, as we saw in Chapter Two, briefly intoxicated Peter Wollen, Metz observes that film is a signifier whose presence is absence: the event has already been recorded and exists in the past but the film operates as a "new kind of mirror",⁵⁴ a move which explicitly links with Lacan's mirror stage. Metz insists that the viewing of a film necessitates a remarkably strong form of identification to account for the absence of the body, and for a form of meaning to emerge. The viewer is forced to identify with the "cinematic apparatus" itself which doubles the act of viewing through the work of the projector, positioned anterior to the viewer, and the realisation of the image directly ahead. The cinema itself re-purposes this exchange as the screen operates as a surface for what has been unconsciously adapted. In short, Metz insists that cinematic spectatorship is completely reliant upon the Lacanian notion of the "Imaginary". By aligning the cinema with the Imaginary, Metz posits the cinema screen as

⁵² Christian Metz; "The Imaginary Signifier", *Screen*, Volume 16, Issue 2, (Summer 1975), pp 14–76. Metz's article was prefaced by Colin MacCabe, who offers a brief summary of Lacan's work, whose "unceasing effort over the last forty years to prevent psychoanalysis from falling back into biologism (the body as empirically given) or psychologism (the mind as authentically experienced) has provided the basis for perhaps the most vigorous and vital element in contemporary psychoanalytic theory". At no stage does MacCabe make explicit the link, if any, between Lacan's work and that of film or film education; indeed, no film-related terms, including "film" itself, are used in the preface until the very end, when mentioned as a "fixed starting point for analysis". This hagiographical preface perhaps best demonstrates the unproven assertions given to Lacan's work in *Screen* during this period.

⁵³ Christian Metz, "Le signifiant imaginaire," *Communications* 23 (1975), pp. 3-55.

⁵⁴ Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier", p. 14-16.

redolent of the childhood mirror, in that it represents an imaginary completeness but disguises an inherent lack. The creation of this imaginary completeness is represented by another Lacanian term, parachuted into film theory: the suture.

In typically difficult *Screen* style, the concept of the suture was introduced by Stephen Heath's book-length analysis of "narrative space" in *Screen* 17, published in the autumn of 1976, yet the methodology itself was not explicated until *Screen* 18, published over a year later in winter 1977.⁵⁵ The latter issue included a "Dossier on Suture" for readers which contained three items: a translation of Jacques Alain-Miller's "Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier)", first presented in Lacan's Seminar XII, in the session of 24 February 1965, and was first published in *Cahiers pour analyse* in January 1966,⁵⁶ and translated for *Screen* by Jacqueline Rose; Jean-Pierre Oudart's "Cinema and Suture", which was the first article to link the 'suture' with film theory, originally published in *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1969;⁵⁷ and finally, Stephen Heath's own commentary: "Notes on Suture". We shall now briefly explore the interdisciplinary crossing of "suturing" through its Lacanian beginnings through to its conception in *Screen*.

While the term "suturing" does originate with Lacan, he used it on only one occasion in a seminar conducted in 1965. It was Miller, his son-in-law, who converted suturing into a concept for his own article, translated as part of the "Suture dossier". Oudart's subsequent essay developed the concept, arguing that the cinema screen generated a form of *jouissance* in the subject, immersed in the imaginary misrecognition of images, a dynamic reflective of

⁵⁵ Jacques Lacan, "La Suture (Éléments de la logique du signifiant)", trans. Jacqueline Rose, *Screen* (Winter 1977/78), pp. 24-34.

⁵⁶ Jacques-Alain Miller, "La suture", *Cahiers pour l'analyse* no. 1 (1966) pp. 39-51.

⁵⁷ Jean-Pierre Oudart, "La suture", *Cahiers du cinéma* no. 211 (April 1969) pp. 36-9, and no. 212 (May 1969) pp. 50-5; translation, "Cinema and Suture", trans. Kari Hanet, *Screen*, Volume 18, Issue. 4 (Winter 1977/8) pp. 35-47.

Lacan's mirror stage. Yet, in Oudart's account, the symbolic begins to interrupt the imaginary when the spectator becomes conscious of the frame of the screen, generating an anxiety in the subject, a threat which is only avoided through the execution of a shot-reverse shot effect where the second shot legitimises the first shot as the subject's field of vision, allowing them to remain in their voyeuristic position.

The suture in narrative space, extensively elaborated by Heath, is defined as "an absence, a lack, which is ceaselessly recaptured for...the film, the process binding the spectator as subject in the realisation of the film's space".⁵⁸ Heath's essay bisects this into two categories: space within the film-frame and space outside of the film-frame, with the former delineated as "narrative space". This arena is regulated by a number of settings. "Master-shots" enable the viewer to place themselves within the film's own purview; 180 and 30-degree conventions delimit this narrative space; the former generally does not permit the camera to cross the 180-degree line of the screen, where the spectator would be placed within the filmic narrative space. To safeguard against a disruption in narrative space, the 30-degree rule allows for a camera leap of a maximum of 30 degrees.

The concept of suture in film theory did not achieve significant circulation. As Todd MacGowan points out in a recent account of psychoanalysis and film, *Screen* theory "took up the concept of suture and transforms it into the ideological function performed through popular cinematic form. In both cases, a thoroughgoing misreading of the psychoanalytic concept leads to the development of a film theory that has little to do with the psychoanalytic

⁵⁸ Stephen Heath, "Narrative Space", *Screen*, Volume 17, Issue 3, (Autumn 1976), pp. 68–112.

thought that gave birth to it. What passes for Lacanian film theory bears no real resemblance to Lacan”.⁵⁹

But this, again, refers us back to the notion of the capture of names as referents: “Lacan” became a noun within *Screen* theory with only minimal association with Jacques Lacan, the ageing French psychoanalyst. But we can also deduce that MacCabe, Metz and Heath produce a genealogy of Lacanian psychoanalysis re-purposed towards the cinema as providing a way of understanding ideological codes inherent within the act of cinematic spectatorship. These radical re-conceptualisations of the spectator reimagine spectatorship as a subject no longer operating outside the cinematic work as passive receiver but one who is embedded within the cinematic object itself, and forced to interrogate one’s own engagement in a complex code of thought as production and viewing as a collective production. The usefulness of Lacanian psychoanalysis for MacCabe and Heath, in particular, was that it provided a way to open up cinema to areas of concern that had not been typically taken and making them central to film analysis. Furthermore, psychoanalysis, even in the 1970s, had a newness, and shared a history with cinema: both were birthed in the late nineteenth century but came of age in the twentieth century. Both forms of engagement were also analogous for mental processes: cinema and psychoanalysis are ways of imaging the workings of the mind.⁶⁰ We will now turn to an alternative method of engaging with psychoanalytic theory and film in the pages of *Screen*, specifically through the work of Laura Mulvey.

⁵⁹ Todd MacGowan, *Psychoanalytic Film Theory and the Rules of the Game*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 58.

⁶⁰A much later Stephen Heath article takes up this point in full: “Cinema and Psychoanalysis: Parallel Histories”, in *Endless Night: Parallel Histories*, ed. Janet Bergstrom, (California: UC Press, 1999), pp. 1-18. This Heath article is credited as written in 1993.

Towards a Women's Counter-Cinema

Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" was published in *Screen* autumn 1975.⁶¹ A work cited by Mandy Merck as "by far the most cited work in its field, paradigmatic in cultural studies at large, Mulvey's essay has been applied, elaborated, interrogated, revised, refuted, and endlessly reiterated in the years since its publication".⁶² However, it is also worthwhile to consider Mulvey's approach to utilising French theory in her essay in that it is markedly different from the style of Heath and MacCabe despite also using psychoanalytic concepts drawn from Lacan and Althusser. It is also useful to place Mulvey's essay in a lineage of French theory which links back through Claire Johnston and Peter Wollen: a specific form of *écriture* which has more to do with manifesto writing than dense exploration of film theory.

According to Laura Mulvey, the publication of Althusser's "Freud and Lacan" in the *NLR* in 1969 was the a crucial awakening in her intellectual development: "it's like waving a flag to Marxists to tell them: 'you have been taken in by bourgeois ideology in your attitude to Freud, and you have to liberate yourself from the way in which Freud has been taken over by American psychologists and psychologism and you have to look at Freud again'.⁶³ So it was in a sense directly addressed to Marxists and it was also bringing in the very complex

⁶¹ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Screen* Volume 16, Issue 3 (Autumn 1975), pp. 6-18. Alan Lovell remarks that "the first appearance of Lacan [in *Screen*] was Laura Mulvey's article. And it was sent back to Laura to re-write, an editorial thing, it was confusing with the use of Lacan. She really brought Lacan more centrally to it. In my case, I was very puzzled". Interview with Alan Lovell, 12 January 2021.

⁶² As an example of the essay's remarkable influence, an episode of the popular US sitcom *Parks and Recreation* aired on International Women's Day 2012 contained a reference to Mulvey's essay — one of the principal characters is about to take a test in women's studies and is asked about the source of the "male gaze". His triumphant response: "Laura Mul-vay".

⁶³ Louis Althusser, "Freud and Lacan, translated by Ben Brewster, *NLR* 1/55 May/June 1969, pp. 64-5.

relationship between Freud and Lacan within a couple of pages”.⁶⁴ Mulvey also reflects that she:

loved these Hollywood movies but then I encountered feminism and everything went wrong and the movies that I loved so much suddenly started to irritate me and I saw them with different eyes...I was going to — well we didn't say 'feminism' in those days — a women's liberation reading group where we were trying to get to the bottom of women's oppression. We were reading Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Lévi-Strauss "Exchange of Women' and then we started to read Freud and a number of us got stuck and perhaps never managed to escape. Some of us went on to Lacan and got stuck there. Our reading group evolved and became a Lacan reading group which then produced the journal *m/f*, which you can think of as Male/Female or Marx/Freud...Psychoanalysis made it possible to think through the questions the women's liberation movement posed while providing a vocabulary that made it possible to conceptualize oppression and repression.⁶⁵

Mulvey's essay parallels with the work of Metz and Heath in displaying an engagement with the mirror stage and film. The mirror stage is, in fact, the second of two modes of pleasure introduced by Mulvey in her essay, the other being scopophilia – the erotic pleasure emerging from subjecting another to one's gaze. In Mulvey's account, the cinematic apparatus reinforces pleasure, a claim which has similarities with Metz's "The Imaginary Signifier",

⁶⁴ Lejeune, Mignon & Pirenne, *French Theory and American Art*, p. 213.

⁶⁵ "Suddenly, A Woman Spectator: An Interview With Laura Mulvey", *Another Gaze*, <<https://www.anothergaze.com/suddenly-woman-spectator-conversation-interview-feminism-laura-mulvey/>>, [accessed 28 May 2021].

although Mulvey admits not to have been aware of this essay when writing “Visual Pleasure...”.⁶⁶ But her engagement with Lacan’s “Mirror stage” essay, published in the *NLR* in 1968 takes a very literal form, much more so than Metz, Heath and MacCabe. Mulvey argues that the first pleasure was reliant on separation from the image. In cinematic codes it is founded upon identification with the image as a narcissistic pleasure reveals itself through “a fascination with likeness and recognition: the human face, the human body, the relationship between human form and its surroundings, the visible presence of the person in the world”. The correlation between this form of pleasure and the narrative cinema exists here as it necessitates the introduction of characters who fulfil the role of identification – the illusory role of Hollywood draws the spectator in to identify with the image while the leading actors play the part of ego ideals.

While the relevance of Mulvey’s essay does not need to be further asserted, where does it sit in relation to *Screen* journal at the time and its use of French theory? Firstly, the re-imagining of film as a system which produces the spectator in subject positions is a consistent theme throughout *Screen* in the mid-1970s.⁶⁷ And as Rodowick point out, the subject indicated by the male writers – Metz, MacCabe, Heath – in *Screen* is highly abstract. Mulvey’s essay works towards making the subject gendered, concrete and specific. This is important for the essay’s circulation; despite the male *Screen* writers’ Althusserian and Marxist avowals, Mulvey succeeds in integrating a concrete political grouping with the journal’s extant developments in theories of textuality. In effect, Mulvey takes the French theory in *Screen* out of itself and aligns it with a specific social formation – women – a task which appeared to be beyond the male writers, whose attempts at centralising, for example, the working class to

⁶⁶ Interview with Laura Mulvey, 15 December 2018.

⁶⁷ See Helm-Grovas, *Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, Theory and Practice, Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 38.

these signifying systems were far less successful. Secondly, Mulvey's text is indebted to the work of Peter Wollen, in that, unusually for *Screen* at the time, it is an auteurist text. The directors mentioned by name in the essay – Boetticher, Hitchcock, Sternberg – were all written about by Peter Wollen in his 'Lee Russell' period at the *NLR*. Furthermore, Helm Grovas points out that Mulvey "quotes and paraphrases remarks by Boetticher and Sternberg that had earlier appeared in Wollen's writing" and also highlights a passage from a Wollen essay on Hitchcock from 1969 which appears to point the way towards Mulvey's later intervention:

The act of watching dominates [Hitchcock's] films, both in the narration and in the narrative, in his style as director and in the relations between the dramatis personae. [...] To analyse his work we need [...] a concrete and meaningful psychology-semiology of gazing, watching, observing. The elementary terms for this are to be found, of course, in the work of Freud, in concepts such as skoptophilia [sic] ('gazing impulse', voyeurism) and exhibitionism.⁶⁸

But a further influence on Mulvey's work, and one which regularly fails to make it into the innumerable essays on Mulvey's own essay, is Claire Johnston's denouncement of an austere avantgardism in "Notes on Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema" which was published as a *Screen* pamphlet in 1974. While Johnston's essay does not use an overt Althusserian or Lacanian framework, her essay serves as a prescription for feminist filmmaking and serves as a manifesto or polemic. As such, it privileges the auteur theory which, in Merck's terms, "serves as a reminder of the authorial link between manifesto writing and artistic

⁶⁸ Peter Wollen, Wollen, "Hitchcock's Vision", *Cinema* 1:3 (June 1969), p. 2.

production”. This stated link between writing and production also indicates a crucial distinction between Mulvey and her *Screen* co-writers; by the time of the “Visual Pleasure...” publication in 1975, she had commenced her own film co-directing endeavours with Peter Wollen as their first film, *Pentelisea*, was produced the previous year. Therefore, Mulvey’s essay was written as a filmmaker, critic and curator rather than simply the latter, a move which afforded her increased legitimacy with the wider filmmaking circuit.

A final observation on Mulvey’s essay is that neither Althusser nor Lacan (nor even Freud) are directly quoted. The essay is without footnotes and only two other publications, Freud’s “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” and his “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes”, are mentioned albeit without citation. In this sense, Mulvey’s essay can be compared to that of Juliet Mitchell some nine years previously whose “Women: The Longest Revolution” was circulated in a similar fashion. The relative simplicity with which both essays are presented, steeped in French theory but devoid of extensive footnotes or cross-referencing, enabled each essay to be read and interpreted, anthologised, taught and cited; indeed, Mulvey’s essay remains the most widely available example of *Screen* theory in existence. Indeed, looking at Mulvey’s essay now, one is struck by its vitality and clarity. The essay is unencumbered by abstruse terminology and there is the sense that Mulvey is very much at ease with her own theorising and unburdened by the necessity to rigorously account for every aspect of her writing. The essay is also unusual in terms of *Screen* at that time. The journal’s engagement with feminist issues was, like the *NLR*’s, quite sporadic; Julia Lesage challenged the phallocentrism of MacCabe’s work in the summer 1975 issue of *Screen*.⁶⁹ In this sense, Mulvey’s work contrasts hugely with that of Heath and MacCabe; while all three writers are

⁶⁹ Julia Lesage, “The Human Subject – You? He? Or Me? (Or, the Case of the Missing Penis)”, *Screen* Volume 16, Issue 2 (Summer 1975), pp. 77-83.

engaged with Lacanian psychoanalysis on the terrain of film studies, it is Mulvey who is most successful in challenging existing orthodoxies and utilising continental concerns for a potential far beyond the pages of a film journal. In deploying French theory as the methodology for their writings in *Screen*, Heath, MacCabe, and Mulvey all engage in a similar type of intellectual intervention. However, it is now clear that the interventions of Mulvey brought about a different form of positioning, one which was more easily transposed to different contexts outside of the theoretical practice of *Screen*.

In this section, I have been concerned with an analysis of the work of four *Screen* writers and their deployment of French theory, primarily emerging from Lacanian psychoanalysis, during the mid 1970s. Two contrasting forms emerged: the rigorous film-theoretical essays of MacCabe, Metz and Heath; and the more polemical style of Laura Mulvey. I have posited that the latter style was ultimately more impactful as it gendered the accounts of textuality in film, ensuring that feminist film criticism and film practice was one of the most successful descendants of French theory in *Screen* due to its association with an effective moment in social politics. We will now turn to the disputations which emerged both internally and externally around French theory, resulting in a series of denouements and public pillorying of the journal's work.

Collapsing Theories

An extract from a *Screen* statement on “Psychoanalysis and Film”, winter 1975:

Much of the writing about psychoanalysis comes from a commitment that doesn't allow a critical distance to be taken. The presentation of Lacan's ideas (*Screen* v 16 n 2, Summer 1975) provides a convenient example of how this commitment blocks criticism. We believe that no socialist educationalist could be happy with Lacan's authoritarian account of the learning process...Lacan's position as presented raises many of the problems that have become familiar in discussion of F R Leavis's critical position – the refusal of a metalanguage, the attempt to explicate concepts only by showing them at work. Indeed in confronting the use of Lacanian concepts in *Screen* we have come up against one of the special problems of Leavisite criticism, the use of terms whose repetition suggests they are important for the system of thought but whose meaning is hard to specify.⁷⁰

The statement was signed by four editorial board members: Edward Buscombe, Alan Lovell, Christopher Gledhill [sic], Christopher Williams. These members reflect the “educationalist” rationale referred to at the beginning of this chapter: their primary complaint is that the journal was no longer taking any significant interest in education.⁷¹ The lack of critical distance from Lacan's work was another one of many criticisms articulated in the piece.

⁷⁰ Edward Buscombe, Christopher Gledhill, Alan Lovell, Christopher Williams, “Statement: Psychoanalysis and Film”, *Screen* Volume 16, Issue 4 (Winter 1975), p. 119-130. There is an error in the signatories: Christopher Gledhill should read Christine Gledhill.

⁷¹ See Annette Kuhn, “*Screen* and *Screen* theorizing today”, *Screen* Volume 50, Issue 1, (Spring 2009), pp. 1-12.

While accepting that “psychoanalysis is an intellectual discipline that may provide fruitful insights for film theory”, the signatories express uncertainty at the deployment of psychoanalytic concepts and methods as they remain “undeveloped”. Quoting Lévi-Strauss’s criticisms of Lacan, the board members “cite Lévi-Strauss not to side with him against Lacan but to show that substantial intellectual choices are being made using Lacan’s account of psychoanalysis... a film theorist does not have any special competence in making such choices”. Therefore, *Screen* is criticised for its hierarchical approach, making intellectual choices without explicating the problems attached to these choices. In the views of the four members, the *Screen* project has become an orthodoxy which closes off any room for criticism; in Bourdieusian terms, the latter become “heretics” in the face of mounting an affront to the “orthodoxy” of the dominant members of the editorial board.⁷²

A second issue brought to the fore is the “intelligibility of the various expositions and applications of psychoanalysis...obscurity is [not] a guarantee of profundity”. Two forms of obscurity are highlighted. The first is a sample passage is from Colin MacCabe’s summer 1974 piece on realism and Brecht. The selected passage is derided for being “full of ambiguities and uncertainties”; concepts such as “desire” are introduced without any explanation and assertions are made on top of these introductions thus undermining their effectiveness. The second form of obscurity is highlighted in a response, signed by Ben Brewster, Stephen Heath and Colin MacCabe to Julia Lesage’s aforementioned criticisms of sexism in MacCabe’s account of Barthes’s *S/Z*. The offending passage cited by the four members is worth repeating: “The problem is to understand the terms of construction of the subject and the modalities of the replacement of this construction but also, more difficultly,

⁷² See *Fielding Transnationalism*, Julian Go and Monica Krause eds., (London: Goldsmiths Press, 2016).

the supplantation – the overplacing: supplementation or, in certain circumstances, supplantation (critical interruption) of that construction in its place of repetition”.⁷³

This example, which now reads like a parody of “*Screen* theory”, is cited by the four dissenting members as exemplary of a strategy of writing emerging from Roland Barthes’s work where supposedly precise terms from alternative intellectual discourses are combined with a supposed “play” in language; ultimately, the latter undermines the former. The board members warn that unless such textual complexities are abandoned, the *Screen* readership will abandon the journal, leaving it to “drift into a cultural void and become a conventional academic magazine with a ‘leftist’ colouring and no political situation in which it can specifically engage”. Two further issues are alluded to: an uneasiness about the “critical acceptance of Juliet Mitchell’s defence of Freud” in her *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* which, apparently, fails to resolve Freud’s controversial account of women and, finally, the rather striking claim that *Screen*, a journal *for film education*, had extricated itself from any reasonable link *to film education*. Evidence of the split in the ranks was visible elsewhere in this issue. Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen take aim at “Hoggart, Williams, Whannel and Hall” as their “theoretical limitations are clear, particularly in relation to the whole question of ideology”.⁷⁴ Singling out *The Popular Arts*, Johnston remarks that “it’s interesting that

⁷³ Ben Brewster, Stephen Heath, Colin MacCabe, “Comment”, *Screen* Volume 16, Issue 2, (Summer 1975), p. 88.

⁷⁴ Stephen Heath, Claire Johnston, Alan Lovell, Colin MacCabe et al, “Discussion”, *Screen* Volume 17, Issue 4, (Winter 1975), p. 77. This discussion which is an edited transcript from a Brecht event hosted by *Screen*, perhaps best demonstrates the disputation at editorial level within the journal at the time. Alan Lovell is repeatedly chastised by Heath, MacCabe, and particularly Johnston, for his “romantic nostalgia” towards the mass culture debates of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Lovell is dismissed as out-of-date whereas Johnston positions herself, and by proxy, her *Screen* allies as far more modern: “...developments in film theory since then such as semiology have radically altered those terms of reference”. The same issue featured an extensive discussion of *The Nightcleaners*, the film made by members of the Berwick Street Collective (Marc Karlin, Mary Kelly, James Scott and Humphry Trevelyan), which depicted the invisible forces at play between the women who cleaned offices at night, their own Cleaners Action Group, and the unions. Claire Johnston aligned the film within a form of German theory, specifically the lineage of Bertolt Brecht’s work. See Claire Johnston, Paul Willemen, “Brecht in Britain: The Independent Political Film (on *The Nightcleaners*), *Screen*, Volume 17, Issue 4, (Winter 1975), p. 101-118. See also Siona Wilson, *Art Labor, Sex Politics: Feminist Effects in 1970s British Art and Performance*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

what was concentrated on was the notion of the artist in popular art rather than the question of textual production itself and the way meaning is produced at that level, the ideological configurations in the text – the relationship the work attempts to produce between text and audience”.⁷⁵ By this point, the field of *Screen* was clearly demarcated across two poles: the educationalist pole, represented by Lovell and co, eager to maintain a healthy engagement with working-class ideas and values; and the aggressive theoretical pole, represented by MacCabe, Heath, Johnston et al, hell-bent on taking up concepts from Althusser and Lacan and transforming them into critical exegesis of the popular cinema.

The spring 1976 issue of *Screen* made no further mention of any dispute in the ranks. The summer 1976 issue, however, led with an editorial announcing the resignation of the four members – Lovell, Gledhill, Buscombe and Williams – from the board. The issue contained a rationale for the resignations which summarised previous concerns into three theses: “*Screen* is unnecessarily obscure and inaccessible”; “The politico-cultural analysis that has increasingly come to underpin *Screen*’s whole theoretical effort is intellectually unsound and unproductive”; “*Screen* has no serious interest in educational matters”.⁷⁶ The response authored by the remaining members of the *Screen* editorial board was defiant and lapsed into borderline personal attacks which need not be repeated here. But, in short, the *Screen* board re-iterated their commitment to theory, be that French or otherwise: “No one writes difficultly in *Screen* for the sake of difficulty; the difficulties come from the development of film theory within the perspectives mentioned above, from the fact that this development is a process”.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Stephen Heath, Claire Johnston, Alan Lovell, Colin MacCabe et al, “Discussion”, *Screen*, Volume 17, Issue 4, (Winter 1975), p. 77.

⁷⁶ Edward Buscombe, Christine Gledhill, Alan Lovell, Christopher Williams, “Statement - Why We Have Resigned From The *Screen* Editorial Board”, *Screen*, Volume 17, Issue 2, (Summer 1976), pp. 88-109.

⁷⁷ Ben Brewster, Elizabeth Cowie, Jon Halliday, Kari Hanet, Stephen Heath, Colin MacCabe, Paul Willemen, Peter Wollen, “Reply”, *Screen* Volume 17, Issue 2, (Summer 1975), pp. 110-116.

Reflecting on these splits some 45 years later, Colin MacCabe admits that he was “always baffled by the degree of antipathy that French theory could generate. But that moment when four members resigned created a split which was disastrous”.⁷⁸ Certainly, looking back on this now, the split sapped the intellectual energy *Screen* had built up over the decade and made it vulnerable to further attacks from within. The *Screen* editorial board, once a heterogeneous team albeit with a common goal, was now beset by contestation, a development which Baert warns is a crucial part of any form of intellectual positioning which itself is, as we have seen, an on-going achievement, requiring continuous maintenance. But there is a sense, with the *Screen* project, that the editorial split affected some more than others. Peter Wollen, who remained on the editorial board throughout the 1970s, did not appear to engage on any level with the attacks levelled at the use of psychoanalysis in *Screen* while MacCabe now maintains that he “did not have any belief in French theory by the late 1970s”.⁷⁹

Was Lacan wholly to blame? Or was the split symptomatic of a wider disillusionment with the *Screen* project? It can be argued that the disengagement of *Screen* from an overt educationalist rationale had cleaved the project from itself, creating a sense of alienation. *Screen*'s commitment to a programme of theoretical engagement constituted its own form of modernist *écriture* which, as Justus Wieland correctly points out, was “defined against a Sartrean commitment to instrumental language and communicative clarity”.⁸⁰ The sheer depth of *Screen*'s engagement with French theory ensured that it was also vulnerable to further attacks from *within* French theory itself. The most stunning example of this was Paul

⁷⁸ Interview with Colin MacCabe, 09 March 2020.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Wieland, *Happiness By Design*, p. 320.

Willemen's "Notes on Subjectivity: On Reading Edward Branigan's 'Subjectivity under Siege'" (1978) which attacked the *Screen* project for its formalist readings of a cinema text which, echoing the complaints of the earlier editorial board resignations, cut the text off from its ideological social practices. Willemen claims that there is no central structure in the text which just leaves the *Screen* project as a site for a competing clash of interpretations.⁸¹ Willemen's reasoning was dense and operating within the *Screen* spirit as exemplified by Heath and MacCabe, but it also made the journal question its own function: was *Screen* simply operating in a theoretical vacuum of its own creation MacCabe attempted a retort in an article entitled "The discursive and the ideological in film: Notes on the conditions of political intervention" which appeared in autumn 1978.⁸² This article, deliberately left out of all of MacCabe's subsequent essay collections, is a last gasp attempt at validating the *Screen* project. However, as MacCabe admits, "the game was up by then".⁸³ When Stephen Heath insisted that the processes of history and the unconscious created a "necessary simultaneity – like the recto and verso of a piece of paper",⁸⁴ there is an implicit conceding of their theoretical incompatibility: a discursive amalgamation of Althusser's theory of ideology with Lacan's account of the subject was impossible. In the *NLR*, Terry Eagleton declared that the formalism of *Screen* served to evaporate history which meant the "historical specificity of the ideological codes" investigated was nothing more than a "gesture".⁸⁵ Beyond *Screen*, the sociologists Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst were developing their own critique of Althusser, maintaining that if one was to truly follow Althusser's work, it would ultimately result in the

⁸¹ Paul Willemen, "Notes on Subjectivity: On Reading Edward Branigan's 'Subjectivity Under Siege'", *Screen* Volume 19, Issue 1, (Spring 1978), pp. 41-70. It was this singular article, reflected Colin MacCabe in our interview on 09 March 2020, which signified the end of the *Screen* project.

⁸² Colin MacCabe, "The Discursive and the Ideological in Film: Notes on the Conditions of Political Intervention", *Screen*, Volume 19, Issue 4, (Winter 1978), pp. 29-44.

⁸³ Interview with Colin MacCabe, 09 March 2020.

⁸⁴ Stephen Heath, "Anata Mo", *Screen*, Volume 17, Issue 4 (Winter 1976-77), p. 62.

⁸⁵ Terry Eagleton, "Aesthetics and Politics", *NLR* 1/107, January/February 1978, p. 23.

rejection of every facet of Marx's own theories.⁸⁶ Althusser's account of knowledge was denigrated as being "contaminated by empiricism", a crushing denouement for any form of theoretical practice, particularly that of *Screen*. Meanwhile, as we saw in Chapter One, E.P. Thompson also published his own rebuttal to French theory and, in particular Althusser, in 1978: *The Poverty of Theory* criticised Althusser as anti-human, diminishing personal experience to mere consequences of economic relations. In Thompson's terms, French theory was elitist and only an elite academic cadre could engage with the Althusserian concept of reality.

Reading *Screen* during 1978-79, there is a sense that these attacks hugely impacted upon the core group of writers. Laura Mulvey did not write again for the journal until 2004. Stephen Heath ceased writing for *Screen* in 1978; Colin MacCabe reflects now that he "never republished that article [defending the *Screen* project in the light of Willemsen's criticisms] because...Hindess and Hirst had shown that the whole ideological project [of *Screen*] was bananas. I don't mind all the terrible positions I took when *Screen* was active but I am still ashamed of that last article".⁸⁷ In fact, 1978 was somewhat of an *annus horribilis* for the theoretical project of *Screen*. A final denouement came from a less likely source: the Russell Harty show, a light entertainment programme broadcast on the ITV networks every Saturday night and featuring Harty along with writers Janet Street-Porter and Clive James as the resident pithy commentators on current happenings in the media. Recorded on 21 September 1978 and broadcast two days later, the programme featured *Screen* as a topic towards the end,

⁸⁶ Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst, *Mode of Production and Social Formation: An Auto-Critique of Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1977).

⁸⁷ Interview with Colin MacCabe, 09 March 2020.

following segments on astrology and R.D. Laing's soon-to-be-released debut album of anti-psychiatry mantras, *Life Before Death*.⁸⁸ Harty's piece on *Screen* begins:

The [BFI] staff are split into left and right wing factions and the happy-go-lucky left of Marxist intellectuals are winning. Their theory is that the cinema isn't all that good for you unless it hurts a bit. They seem to think that watching films for fun is a sin. One of the most endearing traits is a tendency to talk and write in a form of jargon incomprehensible to ordinary mortals. Here is a sample from a journal called *Screen* which regularly carries these contributions to culture... [A sample piece of *Screen* text scrolls down the *Screen*. It begins: 'The hegemony of the visible without doubt informs the stress laid on the significant? of on-the-spot observation in the production of documentary films...' before fading back to the television studio].⁸⁹

Harty's quoting from *Screen* journal was a preamble, designed to contextualise the brief appearance of Keith Lucas, then-director of the BFI, as a guest on the show. Lucas was ostensibly appearing to defend the BFI's alleged propensity for producing both literature and film which was incomprehensible to the general populace; along with *Screen* journal, another example offered by the television show host was a silent film, also funded by the BFI, centring upon the lives of a Navajo tribe in America.⁹⁰ Lucas was offered scant opportunity

⁸⁸ R.D. Laing, *Life Before Death*, (Charisma Records, 1978). While the record itself is unremarkable, the cover features a terrifying portrait of Laing with his enormous holes replacing his eyes.

⁸⁹ The offending text was written by Annette Kuhn and taken from 'The Camera I: Observations on Documentary', *Screen* Volume 19, Issue 2, (Summer 1978), pp. 71-83.

⁹⁰ A special guest on the show was Anthony Alexander, political columnist for the *Daily Mail*. Alexander interrupted proceedings to express how interested he was in the Navajo film; Lucas's attempts to offer more information on the film were curtly dismissed by Harty.

to defend the institution in the light of Harty's pithy introduction and Clive James's more considered, yet still dismissive, elaboration: "The BFI, like a lot of good, left-wing institutions is peculiarly vulnerable to being radicalised. The radicals never want to take over Henley Regatta, they want to take over something that's already institutionalised. I don't think there's an awful lot left for the avant-garde to say".

While the appearance of a film journal on primetime television may indicate a victory of sorts, it is difficult not to reflect on this footage with a certain degree of pity for *Screen* journal and their funders at the BFI. Dismissed by Harty and James as irrelevant remnants of a failed avant-garde, the journal was wildly out of context amid the light entertainment and jovial bonhomie of Saturday night entertainment. But where was *Screen* journal relevant? Certainly, the BFI itself was uncertain; the journal was under consistent attack from the less theoretical members of the institute, the late director Alan Parker famously announcing that "film needs theory like it needs a scratch on a negative".⁹¹ *Language and Materialism*⁹² (1977), written by *Screen* writers Rosalind Coward and John Ellis and emerging from a west London *Screen* reading group, managed by MacCabe and Brewster, provoked consternation from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and from the writer Jonathan Rée who felt a degree of hostility towards the text, adopting the stuffy tones of an 'Oxford don' in his review: "Their attitude to these Parisian chaps is one of pseudo-erotic infatuation - they have produced not a sober evaluation, but a pastiche - a child's guide to a

⁹¹ Quoted in Robert Lapsley and Kevin Westlake. "Foreword", *Film Theory: An Introduction*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988) pp. vi-viii.

⁹² Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism: Development in Semiology and the Theory*, (London: Routledge, 1977). I am grateful to Claire Pajaczkowska, another attendee, for this information.

pseud's corner".⁹³ Even Paddy Whannel was perhaps only partly joking when he admitted to migraines brought on by the sheer thought of semiotics.⁹⁴

In winter 1979, *Screen* started afresh. A new editorial begins like an obituary but ends like a renewal:

In 1971, *Screen* was relaunched as a quarterly magazine devoted to film culture. It saw its priorities as the constitution of a body of knowledge about film and television as signifying practices. This involved a radical questioning of existing theories and forms of writing about film and the introduction of new approaches and terminologies adequate to the complexity of the problems posed....with this issue, *Screen* begins to inaugurate a process of change in the range of its contents and ambitions which is the logical continuation of the work of the past decade...crucial to the success of this enterprise will be our ability to encourage readers to become writers for the magazine.⁹⁵

As Paul Willemsen had pointed out in the journal, there remained "an unbridgeable gap" in between the "real" readers/authors and the "inscribed ones". "Real readers", he insists, "are subject to history" as they exist in "given social formations" rather than functioning as "mere subjects of a single text". Accordingly, these two types of subject are "not commensurate" yet for the purposes of formalism, "real readers are supposed to coincide

⁹³ Jonathan Rée, "Marxist Modes", *Radical Philosophy* 23, Winter 1979.

⁹⁴ According to documentarian Mike Dibb, "Paddy had high blood pressure and later in life was hospitalized because of a brain haemorrhage. Nevertheless he continued to retain his lovely Scottish sense of humour, and I heard that one day a friend of his came to the hospital and said, 'Paddy, what brought this on?' To which he just looked up and smiled 'Semiology!'" See *Biography*, vol. 41, no. 2, (Spring 2018), p. 349.

⁹⁵ "Editorial", *Screen*, Volume 20, Issue 1, (Spring 1979), p. 7.

with the constructed readers”.⁹⁶ If subjects are, in Althusser’s terms, mere products of interpellation, readers of *Screen* were simply effects of the journal’s own textual construction. The theoretical totality of *Screen* could no longer hold.

Conclusion: It’s All Fucking Bullshit

Reflecting on the *Screen* project now, one is struck by the vitality of the journal’s engagement with French theory, while the tensions and splits illustrate a commonality in the potential for the deployment of French theory to create a critical rupture. But it is important at this juncture to separate the Althusserian project from the French theory project. In many respects, Althusser was outed by Hirst and Hindess for *not* being sufficiently Althusserian; but French theory was now a fugitive while the framework for its application, conceptualised by *Screen*’s efforts, was in place. Despite the attacks of the mid-to-late 1970s, this period was crucial in witnessing the English translation of key texts: Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*⁹⁷ and *Writing and Difference*, both originally appearing in 1967, arrived in an English translation in 1974⁹⁸ and 1978, respectively. Barthes’s *S/Z* (1970) was published in English in 1974, *The Pleasure of the Text* followed in 1975, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* in 1976 and *Image-Music-Text*, a collection of essays edited by Stephen Heath landed in 1977.⁹⁸ Lacan’s *Écrits*, as we have seen, was also translated with selections published in English in 1977 while Michel Foucault, whose work had arrived in England through the anti-psychiatry boom earlier in the decade, had *Discipline and Punish* and the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* appear between

⁹⁶ Willemsen, “Notes on Subjectivity: On Reading Edward Branigan’s ‘Subjectivity Under Siege’”, pp. 40-43.

⁹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

⁹⁸ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1974); *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1975); *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller, (New York: Hill & Wang, 1975); *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, (London: Fontana, 1977). For more on Barthes in translation, see Lucile Dumont, “The Moving Frontiers of Intellectual Work: The Importation and Early Reception of Roland Barthes’ Work in the United States (1960s-1980s)”, *Sociologica*, II Mulino, (2017), doi.10.2383/86984.

1977 and 1979.⁹⁹ This is a remarkable publishing boom as the British publishing market was flooded with these French theory texts, many appearing out of order with their original publication, and creating a form of theoretical delirium. Furthermore, I would argue that it was Althusserianism, and the *Screen* project, which cemented the identification between structuralist and post-structuralist theory and radical cultural politics, securing a left-ist reading audience for the continuing import into Britain of French theory texts.

But *Screen* also demonstrates the dangers of unproven assertions when importing theories from one context to another: the unstated acknowledgment that the work of an untranslated Francophone psychoanalyst ought to be central to the concerns of a journal devoted to film education in Britain was bound to create undue pressures, particularly amongst those who simply did not have the time or the patience to develop the appropriate vocabulary and grammar to understand Lacan's work, let alone to deploy his concepts within a classroom environment. Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that the *Screen*-era represents, in some respects, a "high-point" of French theory in that the journal allowed a legitimised space for myriad appropriations of his work, along with that of Althusser, but also a "low-point" of French theory in Britain in that the imported works were being used in a manner which was almost symbolically violent, and certainly of little import to a public beyond the immediate confines of the *Screen* journal cadre. It is also notable that many of the key figures associated with Lacan at the time – Colin MacCabe, Laura Mulvey – were keen to distance themselves from his work when I spoke to them for this thesis while others, particularly Alan Lovell,

⁹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, New York: Random House, 1977); *History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, (London: Allen Lane, 1979). Foucault's trajectory within Britain is worthy of a separate full-length study, as he emerges through his links with the anti-psychiatry scene of the 1960s. See Colin Gordon, "Foucault in Britain" in *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government*, Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, Nikolas Rose eds, (London & Chicago: UCL & Chicago University Press, 1997).

doubled down on their denigration of Lacan's work, dismissing him and Althusser as "Stalinist" figures.¹⁰⁰

Despite Alan Lovell's warnings, the fact that *Screen* is now an academic journal reflects what is perhaps the primary function of its work: the academisation of not just film but of French theory. Within Britain, *Screen* offered a consistent outlet for creative transpositions of Althusser, Lacan, and, to a lesser extent, Barthes and Metz. Philip Rosen also asserts that "the ambitions and the approaches articulated in the journal, along with its internal contradictions (as well as externally controversial aspects), were instrumental in shaping debates defining a rapidly expanding film studies".¹⁰¹ While this is certainly true, I would extend the acknowledgement of *Screen*'s reach far beyond mere film studies and across the development of feminist studies, both inside and outside the academy, through the continued circulation and influence of Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure..." essay and the embedding of terms such as the "male gaze" into our contemporary cultural parlance. Furthermore, the dynamic activities of *Screen* in its collaborations with Edinburgh Film Festival also pointed the way forward for a dissemination of French theory through *Screenings*, talks, and other publications – there was an intellectual generosity attached to *Screen*'s engagement with French theory which is overlooked somewhat.¹⁰²

Many of those who wrote passionately of Althusserian French theory in *Screen* do not subscribe to this view today. "[French theory] is all fucking bullshit", boomed Colin MacCabe during our interview in 2020.¹⁰³ But the journal remains an extraordinary sourcebook of

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Alan Lovell, 12 January 2021.

¹⁰¹ Rosen, "Screen and 1970s Film Theory", p. 292.

¹⁰² See Michèle Lamont and Marsha Witten, "Surveying The Continental Drift: The Diffusion Of French Social And Literary Theory In The United States" for a full account of the necessity of intellectual collaboration in terms of cultural legitimacy. *French Politics and Society*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (July 1988), pp. 17-23.

¹⁰³ Interview with Colin MacCabe, 09 March 2020.

theoretical engagement. One can conclude that the lasting effect of *Screen*'s engagement with French theory is to leave us with a historic reminder of the disruptive potential of travelling theories but also as a vivid archive, rich with potential, disputation and radical energy and which has arguably yet to be fully unravelled.

Chapter Four – Institute of Contemporary Arts: 1972 – 1973



Introduction: Brentrance

Up to this point, we have largely been concerned with the trajectory of French theory in Britain, specifically that of Althusser and Lacan, through sites of reception which largely focused upon the textual properties of French theorists and their work. Their publications were imported and transposed through a series of intellectual interventions and processes of selection, labelling and classification in order to enforce a position antithetical to existing

cultural norms. For the final two chapters of this thesis, I would like to turn to two different examples of French theory's reception and dissemination in Britain during the 1970s and early 1980s, both of which point towards a more contemporaneous view of French theory in Britain. We will begin with an in-depth analysis of the work undertaken by the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, and specifically a programme of events entitled the "French programme" which occurred at the venue during March 1973.

By the early 1970s, there appears to be little evidence of the *NLR* or BFI inviting Althusser, Barthes, Lacan and their contemporaries to London to address their acolytes across the channel.¹ The intellectual interventions staged by Perry Anderson, Peter Wollen et al were purely at a medial level; as many of the Francophone works cited by the *NLR* and *Screen* were not yet translated into English, a certain boundary existed around the source theorists and source texts. Therefore the theorists themselves were unfamiliar to British audiences, as they were recognisable only as referents within the texts produced by the *NLR* and BFI Education Department. This ensured that the French theorists had little control over how they were being perceived in Britain during this period and, aside from occasional correspondence between Ben Brewster and Louis Althusser in the *NLR*, they had little opportunity to exert any control over these cross-channel intellectual exchanges.²

Nevertheless, the early 1970s were a crucial time for fledgling interactions between Britain and Western Europe. In 1961, Britain had made its first application to join the fledgling

¹ Roland Barthes did attend a seminar chaired by Frank Kermode at UCL in the early 1970s. See Frank Kermode, *Essays on Fiction: 1971-82* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983). Kermode later regretted his role in legitimising theory in the academy, as he admitted to Sue Lawley in his *Desert Island Discs* appearance on 12 September 1997, available to listen here: <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0094455>>, [accessed 10 June 2021]. Louis Althusser did also visit the *NLR* offices in the summer of 1977. See Perry Anderson, "An Afternoon with Althusser", *NLR*, 2/113, Sep/Oct 2018.

² See Louis Althusser, "A Letter to the Translator", *For Marx*, pp. 257-8. There is no evidence of Jacques Lacan interacting with the BFI Education Department or *Screen* journal.

European Economic Community, an application which was vetoed by the French in 1963 and again in 1967. It was only in 1969 that Britain was given the green light to embark on negotiations for membership which was ultimately granted with an entry date of 01 January 1973.³ “Britain passed peacefully into Europe at midnight last night without any special celebrations”, announced a contemporary report in *The Guardian*. “It was difficult to tell that anything of importance had occurred, and a date which will be entered in the history books as long as histories of Britain are written, was taken by most people as a matter of course”.⁴ The cultural implications of Britain’s accession to the EEC was marked by “Fanfare for Europe”, an eleven-day event featuring musical acts as diverse as the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Irish folk trailblazers Planxty, an exhibition entitled “Treasures from the European Community” at the Victoria and Albert Museum and an exhibition of European candy, ranging from marzipan salami sandwiches from Italy to chocolate turtles from Denmark, magnificently arranged at the Whitechapel Gallery in London. The most successful event, according to the *New York Times*, was the Hayward Gallery’s show of paintings by the great French impressionists while further initiatives included a set of commemorative stamps commissioned by the Royal Mail to honour the cultural flow between Britain and Europe.⁵ This period was also a fruitful time for cultural programmers working at an institutional level, certainly within London, as funds were made available to foster positive relationships between Britain and its cultural counterparts in Europe. And it was one of these initiatives, the French Programme, occurring throughout March 1973, which provided an ideal opportunity for some of the figures associated with French theory to appear in Britain under a

³ Amid the innumerable accounts of Britain’s entry into the EEC, Andy Beckett’s *When The Lights Went Out: Britain in the Seventies* (London: Faber, 2010) remains the most lucid.

⁴ David McKie and Dennis Barket, “We’re In But Without The Fireworks”, *the Guardian*, London 01 January 1973, p.1.

⁵ Richard Eder, “Britain Salutes Market in ‘Fanfare for Europe’”, *The New York Times*, 07 January 1973, p. 65.

singular gathering at a prestigious, progressive arts venue in London: the Institute of Contemporary Arts.

Why is the ICA's French programme in 1973 important for our study? And what does it tell us about French theory in the para-academic space of the contemporary art gallery? Firstly, this chapter hugely benefits from research in the ICA Archive held at Tate Britain. As we will see, the archive holds a comprehensive array of planning documents relevant to the event's organisation, none of which has been cited in any histories of the ICA. This archive provides us with a detailed exposition of the French programme's genesis from an idea to a fully-executed reality. My aim here, therefore, is to situate this event, through an in-depth analysis of its organisation, within the import of French theoretical texts occurring concurrently through the work of the *NLR* and *Screen* journal. In this respect, the chapter places the work of the Institute of Contemporary Arts, and particularly that of its visionary director of talks, Jonathan Benthall, as the key "agent" in demonstrating a new and exciting format for the legitimisation of intellectual work: through the format of a live conversation within the contemporary art gallery, often using a room otherwise used for film screenings. While this format is nowadays standard within cultural institutions, evidence within the ICA Archive at the Tate Gallery indicates Benthall's aim to structure the French programme within such a format was innovative at the time. This also allows us to view the French programme as laying the groundwork for the immensely popular series of talks occurring at the ICA during the following decade, under the curation of Lisa Appignanesi, which saw Derrida, Lyotard, and many more, regularly speaking to a full-house at the venue. Furthermore, I argue that while the basis for importing French theory into left-cultural networks in Britain was already founded by the *NLR* and BFI, the work of the ICA during the early 1970s continued this process of import, offering a different cultural space for travelling theories to take root.

Curiously, the French programme warrants a mere footnote in the few written histories of the ICA, and is not covered across any cultural histories of the 1970s.⁶ *50 Years of the ICA* (1998), a pamphlet produced to celebrate the institution's quinquagenarian year of operation, makes special note of the "German programme" which happened in 1974 but offers scant information on the French programme. The month-long event is completely absent from any other existing histories of British culture, or counter-culture, in the 1970s and it does not merit a mention in any existing biographies of the speakers.⁷ This is an oversight I intend to correct as a fresh analysis of this programme, and its archive, provides us with an invaluable opportunity to witness French theory in Britain *in statu nascendi* — productively undisciplined yet bearing all the hallmarks of the controversy which was to be a defining feature of its movement through the British cultural circuit. Significantly, the archival research reveals a programme which is deeply heterogeneous, an aspect which I seek to emphasise here in order to extend the previous chapter's analysis of the institutional journey of French theory in Britain.

The work of Pierre Bourdieu is also crucial for this chapter as I situate the endeavour of the ICA's French programme within Bourdieu's notion of *allodoxia* which, I contend, is a defining feature of French theory's journey in Britain. Bourdieu defines *allodoxia* as the tension which emerges from, on the one hand, the participation of intellectuals in a public sphere of transnational cultural exchange, while, on the other hand, experiencing the pull of

⁶ The primary history of exhibitions at the ICA, *ICA London 1946-1968*, edited by Anne Massey (London: ICA, 2014), finishes in 1968. Curiously, there is no further book length work on the rich history of this institution.

⁷ For example, Peter Salmon's biography of Derrida, *An Event, Biography*, (London: Verso, 2020); François Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

the territorialised, nationalistic contexts in which the uprooted intellectuals are encouraged to articulate their professional beliefs.⁸ Therefore, an analysis of the French programme at the ICA allows us to shift our attention to the uncertainties or misrecognitions that can arise in the uprooting of theory from one national framework of culture and opinion to another, entirely separate, national and cultural sphere. But this chapter's turn towards the journey of French theory on a curatorial level, within a field separate to the networks of the *NLR* and *BFI*, also allows us to seek a deeper history of these theories, traversing interdisciplinary terrains of cultural production and practice, a frontier upon which the French programme is uniquely situated. Furthermore, I feel it important to link the intellectual work undertaken by the *NLR* and *BFI* with the concurrent work at the ICA, and this thesis is unique in linking these three cultural institutions within, as Baert would put it, the "moment" of French theory.

The heterogeneity of French theory in Britain was fed from sources as diverse as Marxism, psychoanalysis and semiotics. This disciplinary errancy and eclecticism was emphasised in the framework for the French programme's presentation: its planning provides us with an insight into the difficulties afforded by the presentation of Francophone theories in a British institutional context. While the *BFI* Education Seminars did offer an intellectual intervention in the form of the seminar papers deploying aspects of French theory as a methodology, this operated within the wider rubric of the serious study of film. However, the French programme works within the explicit use of "Frenchness", using the national term as a form of label or brand. This form of positioning, as Baert points out, facilitates the dissemination of ideas, involving the agent – in this case, Jonathan Benthall, but also the ICA as the institution were largely in support of his endeavours – and the "positioned party", which is

⁸ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), p. 190; see also Pierre Bourdieu, "Passport To Duke", (1997) *Metaphilosophy* 28 (4): 449 - 55; also Andrew John Miller, "Pierre Bourdieu and the Perils of Allodoxia: Nationalism, Globalism and the Geopolitics of Intellectual Exchange", (2003) *Cultural Studies*, 17: 3/4, pp. 553-571.

the array of French intellectuals travelling to the ICA to speak about their work in person.⁹ Thus our analysis of the French programme archive reveals the concept as an ambitious, amorphous event which demonstrates a desire to bypass the mediatory processes of travelling theories and present French theorists and theories in an unmediated format: out of context, speaking in a foreign language in a foreign institution.

The chapter begins by describing the work of the Institute of Contemporary Art and demonstrating how it, too, was fertile terrain for French theory albeit in a different fashion to the BFI Education Department. My goal here is to show how the French programme serves as a bridge between the previous chapters and the journey of French theory in Britain from the late 1970s onwards: the ambitious presentation of French theory directly connects the work of these French intellectuals with a British public, bringing them into dialogue with one another in a hitherto unheralded fashion.

Cultural Modernism at the ICA

By the early 1970s, the Institute of Contemporary Arts was situated on The Mall, just a short walk from the intellectual strongholds of the British Film Institute and *NLR* offices in central London, having previously occupied a smaller space on Dover Street in nearby Piccadilly Circus. The current building on the Mall was purpose-built in 1968 while the institution was under the directorship of Michael Kustow, whom we last saw writing for the *NLR* in 1961, offering a derisory account of the British theatre scene in comparison to its far more lively and intellectually engaged French counterpart.¹⁰ The ICA itself had significant roots in cross-

⁹ Baert, "Positioning Theory and Intellectual Interventions", p. 312.

¹⁰ Kustow had spent the intervening years working in Paris for Roger Planchon's Theatre de la Cité, the very same theatre group he had written about for the *NLR* in 1961.

channel artistic developments; according to co-founder Roland Penrose, the first ICA event, in theory if not *in situ*, was the *International Surrealist Exhibition* at New Burlington Galleries in 1936.¹¹ Penrose's co-founders of the ICA were also paragons of modernism: the poet and art critic Sir Herbert Read and E.L.T. Mesens, a Belgian surrealist and close friend of René Magritte. The institution's practical existence was announced through a public letter to *The Times* from Read on 26 June 1947 which presented the aims of the Institute and an address to send for further details.¹² Over three hundred requests ensued, bolstering the notoriety of the institute's first exhibition: *Forty Years of Modern Art: 1907 - 1947*, a celebration of European modernism with a particular focus upon French Surrealism, which was held at George Hollerin's Academy Hall in Oxford Street from February through March 1948.¹³ The ICA quickly developed a reputation for promoting European Modernism; echoing Paddy Whannel's vanguardist visions for the BFI Education Department, Read hailed the institution as bringing into existence "the arts of the future...we would rather be thought of as a laboratory rather than as a museum...where a new vision, a new consciousness is being evolved".¹⁴

France and French culture played an essential part in the ICA's practice of contemporary vision. In August 1959, the ICA presented a programme entitled *Place* co-produced by Ralph Rumney, the sole English signatory of the First Situationist Manifesto, and which developed ideas formulated with the concurrent Situationist movement in Paris; later in the 1960s, the ICA built its own cinema space which exhibited the best of the *nouvelle vague* emerging from contemporary France, including a members-only screening of Godard's controversial

¹¹ Anne Massey, *The Independent Group* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 23.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Massey, *The Independent Group*, p. 26.

¹⁴ Massey, *The Independent Group*, p. 28.

film *Week-End* which had been banned by the BBFC in 1968.¹⁵ As the 1960s gave way to the following decade, the ICA's reputation as a pioneering space for transnational artistic interventions was secure, particularly through the success of Jasia Reichardt's *Cybernetic Serendipity*,¹⁶ a staggeringly successful exhibition of computer art which generated enormous international coverage and which, according to a contemporary report in *Time* magazine, attracted 10,000 visitors.¹⁷

Certainly, this history of curated work indicates that the ICA was a welcoming space for French theory albeit in a very different fashion to the BFI Education Department. The ICA was historically open to continental, particularly Francophone, ideas and benefitted from a healthy relationship with the Arts Council. But this was, fundamentally, a different field, that of contemporary art — indeed, Herbert Read had insisted upon the use of the term “contemporary” as a replacement for “modern” in order to differentiate the ICA from its progenitor MOMA — one whose function was not as a point of origin for intellectual work, but instead one where intellectual work was received and exhibited.¹⁸ The ICA was a site of consecration and an institution which found it more worthwhile to look at forms of synthesis between objects rather than merely looking at the objects themselves and it is into this institutional cleavage which I wish to situate the French programme and its heterogenous arrangement of Francophone intellectuals.

¹⁵ Massey, *The Independent Group*, p. 31.

¹⁶ Reichardt spoke about the event on *Late Night Line Up*, a contemporary BBC 2 discussion show. The clip can be viewed here: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8TJx8n9UsA>> [accessed 29 October 2020]. A special edition of *Studio International* was entirely dedicated to the exhibition, edited by Reichardt: ‘Cybernetic Serendipity/The Computer and the Arts; a Studio international special issue’. *Studio International*. (London: The Studio Trust, 1968).

¹⁷ “Cybernetic Serendipity”, *TIME*, 06 October 1968.

¹⁸ See Ben Cranfield, “Not Another Museum: the Search for Contemporary Connection”, *Journal of Visual Culture* (2013) Vol 12(2), pp. 313–331.

Nevertheless there was little crossover between the ICA's pioneering work and that of the BFI and *Screen* journal. No partnerships appear to have existed between the two institutions as both appeared to operate within quite separate intellectual circles.¹⁹ By 1972, Michael Kustow had left the ICA, replaced as director by Peter Cook, the architect and co-founder of Archigram, while Jonathan Benthall, a committed Francophile, took more of a leading role in programming the talks series at the institution. Benthall recalls "there was [in the early 1970's] a short tradition of bringing people over to quite serious lectures":²⁰ Jasia Reichardt's "Linguistics At Large" programme from 1971 prompted a publication by Paladin of the proceedings while "The Body as a Medium of Expression", co-curated by Benthall and Ted Polhemus, warranted not just a further book publication but an entire segment dedicated to the event by the BBC Television arts show *Omnibus*.²¹ Reflecting on the event in 2017, Benthall recalled the organisation of French programme as benefitting from teamwork, an approach which we know from Baert enhances the effectiveness of intellectual positioning.²² In this respect, credits his co-organiser, Jean-Marie Benoist, as the singularly most influential figure on the programme. Benoist was able to bring a unique form of legitimacy to the programme as he was working as a cultural attaché for the French Embassy in London and able to provide Benthall with immediate access to the majority of artists, writers and philosophers whom he wished to appear at the programme, along with the relevant governmental authorities.²³ Therefore, the institutional and social conditions under which the

¹⁹ This point was made by Stephen Bann in our interview in Canterbury on 03 March 2020.

²⁰ Interview with Jonathan Benthall, 01 February 2017.

²¹ *Linguistics at Large*, ed. Noel Minnis, (London: Paladin, 1971); Jonathan Benthall and Ted Polhemus, *The Body as a Means of Expression: Essays Based on a Course of Lectures Given at the Institute of Contemporary Arts*, (London, Allen Lane, 1975); *Omnibus File: The Body as a Medium of Expression*, BBC One London, tx. 8 October 1972.

²² Baert, "Positioning theory and intellectual interventions", p. 316.

²³ According to Benthall. Benoist left London in the mid-1970s and changed his allegiances entirely, turning to the right and declaring his support for Margaret Thatcher, exemplified by his penning of a glowing interview with Thatcher in *Paris Match* in the late 1980s which Benthall described as "obsequious". Benoist died of cancer aged 48 in 1990. Interview with Jonathan Benthall, 01 February 2017. Stephen Bann was more generous in his recollections of Benoist, remembering him as "a truly brilliant character, as it happens descending on his mother's side from Jules Guesde, a radical journalist who espoused Marxism but got into a dispute with Marx.

French programme occurred at the ICA were largely geared towards supporting an event which traversed the fields of philosophy, literature, and the social sciences, as the ICA was uniquely positioned within the “social life of ideas” in 1970s London,²⁴ but one which was also able to strategically position itself in a politically acceptable fashion, through Benoist’s habitus. This combination ensured the French programme had a unique set of features – official political approval and counter-cultural appeal – which marks it out from our previous sites of reception for French theory in Britain.

The ICA Archive

Within the archives of the ICA at Tate Britain are decades of administrative records relating to the institution’s curatorial projects and one of these boxes is labelled “French programme” and contains reams of correspondence between the ICA and many of the key figures for this thesis including Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault. The earliest document in the French programme folder is a mimeographed letter dated 21 January 1972 from Benthall to members of the ICA council. Benthall’s letter proposes an “embryonic” idea for a European programme and credits the publisher George Weidenfeld with the original idea. Breaking down the concept into plans for action, Benthall suggests that “the emphasis is on relationships between Britain and each country — e.g. problem of cultural influence, mismatch etc. not merely promotion of French or German culture” and recommends covering “the whole cultural field, including science, social sciences and philosophy as well as art, music and literature” while insisting that “we confine ourselves to the contemporary scene

Jean-Marie had published in 1970 a very brave and timely book, *Marx est mort*, which questioned the rigid orthodoxy of the French Communist party - rather as the *Tel Quel* group were questioning it with their tactical Maoism. When Jean-Marie returned to Paris, he became Levi-Strauss's deputy at the Collège de France”. Email interview with Stephen Bann, 05 March 2021.

²⁴ See Santoro and Sapiro “On the Social Life of Ideas and the Persistence of the Author in the Social and Human Sciences. A presentation of the Symposium”, *Sociologica* (2017) doi: 10.2383/86980.

and living practitioners” and beginning with a French programme as the ICA has “at least two fluent French speakers and excellent contacts with the French cultural attachés in London”. The letter ends with a suggestion of a meeting attended by representatives of the ICA, the National Book League, the French Embassy and two recommended advisers: Stephen Bann and Peter Wollen.²⁵

By March, Benthall was writing again, this time to Geoffrey Rippon, the foreign secretary. Two letters are mentioned; the first, dated 01 March 1972, is not recorded in the archive but appears to have had contained a request for £20,000 from the government for what was now going to be solely a French programme. The second letter, dated 10 March 1972, offers some clarification for Rippon on the proposed programme. Benthall announces that “among the French people to be invited will certainly be a number of representatives of the current ‘structuralism’ movement in France, which has a small body of enthusiastic supporters in this country, as well as some outspoken critics”. Further ideas mooted include investigations as to how certain “English” writers, namely “Lewis Carroll, James Joyce, and Lawrence Sterne [sic]²⁶ have found special favour in France” while, even more ambitiously, Benthall outlines

²⁵ Stephen Bann, in an email interview on 08 September 2020, recalled his involvement with the French programme: “I was then planning an issue of *Twentieth Century Studies* [a University of Canterbury publication, edited by Bann which focused upon continental theory] on the theme which turned out as ‘The Boundaries of the Humanities’, and was published later in 1973. I notice that Jean-Marie Benoist, the cultural attaché at the French Embassy who was on our Editorial Board and of course helped Jonathan a lot, was at one point going to contribute an essay on ‘Humanities and Sciences Humaines’, though this did not materialise. What did however appear in the number of TCS was a symposium on interdisciplinary approaches for which I commissioned short articles from colleagues at the ‘New’ Universities’. So I included a piece by Thomas Elsaesser (then at UEA and of course editor of *Monogram*). I seem to have several copies of a typescript by Thomas entitled ‘Film and the Novel: Reality and Realism of the Cinema’, which must have been sent to me at this time. Part of it appears to have been adapted as his contribution”.

There is no further mention of Peter Wollen in the planning documents for the French programme. When I asked Jonathan Benthall about this over email on 09 September 2020, he replied: “I was on friendly terms with Peter Wollen though unfortunately they came to an end after he accepted an advance from Fontana/Collins - on the basis of an impressive synopsis – to write a book on film for a very short-lived series of paperbacks called ‘The Technosphere’, which I was editing (it included Raymond Williams’s influential book on television). He did no work on the book, wrote another one for some other publisher, and made it pretty clear that he had no intention of honouring the agreement”.

²⁶ Joyce and Sterne were Irish.

a proposal to convert part of the ICA into a “Parisian café where ‘café-theatre’, such as that of Romain Buteille, will be performed. The plans close with a promise that the ‘French traditions of gastronomy, high fashion and popular song will also be covered’”. A mere twelve days later, a brief memo from Rippon appears: “I am pleased to inform you that the Government are willing to contribute £10,000 towards the cost of this occasion through an increase in 1972/73 in the grant which the Institute receives from the Arts Council”, followed by a promise to support similar transnational endeavours over the subsequent three years.²⁷

Benthall’s securing of the funds was controversial for two reasons: firstly, because, in effect, he bypassed the ICA’s primary funding body, the Arts Council, entirely and went straight to the government to successfully secure this funding; secondly, Benthall also received the full, unwavering support of the British government for his initiative which allowed him *carte blanche* in curating the season. However, this also left him open to criticism from potential participants for taking the political pound. This was an issue Benthall remarked upon when we spoke in 2016; he felt certain artists were uneasy with the programme’s cosy relationship with government funding yet he insisted that there was no pressure from any government source regarding the contents of the programme.²⁸ Certainly, Benthall’s correspondence with the council and government demonstrates a form of cautious intellectual positioning; while he conforms to Baert’s insistence that positioning allows for a location of the work “within a broader tradition, linking it to important figures in the field”, it is important to note that Benthall’s immediate audience – the ICA Council – were unlikely to be significantly familiar with the structuralist movement.²⁹ By positioning structuralism as merely part of a wider proposed programme of classic Francophone imports – gastronomy, café-theatre et al –

²⁷ ICA, “French programme — organisational papers”, TGA 955/12/2/1, London: Tate Gallery Archive.

²⁸ Interview with Jonathan Benthall, 01 February 2017.

²⁹ This notion of an audience unfamiliar with French theory is further expanded upon in the final chapter on Scritti Politti’s positioning within the music press.

Benthall ensured he encountered minimal objection to the associated import of Derrida and Foucault.

While it is true that not all of the ideas in Benthall's proposal operate within the seriousness of structuralist and post-structuralist thought — one idea, thankfully not realised, revolves around commissioning Peter Sellers and Jacques Tati to perform a skit as a comedy double-act playing a Frenchman and Englishman respectively — a lengthy section entitled “Lectures, discussions and talks”, which appears as part of a planning document faxed to the ICA Council on 22 May 1972, demonstrates Benthall's heterogenous approach to presenting French culture in Britain:

First, a list of very distinguished and influential men whom we should do our best to get:

Claude Lévi-Strauss – anthropologist

Jacques Lacan – psychoanalytical theorist

Michel Foucault – epistemologist

Roland Barthes – semiologist

Then a list of slightly less famous but very interesting figures (most of them very controversial):

Paul Ricoeur – philosopher

Gilles Deleuze – author of the fashionable book of the hour '*L'Anti Oedipe - Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*'

Julia Kristeva – beautiful Bulgarian semiologist - has been to the ICA recently – queen for the day in highbrow French scene

Phillipe Sollers – semiologist, Kristeva’s husband

Althusser – political philosopher

Jacques Derrida – philosopher³⁰

While Benthall’s vision, on paper, demonstrates a vanguardist array of French intellectuals, it also provides us with a unique grouping of intellectuals, all of whom could be considered part of the French theory corpus. In effect, Benthall’s document is, to use Bourdieu’s term, “a hit parade” of French theory in Britain during the early 1970s.³¹ Benthall did not propose a model for audiences to become acquainted with such a diverse array of theories and theorists other than presenting them under the rubric of being both “French” and “controversial”, harking back to the idea of France as a site of *illicitness*, as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, and also to *Screen* journal’s unproven assertions of Jacques Lacan as a vital methodological source for film education in Britain. The fact that a certain privilege was accorded to those who are controversial indicates a keenness to attract a certain degree of media attention or notoriety to these visits.³² This also transfers to the curatorial field and, by proxy, French theory, as it encourages the ICA Council, and therefore the ICA audience to accept this verdict of French theory as having a merit based upon its supposedly illicit nature, an effect which is in play throughout its movements in Britain, a form of “consecration through contagion”.³³

³⁰ “Report on Visit to Paris”, Memo from Jonathan Benthall to [ICA] Council, 22 May 1972, ICA, “French programme — organisational papers”, TGA 955/12/2/1. Scribbled next to Althusser’s name are two words — “won’t come”.

³¹ Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, p. 257.

³² Earlier in the document, Benthall also expresses a desire to hold “a confrontation between British and French [feminist] militantes [which] would probably be a success”. “Report on Visit to Paris”, Memo from Jonathan Benthall to [ICA] Council, 22 May 1972, ICA, “French programme — organisational papers”, TGA 955/12/2/1.

³³ Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, p. 258.

The correspondence in the archive also allows us to witness first hand as to how the French theorists responded to their proposed appearance in London. Many are positive in their responses, particularly Jacques Derrida, who responds with great enthusiasm to Benthall's written request, suggesting that he prefers the idea of a "prepared discussion...as a 'public conference' gives rise to poorer exchanges."³⁴ In a follow-up letter, Benthall suggests to Derrida that he speak on the theme of "speech and writing" while lamenting that the ICA audience, "like the majority of English people", remains oblivious to other subjects, such as phenomenology.³⁵ The archive also reveals an invitation from Benthall to Roland Barthes, to take part in a discussion with George Steiner with a suggested theme of "Can there be a science of reading?"³⁶ Despite being offered a fee of £50, along with air fare and hotel expenses, Barthes cordially turns down the offer due to prior engagements in Italy.³⁷ Meanwhile, the conceptual artist Daniel Buren is livid at the ICA's financial offer and refusal to commission him to create a new artwork specifically for the programme.³⁸

But what does this somewhat scattershot approach to the organisation of the event tell us? Benthall's planning documents reveal a lack of coherent theoretical framework, one that is not prescriptive, unlike *Screen*, and less hierarchical in terms of the order in which each speaker was to be presented. The yield of this allodoxic approach to the French programme

³⁴ Letter, Jacques Derrida to Jonathan Benthall, undated, ICA, "French programme — organisational papers", TGA 955/12/2/1, London: Tate Gallery Archive. [All translations are my own].

³⁵ Letter, Jonathan Benthall to Jacques Derrida, 17 November 1972, ICA, "French programme – organisational papers", TGA 955/12/2/1.

³⁶ Letter, Jonathan Benthall to Roland Barthes, 25 September 1972, "French programme – organisational papers", TGA 955/12/2/1.

³⁷ Letter, Roland Barthes, to Jonathan Benthall, 26 September 1972, "French programme – organisational papers", TGA 955/12/2/1. The swiftness of Barthes's response suggests the letters were faxed to and from Paris.

³⁸ Buren's letters are particularly vicious in tone and he appears to have approached Lindy Dufferin, the Guinness heir and influential member of the ICA Council, to express his anger at the ICA's refusal to commission his work. His final letter, dated 26 December 1972, signs off with "I will therefore leave your demonstration to those people who, no doubt, will have no shame to play such a game [with the French government, who were supporting the initiative]". Letter, Daniel Buren to Jonathan Benthall, "French programme – organisational papers", TGA 955/12/2/1.

was to generate a *mélange* of competing theories propped up by a vision of France as theoretically errant and eclectic. As Cusset points out, this approach promulgates a “dynamic, dialogic, and allographic connection, in which an author’s work is evoked while its difference is still kept in view, and which, beyond the truncated uses and self-interested simplifications of theory, enriches the interpretation applied to French thinkers”.³⁹ But for an audience relatively unfamiliar with the majority of these topics and speakers, it could easily result in confusion and misrecognition. This danger is elaborated by Foucault himself in his essay “What is an author?”, translated in *Screen* later that decade, when he states that the most nimble of readers are able to “group together a certain number of texts” with a view to establishing a relationship between the texts, thereby entering a realm of transdiscursiveness where the original positions and empirical existences vanish in favour of the flexibility and mobility of the name.⁴⁰ The ICA’s French programme, therefore, operates within this slippery rubric and provides a template for French theory’s trajectory in Britain to operate within this wider sense of “atmospheric connection” between texts, and to which we will return in the final chapter.

The French Programme

The ICA’s French Programme was launched on 01 March 1973 at the institute by George Steiner, who spoke briefly before a party in the presence of the French ambassador. Attendees were provided a special edition of *ICASM*, the ICA’s in-house monthly publication, which doubled as a 13-page colour supplement for the French programme.⁴¹ The cover design was simple: blue and red text on a white background; the arrangement

³⁹ Cusset. *French Theory*, p. 219.

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, “What Is An Author?”, *Screen*, Volume 20, Issue 1, (Spring 1979), pp. 13–34.

⁴¹ *ICASM: French programme* (London: ICA, 1973). My copy was provided by Jonathan Benthall; no other copies appear to exist in the ICA Archive.

resembled a rounded, bearded face with “Visual Arts, Theatre, Literature” as the top banners with “Human Sciences. Structuralism” on the bottom. The first section incorporates an introduction from Benthall who sets out the potential for productivity between the traditions of “Anglo-Saxon empiricism and commonsense” and “French verbosity and obscuritanism”. Each event is denoted with either a British or French flag denoting the language of the event but non-Francophone audience members are assured that a “summary of what has been said will always follow in English”.

Benthall’s introduction is followed by a long piece entitled “The Loom of Language”, a survey of contemporary French linguistics and thought written by Jean-Marie Benoist who offers a more expansive vision for the initiative:

The true role of this French programme should be more to inform than to provide a competition in narrowly defined nationalistic terms. It is to show that...there is a pleasure of language, a lust for language, which goes with an inquisitiveness for finding new relationships, new insights and transgressions: a general translation from one discipline to another, the venture of metaphor and symbol. Literary criticism with Barthes, the history of ideas with Foucault, philosophy with Derrida, cinema with Marguerite Duras, psychoanalysis with Lacan and [André] Green — these are inventing another continent for thought, the deciphering of symbols, the questioning of signs.⁴²

⁴² Jean-Marie Benoist, “The Loom of Language”, *ICASM: French Programme*, p. 3. Tantalisingly, Benoist is also listed in the programme as offering a lecture in English on Marvell and Donne, “from the viewpoint of a structuralist”, at the National Poetry Centre in Earls Court.

Benoist also marks the move from structuralism to post-structuralism when he closes off by announcing that “Structuralism is now under review”, and highlighting “Derrida and Deleuze” as the primary figures in “denouncing certain excesses which have hidden themselves under cover of a degenerate systematized structuralism”, a questioning which “accompanies a radical political attitude”. Each of the events for the French programme are then divided amongst five headings: Visual Arts, Theatre, Poetry, Urban Space and Lectures, the latter of which is further divided into sections detailing visual arts, environment, anthropology, literature. The talks by Derrida, Todorov and Steiner, Raymond Aron and Ernst Gellner, Rosamond Bernier and Jean-François Revel are not classified under any heading. The programme concludes with a page detailing the auxiliary events at the Institut français, including a talk by Deleuze and Guattari on psychoanalysis followed by a brief interview with then-ICA director Peter Cook on the recent expansion of the building’s premises at the Mall.⁴³

The allodoxic nature of both the programming of the event, and the printed programme itself, proved problematic for Benthall and the ICA. First, the written introduction to the booklet accompanying the French Programme included the following sentence: “The French intellectual style makes many things inaccessible and even sometimes repugnant to those of us who were brought up in the Anglo-Saxon tradition of empiricism and common sense. Often our complaints are surely justified, when French verbosity and obscurantism run to seed; and French chauvinism can be as irritating as English insularity”. On reading this, Michel Foucault was incensed as recalled by Benthall in 2016: “the word *repugnant* has a much stronger [and more negative] meaning in French than in English and Foucault had heard me use it on [radio station] France Culture [when speaking about the programme]”. But

⁴³ *ICASM: French programme* (London: ICA, 1973).

Foucault's criticisms did not stop there. He insisted that he did not want to be part of "Monsieur Benthall's *Barnum's Circus*". This was a moot point, reflected Benthall, as "we were rather emphasising the peculiarity and unfamiliarity of these people".⁴⁴ Michel Foucault cancelled his appearance at French programme at the very last minute.⁴⁵

This exchange, centring around an ill-defined concept of French theory, is central to the French programme's importance for our study, as it not only demonstrates the danger of allodoxia, as defined by Bourdieu, but paradoxically represents allodoxia as a defining feature of French theory in Britain. Our research through these documents within the ICA archive allows us to fully witness the eclecticism of the programming for the event, which, in turn, allows us to shift our attention to the uncertainties or misrecognitions that can arise in the uprooting of theory from one national framework of culture and opinion to another, entirely separate, national and cultural sphere. Foucault's intemperance was mirrored by Louis Althusser's exasperated reaction to appropriations of his own work; during his visit to the NLR's offices in 1978, Althusser lamented the misuse of his theories, and expressed bewilderment at what people made of his theories. "Who really had taken his ideas up, what had they done with them?", surmised Perry Anderson, his interlocutor for the day.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Interview with Jonathan Benthall, 01 February 2017.

⁴⁵ Foucault's previous appearance in Britain, at the Institut français on the 20th of September 1971, achieved a certain degree of notoriety for both his refusal to occupy the stage and his refusal to give the expected lecture on structuralism as he claimed he did not wish to be defined as a "structuralist" and insisted he would only speak to the packed auditorium from the auditorium, answering questions on anything...except his own work. Not only did this enrage his audience, his acts of defiance also ensured that the microphones and recording devices set up for his talk failed to capture a single word. This is mentioned in David Macey's *The Lives of Foucault* (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 25-6, although Macey incorrectly recounts the event as occurring in the mid-1970s. Macey's account was corroborated, and corrected, in an e-mail exchange with Professor Stephen Bann, 08 September 2020. Furthermore, the final section of Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* disputes the structuralist label afforded to him. See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (London: Tavistock, 1972), p. 220. David Macey's biography also reveals that Foucault's interactions with structuralism as a term were rather limited; by 1972, Foucault revised *The Birth of the Clinic* and removed any references to "structuralism" and replaced them with "an analysis of discourses". See Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, pp. 537-8.

⁴⁶ In effect, Althusser was lamenting "Althusserianism". See Perry Anderson, "An Afternoon with Althusser", *NLR*, 2/113, Sep/Oct 2018. There is, of course, a huge irony here in that Anderson was instrumental in allowing Althusser's ideas diffuse outside their original context.

This disciplinary errancy and eclecticism was emphasised in the framework for the French programme's presentation: its planning represents the earliest attempt to present French theory within contemporary British culture in the form of public appearances by the French theorists themselves, rather than merely translated and transposed through the journal form. Up to this juncture, there had been no attempt to corral contemporary French thinkers into a coherent programme for a British audience curious to experience first-hand the living, breathing theorists deemed so vital by the *NLR* and BFI. The French programme archive reveals the concept as an ambitious, amorphous event which demonstrates a desire to bypass the mediatory processes of travelling theories and present the theorists and theories in an unmediated format: out of context, speaking in a foreign language in a foreign institution, but also one which runs the risk of presenting the theorists in a manner antithetical to how they view themselves and their own work.

There is one final document in the ICA archive pertaining to the French programme which is relevant to our study.⁴⁷ Seemingly written by Benthall, this is a comprehensive five-page dossier, offering a critical reflection of the French programme after the fact and does not appear to exist in any published form and rather resembles the text of a speech, possibly directed towards the ICA council itself. Yet this is extremely revealing in offering a first-hand account of the difficulties involved in curating such an event.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ "The ICA and France", ICA, "French programme", TGA 955/12/2/1, London: Tate Gallery Archive.

⁴⁸ Furthermore, press coverage of the event itself is extremely scant and it is difficult to reconstruct the events – no publications were forthcoming from French programme and the initiative appears to have been overshadowed by the far more successful German programme of 1974, which featured a highly influential sub-programme entitled *Art Into Society, Society Into Art*, curated by Sir Norman Rosenthal. See "Art Into Society, Society Into Art", <<https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/art/into/society/seven/german/artists/review/institute/of/contemporary/arts/ica/london>>, [accessed 30 October 2020].

In his account, Benthall reflects that “the most important residue that French month has left is a pattern for future events of the same kind, in London and elsewhere...the formula whereby an independent organisation such as the ICA invites participation from nationals of a foreign country is surely a good way of avoiding the cultural nationalism that is otherwise liable to beset occasions of this type”.⁴⁹ In effect, Benthall is advocating for the increased transnationalism of the ICA, but also indicating the effectiveness of the “in-person” format of presenting intellectual work, particularly that from foreign countries. Benthall is careful in navigating his account between the two traditions; the Anglo-Saxon traditions of “good sense, empiricism, lucidity” are “potentially complementary to the French intellectual world” and Benthall laments the fact that “the great Cambridge literary critic F.R. Leavis’ is “untranslated and almost unknown in France”. Conversely, Benthall singles out “Lévi-Strauss, Foucault and Derrida” for their “searching insights into the whole tissue of assumptions that underlie Western science and technocratic society and their insights may well, in the long term, come to alter everyday social and political realities”. Benthall ends his analysis on a tentatively positive note:

If Britain has sometimes seemed recently to be becoming a cultural colony of the USA, the present generation of students is now turning with renewed interest towards European ideas, especially to France and Germany. It would be of course a great mistake to define “Europe’ narrowly in terms of the Common Market only, or of capitalise Western Europe only: we plan to undertake Rumanian and Czech programmes in due course. It would also be a mistake to do anything to aggravate the current trend towards the homogenization of all the advanced capitalist countries. Instead, one should

⁴⁹ Jonathan Benthall, “The ICA and France” [2], p. 3.

surely be receptive as possible to the otherness of one's neighbours' culture and linguistic traditions, while focussing with determination on common problems and common predicaments.⁵⁰

Benthall's account provides an extremely positive and generous assessment of the importance of the cultural institution in fostering positive relations between transnational intellectual scenes. It is also an affirmation of the idea of French theory as *programmable* through the frontier of the public lecture or talk within the contemporary art gallery space. The increasing fluidity of this space allowed disciplinary boundaries, particularly outside the academy, to break down, enabling unconventional positions and collaborations to develop. The ICA, as a cultural institution operating as a cross-channel institutional mediator, was now competing with academia in creating new forms of hybrid intellectual work, particularly showcasing transnational work which was not yet covered by the majority of universities, let alone the cultural press. A brief piece in *the Guardian* by Nina Sutton on the French programme wondered "why the British press and public have almost totally ignored what *Combat* called 'the most important French cultural event ever organised in Britain'?" Sutton further comments on the selection of writers as arbitrary, pinpointing Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Sarraute, Deguy, Duras and Lefebvre before concluding with "something very lively in the way of thinking is going on in France. And the ICA made an effort to link it up with what goes on in Britain, even if it was rather negligent in publicising it...And it's a pity to think that, until now, the most reported part of the French Month programme has been the cinema, precisely the field where the organisers have proved to be the most conservative".⁵¹

⁵⁰ Jonathan Benthall, "The ICA and France" [2], p. 4.

⁵¹ The cinema programme for French month, largely focusing upon the *nouvelle vague*, was programmed by Derek Hill. See Nina Sutton, "Gaul Stones: Nina Sutton on the French Month at the ICA", *the Guardian*, London 19 March 1973, p. 8

Conclusion: The Legacy of French Programme at the ICA

What was the legacy of the French programme? The French programme was certainly ahead of its time but its position within this changing political and intellectual context also helps to explain the movement of French theory in Britain away from the austere presentations of the *NLR* and BFI Education Department towards a more diffuse use of theory, less reliant on an overwhelmingly diligent reading. The currents of French theory were certainly in circulation but, as the relative paucity of coverage for the event indicates, this attempt at travelling theory did not quite reach its intended destination point. Previously, we have witnessed French theory through the prism of Ben Brewster's presentations at the *NLR*, Peter Wollen's interventions at the BFI and *Screen*'s robust re-calibration of theory for the nascent field of film studies; a different sort of reading or interpretation is required for French theory to be fully appropriated in a British context. Therefore there needs to be a context for British readers to engage with French theory other than the theory itself. This context allows for the source material to be re-appropriated, which frees the text from its original contextual source, allows for the fruitfulness of the encounters of French theory on the terrain of British culture. The French programme at the ICA operates a level before this encounter: it is an intellectual intervention, Baert's terms, but which occurs almost *pre-French theory*, or, in other terms, a more authentic form of French theory, one which is unprocessed or unmediated. Yet the event was, in some respects, revived in 1984 when the ICA, under the tutelage of Lisa Appiagnensi, organised a series of events under the rubric "Crossing the Channel". This initiative, spurred by the death of Michel Foucault in April of that year, was a much less ambitious re-staging of French theory in Britain, yet the talks featuring H el ene Cixous in conversation with Angela Carter and Jacques Derrida in conversation with Geoffrey Bennington were sold-out affairs. By this point, French theory was less marginal as

translation processes were well underway, and the idea of talks with artists – writers, theorists, visual artists – had been, in many respects, initiated by the ICA during the previous decade. “The success of these talks”, according to Lisa Appiagnensi, “was [due to the fact that] nothing else like that was happening in Britain [at that time]. Writers did not go out and talk [about their work]”.⁵² Furthermore, Derrida had achieved a certain amount of fame in America through his regular appearances at Yale and University of California, Irvine and had achieved an unlikely form of cultural legitimacy in Britain through the pop group Scritti Politti, to which we will return in the final chapter. In Appiagnensi’s own terms, the ICA was, during the 1980s, now offering “a post-university university [as there was] a substantial conglomeration of young people who had graduated but were still hungry for more. [Encountering theory at university] had whetted their appetite”.⁵³

This indicates the suitability between French theory and the para-academic space of the ICA: it provided a platform for these theories, and theorists, to percolate without the pressures of official academia. Where, then, can we place the French Programme within the emergence of French theory? Certainly, the emergence of such a field usually entails a process of searching for founding events and canonising pioneers.⁵⁴ While the French programme was not decisive in entirely rendering the field of French theory autonomous in its own right, it was remarkable for attempting to bring together many of the primary figures within French theory in a single venue within the course of a single month, with a political backdrop of European integration and breaking down of borders. This consistency of time and place offers us a unique standpoint to witness the interactions between these national lineages, but the archival

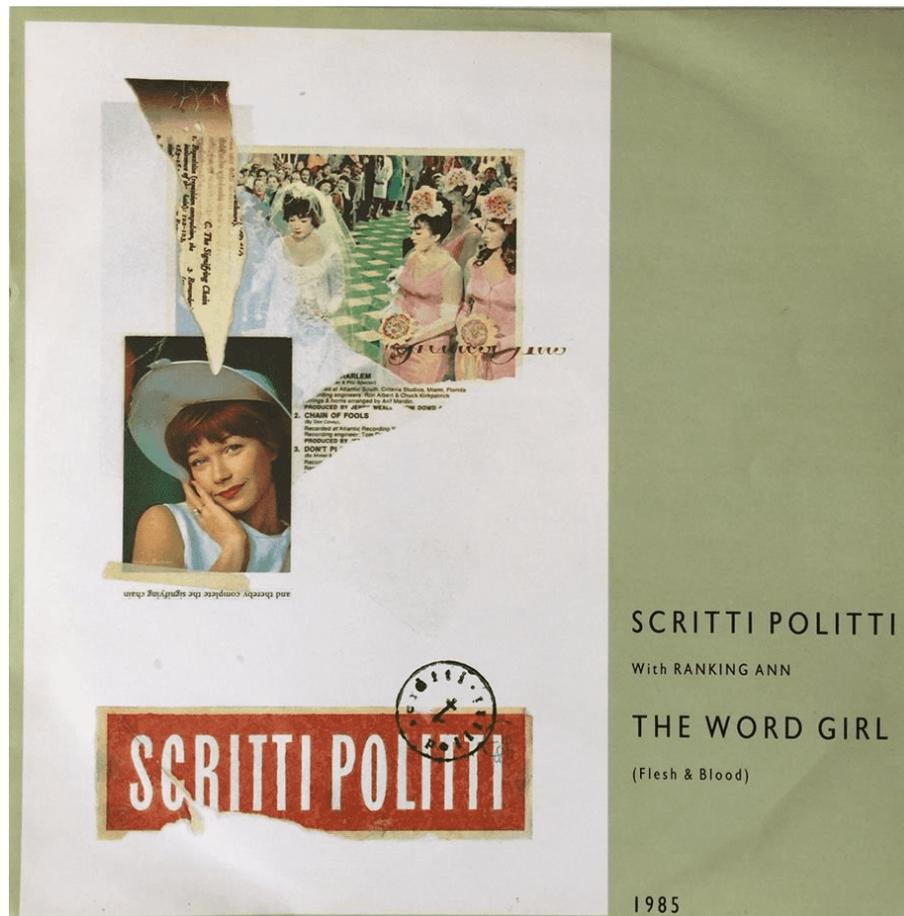
⁵² Interview with Lisa Appiagnensi, 11 March 2021.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Mathieu Hauchetohorne, “The Transnational Making of a Subdiscipline: The Biarritz Conference and the Institutionalization of ‘Public Economics’”, *Ideas On The Move*, Gisèle Sapiro, Marco Santoro, and Patrick Baert eds. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020) p. 198.

findings also allow us to better understand the power relations underlying the emergence of French theory. Furthermore, this field of French theory had yet to be arranged into a coherent framework. The effect of allodoxia, both on the intended participants and the intended audience, is startling in demonstrating how French theory's journey in Britain is embedded within a whole network of interdisciplinary relations, which unifies the theorists and their theories but also produces confusion and misunderstandings as they emerge in a separate national intellectual field. In other words, French theory's journey in Britain is dependent on a certain level of freedom in terms of which French writers or philosophers are chosen to be presented, or are available to be presented, but this is also delimited by the existing confines and demands of the cultural institution in Britain itself. The circulation of French theory in Britain is indebted to the work undertaken by the ICA in the early 1970s as the cultural institution provided a platform for these theories to develop from mere textual imports to become rhetorical acts within the intellectual space of the contemporary art gallery. As Baert insists, the reception, survival, and diffusion of intellectual products is reliant on the range of rhetorical devices which authors employ to locate themselves within the field; but this chapter has demonstrated the equal importance of developing a framework to allow these rhetorical acts, and their associated performativity, establish themselves within the cultural institution, creating a fresh site of reception for these travelling theories from across the channel. Our study will now conclude with a focus upon rhetorical acts albeit in an entirely different, and considerably more performative field: 1980s popular music.

Chapter Five – Scritti Politti: 1978-1986



Introduction: Performing French Theory

June, 1985: Britain's most popular music chart show *Top of the Pops*, hosted by popular BBC Radio One disc-jockey Steve Wright, celebrates the current top 40 with a rundown of the current chart positions in reverse chronological order.¹ Landing at number 6 is a deceptively light, reggae-tinged slice of slick pop music entitled "The Word Girl", performed by Scritti Politti.² Scritti Politti is ostensibly the vehicle for the song writing of Green Gartside, a tall, photogenic Welshman with a curiously high-pitched singing style.³ The current Scritti Politti

¹ *Top Of The Pops*, BBC Television, tx. 13 June 1985.

² Scritti Politti, "The Word Girl", (Virgin Records, 1985).

³ While Scritti Politti is nominally the name of a band, the only constant is Green Gartside. Therefore I will use the third-person pronoun when referring to Scritti Politti. Further, Green Gartside is a pseudonym for Paul

sound is dazzlingly modern, strangely depthless pop music with Green's lead vocal as the frontispiece. Over this commercial pop surface, Green's lyrics perfectly encapsulate the emptiness of the pop parlance, the chorus a joyous affirmation of an unnamed protagonist: "The first time, baby, that I came to you, I'd do things that you want me to, The second time, baby, that I came to you, Oh, you found my love for you, The third time, baby, that I came to you, Oh, oh, oh, I knew, The last time, baby, that I came to you, Oh, how your flesh and blood became the word". So far, so commercial: the combination of the song's cosmetic appeal and the seemingly banal lyrics make the single's success in the pop market seem unexceptional. But, if we briefly step away from the song itself, and look at the cover of the "12" single, we see a comparatively unusual *mélange* of items. We encounter two faded, sepia-toned lobby-card pictures of the actor Shirley MacLaine, first as young girl and second as a forlorn bride in an image taken from the film *Irma la Douce*.⁴ Situated around these pictures, we find a series of written fragments or pages, torn from larger texts. Some of these written fragments represent traces of the liner notes from a different record, Aretha Franklin's *Greatest Hits*, released in 1971.⁵ The torn pages from the record list the credits for the first three songs on this release: "Spanish Harlem", "Chain of Fools", and "Don't Play That Song (You Lied)". The cover is completed by much smaller fragments of a written text, more studious in presentation. This text is partially headed *The Signifying Chain* and contains references to "repetition compulsion" and "foreclosure". Furthermore, a glance at the credits on the record indicates the music has been published by a company named *Jouissance*. The source of each of these three terms is somewhat more obscure considering the context: they

Strohmeier; I will refer to him as "Green" throughout this chapter as per Green's own preference. Green Gartside did not respond to my requests to interview him for this thesis.

⁴ Email interview with designer of the sleeve Keith Breeden, 18 November 2020. Lobby cards are now largely forgotten but were once a staple of film promotion. Usually measuring 14x11, they were displayed and distributed to filmgoers in cinemas. The cards featured memorable scenes of the film, or colourful illustrations of the movie title, or lead actors.

⁵ Aretha Franklin, *Greatest Hits*, Atlantic Records, 1971.

can be found as key terms in Jacques Lacan's *Écrits*.⁶ This is a curious triumvirate: how did the queen of American black soul music, faded images of Shirley MacLaine hovering in shimmering equipoise between girlhood and adulthood, and scraps of paper relating to Lacan's lectures on psychoanalysis, find themselves nestling together on the front cover of a hit pop record?⁷ This chapter demonstrates how the chain of references elucidated by Scritti Politti in their lyrics, record sleeves and interviews in the music press became unlikely, yet important, terrain for French theory in Britain.

Up to this point in the thesis, we have addressed the work undertaken by intellectuals within networks largely populated by other intellectuals. This emphasis is necessary, but it also has the effect of eliding the diverse means through which French theory impacted upon Britain during the late twentieth century. While there are extant studies investigating popular music at an intellectual level, for example *Art Into Pop* (1987), *More Brilliant Than The Sun* (1998), *Irish Blood, English Heart* (2011), my approach in this chapter is unique in that I am highlighting the work of Scritti Politti as both intellectual work and as a series of an intellectual interventions, working within a chain of influence from previous interventions by Anderson, Mulvey, Wollen et al in this study.⁸ In this sense, I am explicitly linking the work

⁶ The most significant account, albeit brief, of Scritti Politti's crossover between French theory and popular music is to be found within Simon Reynolds *Rip It Up And Start Again* (London: Faber, 2005), especially pages 417-419. However, Reynolds erroneously mistakes the page of text on the cover of "The Word Girl!" for a page from Lacan's *Écrits* whereas it is, in fact, from an imaginary book designed to look like a piece of text from Lacan's text; this was confirmed in an email interview with record sleeve designer Keith Breeden, 19 November 2020.

⁷ The cover for the single was primarily designed by the artist Keith Breeden who had previously worked on contemporary sleeves for "clever" pop artists such as ABC, Bryan Ferry and the Fine Young Cannibals. Breeden's designs for Scritti Politti visually enhance the sheer surfaces of the music and the record sleeves: the material manipulations and collaged combinations of Aretha Franklin, Jacques Lacan and Shirley MacLaine generate an eroticism, a *jouissance* of text and image, where the "reader" of this record sleeve is led to visualise beyond the aesthetic bricolage and experience the pleasure and sensation generated by this playful calibration of grain and texture.

⁸ Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art Into Pop*, (London: Routledge, 1987); Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than The Sun*, (London: Quartet, 1998); Sean Campbell, *Irish Blood, English Heart*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 2010). Simon Frith was critical of Scritti Politti, dismissing the band as mere "advertising people, skilled at design and cloths and packaging...the only difference between Green and David Cassidy is that Cassidy did not

undertaken by the *NLR*, BFI, and ICA in disseminating French theory in Britain with the rhetorical work undertaken by Scritti Politti in performing a similar task of diffusion, albeit with a different audience, enabling different effects. Indeed, the element of effect is important for this chapter. Baert explains that intellectual interventions bring about two types of effect: first, the positioning itself, which in Scritti Politti's case is that of a pop star conversant with French theoretical texts, and second, effective positioning "helps diffuse the idea or it might help the agent's career".⁹ In the latter regard, we will witness how Scritti Politti deployed French theory as rationale to move away from the margins of popular music, and instead develop a highly commercial sound and aesthetic. To this end, the chapter will investigate how Green Gartside, as the frontman for Scritti Politti, uses interviews in the music press and coy references in his lyrics and the designs of their single and album covers, to position himself as a popular musician with intellectual credentials, almost entirely derived from his reading of French theoretical texts.

An important element of this chapter is the music press as the site of reception and its astonishing public reach during the early-to-mid 1980s. This is important for our study as it allows us to compare Scritti Politti's engagement with French theory in tandem with that of other publications which diffused French theory, namely the *NLR* and *Screen*; while the latter enterprises may have more intellectual heft, neither publication could reach the circulation levels of the *NME*. As we will see, the regularity with which Scritti Politti dropped references to French theory in the music press ensured that these theories were travelling far wider than ever before. This created a form of circulation and reception of theory where readers, as Edward Said remarks, "seized on [certain] words as if they were magic wands" in order to

explain his sex appeal by references to Foucault and Deleuze". Simon Frith, *Music For Pleasure*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), pp. 90-91.

⁹ Baert, "Positioning theory and intellectual interventions", p. 311.

transform their otherwise humdrum connection with the music and lyrics into something altogether more intoxicating.¹⁰ This chapter also benefits from an extremely close analysis of Scritti Politti's song lyrics. The yield of this analysis is twofold: first, to highlight the depth to which French theoretical references were embedded within the lyrics; second, to illustrate a uniquely performative use of French theory, one where the theories are used to invoke a feeling of *pleasure*. I contend that such a close analysis demonstrates a trajectory of French theory in Britain which is far removed from its American counterpart, and re-calibrates the scene of 1980s popular music as a site of reception, and dissemination, for these travelling French theories.

The Age of Clever Pop

While Scritti Politti's career traverses the late 1970s to the present day, the early-to-mid 1980s comprises a period which can be described as their commercial heyday. As Michael Bracewell notes, this was "the age of clever pop", citing Paul Morley's "wittily intellectual" sleeve notes to Frankie Goes To Hollywood's debut album *Welcome To The Pleasuredome* (1984), the "lyrically nimble and authorially self-aware" work of Prefab Sprout and Momus, along with Scritti Politti's work as the avatars of this movement.¹¹ The early-to-mid 1980s was also period in British history described by Andy Beckett as one of "hard-headed realism – or political and personal self-interest masquerading as such – as well as start-ups and idealism" but also one where "pop music... still offered clues then to what millions of Britons were thinking, with record sales still enormous and music weeklies almost as popular as national newspapers".¹² During this time, French theory in Britain still retained the frissance

¹⁰ Cusset, *French Theory*, p. 219.

¹¹ Michael Bracewell, *England Is Mine*, (London: Flamingo, 1998), p. 215. Frankie Goes To Hollywood, *Welcome to the Pleasuredome*, (ZTT Records, 1984).

¹² Beckett, *Promised You A Miracle*, p. xix.

of *oppositional chic*: the critical establishment in Britain, which, by the early 1980s, was increasingly represented by para-academic sites of reception such as the *London Review of Books*, was still resistant to the import of these theories.¹³ However, a proclivity to concentrate upon the reception of French theory in purely intellectual scenes does not account for its diffusion through less critical sectors. I argue that the popular music scene of the mid-1980s, represented by the music press, was unusually accepting terrain for French theory, largely because the majority of musicians and writers whose work was covered by the press were not *au fait* with the import of theories from continental Europe and were not in a position to challenge this work.¹⁴ It is into this lineage which I situate the work of Scritti Politti whose interviews were carried within the pages of the music press; as Sean Campbell explains, the NME alone had sales of up to 230,000 each week yet reached between one and two million people per issue, due to the “pass-on” effect of each copy which was browsed by up to nine people.¹⁵ Accordingly, the music press did not simply inform readers of the latest news in music, rather they worked on a pedagogical level; as Mark Fisher explained that his “education didn’t come from school...it came from reading *NME*”.¹⁶

¹³ For example, Brigid Brophy amusingly dismisses MacCabe’s *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word*: “Mr MacCabe’s book resembles the proceedings of a water beetle. He skeeters across the surface of a great many questions, bumps excitedly into a theory and then, before examining it, shoots off to the next. He takes quick looks at Saussure (with diagram), Lacan, Barthes, Brecht and Wittgenstein. (No wonder he doesn’t seem to have found time to read many novels.) He remarks on certain similarities between an analyst and a novelist telling stories to a reader, but skeeters off before he can notice the crucial economic difference: that, with a novel, it is the talkative one who is performing a service and demands to be paid for it.” Brigid Brophy, “James Joyce and the Reader’s Understanding”, *London Review of Books*, Vol. 2 No. 3 · 21 February 1980. The LRB’s hostility to theory peaked with Tom Paulin’s coruscating *denouement* of Peter Widdowson’s *Re-Reading English*; the follow-up letters, from Terry Eagleton, Christopher Norris, Peter Barry, Antony Easthope, Terence Hawkes, Margaret Atack, and many more, are perhaps the liveliest record of the theory wars within the British academy during this period. See Tom Paulin, “Faculty at War: Tom Paulin gives his view of teachers of English”, *London Review of Books*, Vol 4, No. 11, 17 June 1982. The review subsequently displayed a more accepting tone towards theory; for a brief compendium of theory in the LRB, see *The Meaninglessness of Meaning: Writing about the theory wars from the London Review of Books*, (LRB Collections 8: London, 2020).

¹⁴ Aside from routinely dismissing it as “pretentious”.

¹⁵ Sean Campbell, “*NME*’s ‘Irish Troubles’: Political Conflict, Media Crisis and the British Music Press”, *Études irlandaises* 46-1 (2021), DOI: 10.4000/etudesirlandaises.10464

¹⁶ Andrew Brookes, “Do You Miss The Future? Mark Fisher Interviewed”, *Crack Magazine*, 12 September 2014, < <https://www.scoop.it/topic/hauntology/p/4027959297/2014/09/13/do-you-miss-the-future-mark-fisher-interview-crack-magazine>>, [accessed 17 July 2021].

Therefore, the diffusion of French theory in Britain during the 1980s reached an apogee through the work of Scritti Politti as mediated through the music press. Following on from Bourdieu's outlining of the factors which trigger the circulation of texts, Gisèle Sapiro maintains that the key factors in this mediation are material means: "books, newspapers, journals...or by oral diffusion in public or private settings". While *Screen* journal had a print run of approximately 2000 issues, the music press had significantly greater reach.¹⁷ Issues of each paper were regular, affordable, and often maintained a very loyal readership. The music papers also provided an outlet for young writers to test out forms of style which would not be permitted in a more serious newspaper context nor within the confines of academia. Thus the music weeklies were increasingly staffed by eager, young music enthusiasts unshackled by institutional or academic allegiances, creating fertile terrain for "texts to circulate without their context" which allows for the writer to take "possession" of the foreign text and "slant it with [their] own point of view".¹⁸ We can also say that the music press benefitted from the emergence of an independent music scene, as the nature of the punk movement allowed for a degree of auto-didacticism to emerge during a period which Simon Reynolds describes as a "systematic ransacking of twentieth century modernist art and literature", insisting that "the entire [punk and post-punk period of the late 1970s and early 1980s] looks like an attempt to replay virtually every modernist theme and technique via the medium of pop music".¹⁹ This interzone between the music press and the creation of music was mirrored by Scritti Politti's own formation as the initial make-up of the band consisted of three musicians: the aforementioned Green Gartside on guitar and vocals; his former Young Communist League acolyte Nial Jinks on bass; former art student Tom Morley on drums; and an assortment of

¹⁷ Interview with Mark Nash, former *Screen* editor, 09 August 2018.

¹⁸ Bourdieu, "The Social Conditions...", p. 222.

¹⁹ Reynolds, *Rip It Up...*, p. xviii.

non-musicians, including *NME* journalist Ian Penman. Green was the leader of the collective while remaining a member of the Young Communist League where he became an acolyte of Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst whom we last saw in Chapter Three, denigrating the work of Louis Althusser.

Green was a graduate of Leeds Art School, part of Leeds Polytechnic. Having shelved plans to attend the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, Green focused upon music, creating the band's name as a "corruption of the title of a book by [Antonio] Gramsci", and they released their debut single "Skank Bloc Bologna" in autumn 1978.²⁰ It is worthwhile for our study to note Green's reading at this time, which he expounded upon during a 1990 interview. He recalled how he "move[d] from Wittgenstein to Althusser", the latter initially coming across like "puffed up continental gobbly-gook". But crucially, Green's reading of Althusser provided a springboard towards "some interesting Lacan, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari". In short, "[French theory was] in the air, it would have been provoked. It was obviously in itself an index. *Screen* magazine as well, that was read."²¹ Green's references here make an explicit link to the previous chapters of the thesis. It also demonstrates how French theory was, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, becoming an "index", or a list of names purloined from the French intellectual scene, and the reference to these theories being "in the air" signifies the *atmospheric connection* which was emerging

²⁰ Kodwo Eshun, "The Weakest Link In Every Chain: I Always Want To Find It", interview with Green Gartside in *Post-Punk Then and Now*, Gavin Butt, Kodwo Eshun, Mark Fisher eds., (London: Repeater, 2016) pp. 355-360. Scritti Politti, "Skank Bloc Bologna", St. Pancras Records, 1978.

²¹ Fareed Armlay, "Interview with Green Gartside", *R.O.O.M.*, (self-published magazine: Cologne, 1990). I am grateful to the curator Matthew Higgs for recommending this publication. In an email interview with Higgs on 27 November 2018, he recalled that "Fareed Armlay's *R.O.O.M.* journal is the ONLY published account I have come across that looks at this moment seriously – i.e., the late 70s/early 80s intellectual theory/politically-minded independent music culture in the UK. That he was doing this c. 1990 in Cologne is all the more interesting, as NO ONE was thinking about the Gang of Four/Scritti etc. at this time. The journal includes an earlier contextual text by Dan Graham, plus an interview with former member of The Raincoats by former A&L [Art & Language] associate – and artist – David Batchelor. So these connections/conversations – between 1970s conceptual art, UK post-punk culture, and theory were all tangible and unfolding at the time".

between these Francophone theorists. The manner of Green's reading whereby Althusser leads on to Lacan, Derrida et al is also reminiscent of how one consumes favourite artists via the music press: reading about, and developing an affiliation with, one artist before transferring one's affections to a different, yet somehow connected, artist. This also affirms the sense of Bourdieu's allodoxia emerging in the reading of French theory in Britain: Althusser was the catalyst for reading Lacan, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, mediated through *Screen* journal. It is also striking to note that the readers of these texts, the Scritti Politti collective, were not working within the traditional academic or film education networks; they were neither filmmakers nor lecturers but instead untrained musicians drawn to the oppositional appeal of French theory. Accordingly, Scritti Politti were auto-didactic intellectuals working within the field of the emergent punk and post-punk movement. The energy of this scene generated an enormous amount of fresh cultural material, not just through the "official" music press but "unofficial" channels such as creation of fanzines which further indicated how simple it was to form a band, write music and get a record made.²² The legitimization of these processes by "gatekeeper" DJ's such as John Peel ensured that dissemination of this fresh material was consecrated, however marginally, by an institution of merit such as the BBC, in tandem with the ever-present coverage by the *NME* and music weeklies.

Scritti Politti deployed references to French theory in virtually all the channels of communication available to them as a musical group. Their second release, a series of Peel Sessions released in 1979, featured a text on its record sleeve from an imaginary book entitled *Scritto's Republic*.²³ "The rules of a society are embodied in the rules of its

²² Scritti Politti were also influenced by The Desperate Bicycles, a short-lived punk outfit who printed the material costs of every aspect of the recording and manufacturing of their music on their sleeves.

²³ Scritti Politti, *2nd Peel Session*, (St. Pancras Records/Rough Trade Records, 1979).

language”, wrote the unnamed author, presumably Green Gartside himself, hiding behind the screen of the collective. The fragmented piece of writing accosted a familiar target for readers of French theory in Britain: “it is through *common sense* [my italics] that we are reproached and directed...Language pre-exists our entry into it and defines what is normal and represses that which will not or cannot be covered or developed by its framework”. This imaginary *Scritto's Republic* text explicates a science of history which could be extracted straight from the pages of Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* where he insists “there are bodies of knowledge that are independent of the sciences (which are neither their historical prototypes, nor their practical by-products), but there is no knowledge without a particular discursive practice; and any discursive practice may be defined by the knowledge that it forms”.²⁴ This bricolage of fragmented pages from imaginary books on theory, jostling for space alongside seemingly unrelated traces of cultural artefacts, was to become a hallmark of Scritti's visual style: capturing references and visually re-deploying them out of context and often out of time.

There are further traces of French theory in the early Scritti Politti lyrics. “Doubt Beat”, a song released on the band's third release 4 ‘A’ Sides in 1979, contained a direct Foucault reference in the lyric: “We have no big interest, we listen sideways / This much we always know is *discipline and punish* / We work for interest is how we discriminate” [my italics].

²⁴ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp. 182-3. The record sleeve also included a linguistic table, explicating the function of each word in an apparently random sentence and the lyrics of a Warwickshire folk-rhyme which, in the context, reads like a Dadaist poem: “vizzery, vazzery, vozery vem, tizzery, tassery, tozery tem, Hiram, Jiram, cockrem, spirem, Poplar, rollin, gem”. This is an imaginary rhyme but does have a genuine source. According to Green, “I actually did a lot of research into Welsh traditional things, at the national archives in Cardiff. This is many years before. I was looking into a Welsh tradition called the Mari Lwyd, or the White Mare, which is when the skeleton of a horse is exhumed and taken round the houses at a certain time of year. Basically you had to join in with the people that came around. It was mixture of... they were menacing, it was anarchic, and you entered into almost an MC battle. The people outside had to come up with a rhyme and you inside had to come up with a rhyme to match it. There was a sort of contest-cum-orgy. It sounded good to me!”. Interview with Green Gartside, <<https://reynoldsretro.blogspot.com/2019/07/>>, [accessed 23 November 2020].

The writer Kodwo Eshun hailed this particular lyric as exemplary of Scritti's tendency to avoid "sloganising with theory...it's not as if *Discipline and Punish* is being brandished. On the contrary, it is embedded within the song form. The idea of discipline and punishment has been metabolised by the musical process itself. What comes across is not so much the lyrics as the beat".²⁵ However, I disagree with Eshun; in this instance, I argue that Green is using the book titles as a form of slogan while also staging an intellectual intervention, in a manner similar to Peter Wollen's tendency to create synoptic lists of foreign names and referents in his BFI Education Seminars. The reference to *Discipline and Punish* in the lyrics is an active form of communicating Green's own difference from the punk and post-punk lyricists of the day. It is a strategic reference point, and an indication of a burgeoning interest in the intersections of music and language, fuelled by the reading of Foucault. As Baert points out, any form of intellectual intervention "will have to be accounted for...[as it] entails reputational risks".²⁶ Accordingly, Scritti Politti's aesthetic and lyrics took on an important context, as this was the arena in which Green was able to articulate a competitive advantage over his competitors simply by deploying names and terms associated with contemporary Francophone thought. This intervention separated him from his peers who, in contrast, spoke in more empirical terms about the "meaning" of their songs and their "authenticity". Green's deployment of Foucault's book title in an entirely separate context to the book's own position within the strata of social science extracts the publication from its material existence but also imbues it with a new significance and new set of possibilities through its inclusion in a non-rhyming couplet in a post-punk single. The intervention also consecrates Foucault in a new field, a move which captures Foucault for Scritti's own beliefs and political frameworks and allows fans of Scritti Politti to share in this secret, almost contraband, knowledge.

²⁵ Kodwo Eshun, "The Weakest Link In Every Chain...", p. 363.

²⁶ Baert, *The Existential Moment*, p. 183.

While this early incarnation of Scritti Politti achieved a certain degree of success within the punk and post-punk networks, they were very much a marginal concern within the wider pop music framework. Their early releases were often dissonant, devoid of conventional verse-chorus-verse structures and poorly produced, reflecting the band's squat-living privations. Green was increasingly dissatisfied with the form of music which his band were producing and repeatedly linked marginal music to Marxism. In a manner which suggests the move in his reading from structuralism to post-structuralism, Green rejected Marxism as a false offer towards "an understanding of the present in materialist terms through [this] notion of a science of history...doing a lot of reading, though, I realised that the past didn't offer itself up as an object available for the scrutiny of history. I began to think about history in terms of the individual and in turn was led to think about the formation of the unconscious".²⁷ Invoking a triumvirate of Lacan, Kristeva and Derrida, Green further celebrated his post-structuralist appropriations as validation for transcending the marginality of Scritti Politti's music and the selective appeal of artists working within the independent music sector: "I can't see the point of remaining marginal", he insisted in a later interview. "For one thing, it doesn't suit my politics or my temperament. I'd rather sell a lot of records than get a lot of letters asking how to make records because I really do think that a lot of my strengths and a lot of political focus lies in that music rather than it would in me sending people information on how to commit their own atrocities to vinyl and sell 150 copies....We stopped being crusaders for DIY records 'cos we know how awful it is. My advice to anybody doing it now is please, please don't!"²⁸ This brief remark signifies the beginning of Green's rationale for changing his entire musical and personal style, sharply moving away from the margins of post-punk and

²⁸ Simon Dreyer, "The Politics of Ecstasy", *Sounds*, May 1982.

into the “centre” of pop music. “The marginal is conservative”, further reflected Green in 2012. “The marginal only reinforced things and didn’t challenge things. It was the reading of Jacques Derrida which led me to pop music”.²⁹

Deconstructing Pop

In the spring of 1981, the *NME* and Rough Trade records released a cassette compilation entitled *C81*, which was a celebration of five years of the label’s existence and, by proxy, five years of independent music in Britain. Scritti Politti provided a song called “The ‘Sweetest Girl’”. The song is a striking departure from the band’s previous aural assault, now replaced by swathes of reggae-style organ, elegant musicianship and yearning vocals, directed towards a “girl” in implied quotation marks. The *C81* release was accompanied by a brief biographical account of each performing artist; typically, Scritti eschewed autobiographical material in favour of a direct quotation from Roland Barthes’s *A Lover’s Discourse*: “A squeeze of the hand—enormous documentation—a tiny gesture within the palm, a knee which doesn’t move away, an arm extended, as if quite naturally, along the back of a sofa and against which the other’s head gradually comes to rest—this is the paradisiac realm of subtle and clandestine signs: a kind of festival not of the senses but of meaning”.³⁰ Green elaborated on this overlap between theory and his music in an October 1981 interview for the *NME*. It is worth quoting this at length to demonstrate the extent to which Green was prepared to ground his new positioning within French theoretical concerns:

²⁹ “Mark Fisher and Green Gartside Interview”, <<https://egressac.wordpress.com/2011/02/11/off/the/page/2012/green/gartside/and/mark/fisher/on/politics/and/music/>>, [accessed 30 August 2020].

³⁰ Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979), p. 67. I am grateful to Simon Reynolds for providing me with a scan of the *C81* cassette cover during lockdown.

Pop does lie outside the limits of language and logocentrism, yes...beat doesn't go 'thick', like the broth of language Barthes imagines will go thick if he isn't watchful. Beats are finite and perpetual, and without meaning. They have power, and they are violent, and they do transgress sense. I do not think that I am 'knowledgeable' of them nor that I've somehow caught them or tamed them and can put them to my services. The exact opposite: this is to do with my AWE of pop music, as measured against the endless signatures and closures of more idiosyncratic music. But that in itself is not a final position on the subject. You must understand the loss of sense and identity through repetition, the assertion through repetition, the currency of repetition, the demystification in and of repetition – it's so monolithic, it's endlessly powerful, the tiniest chip of it signifies. Language and grammar once acquired is both constructive and restrictive, while the acquired grammar of beat is at once constructive and destructive joy. But no one musical phenomenon is ever going to transcend beat or repetition, nor is it ever going to transcend the history of criticism and the industry. You have to keep making conditional moves. I think it's so mistaken to believe that ours is a coldly calculated and stilted music. There is no 'knowledge' of beat, only the unmonotonous insistence of difference....That refers to an interesting point Barthes raises, interesting I think for music, which is to do with the enormous sexuality, loss and pleasure which you cannot find innately residing within four beats to the bar. The meaning of footsy-footsy, for example, will articulate a whole sexual, emotional and physical response, and it's the way that that illuminates just a little bit of the

unspeakable power of music that I was talking about. You know, a clandestine series of gestures...a secret that can never be told.³¹

To unpack this statement, one can go beyond the direct references to Roland Barthes's discourse on love. Firstly, it is quite clear that Green has been reading and interpreting Jacques Derrida, specifically his work around the "play" of deconstruction, and reflecting Derrida's use of *différance* not just to describe but to perform the fashion in which the meaning of one concept appears purely through the effacement of other possible meanings.³² Green has purloined this explanation from Derrida's texts and re-connected them into the horizon of making popular music. This powerful modification of standard ideas of identity and difference is further deployed to explain Green's move away from punk and post-punk and into the realm of the currency of pop which, apparently, lies "outside the limits of language and Logocentrism". Green's own repetition of repetition, derived from Derrida's privileging of repetition as an appropriate site for the creation of something new, is heralded by an insistent tone – "you must understand" – creating a unique, if somewhat garbled, soufflé of theory, musical explication, and the "accounting for" oneself that Baert describes as a necessary feature of re-positioning oneself within a cultural field, particularly when such a move entails reputational risks.³³

A further point about this extensive quotation is to acknowledge its context and reception: delivered within the pages of a popular music weekly magazine, it is hugely important in demonstrating another atmospheric connection between French theory and a readership outside of the intellectual milieu of the *NLR* and BFI Education Department. Green's

³¹ Barney Hoskyns, "Where Radical Meets Chic: Scritti Politti", *NME* 31 October 1981.

³² Derrida first deployed the term *différance* in his 1963 paper, "Cogito et histoire de la folie", See Salmon, *An Event, Biography*, p. 122.

³³ Baert, *The Existential Moment*, p. 183.

deployment of the referent “Barthes” and use of unfamiliar Derridean terminology such as the “insistence of difference” and “clandestine series of gestures” is compelling and attractively mystifying. This creates a pivotal encounter between French theory and its readers, mediated through the figure of the eloquent pop star positioning himself through his intellectual interventions; one is also reminded of Bourdieu’s description of reading books as finding “a depository of magic secrets...like a text from which one wants to learn the art of living”.³⁴ Green’s unspooling of theoretical terms within his interviews for the music press is important for two reasons. First, the audience is receptive as it comprises individuals who are seeking textual appendices to the music or to find textual description which encourage the reader to purchase unheard music. Second, through Green’s interviews the reader is able to construct their own allodoxic corpus of unprescribed references of French theoretical theorists and texts. In this fashion, references to Barthes and Derrida become exciting literary discoveries which can be shared and discussed. Furthermore, this dissemination of theory occurs outside a traditional pedagogical framework through a form of autodidacticism: there is no “teacher” present to correct the work which accords a certain validity to every reading and every interpretation. This is an important point, and unique to the diffusion of French theory in Britain through Scritti Politti and the music press.³⁵

³⁴ “La lecture, une pratique culturelle” (debate between Pierre Bourdieu and Roger Chartier), in *Pratiques de la lecture*, Roger Charter ed., (Paris: Payot, 1993), p. 279.

³⁵ A further example of the allodoxic indexing of French theory appears in the *NME* less than a year later. “Sheet Music”, written by the aforementioned Scritti Politti collective member Ian Penman, is a lengthy, schematic account of the “Song” in popular music, gleefully plundering Derrida and Kristeva, often without citing the original source. Penman’s playful code of re-appropriation — plagiarising but almost revealing the source — opens up another (dis)connective tissue for readers of theory and readers of *NME*; if a reader independently makes the connection between Penman’s quotation and the source, it has the effect of proselytising through the form of a secret clique formed between reader and writer with the French theoretical text as the prized contraband. Both Green’s assertion of his new found appreciation for pop music and Penman’s extensive, circular re-evaluation read like manifestoes for their own reading; it is as if Scritti’s music and Penman’s examples of the song are the fuel for the use of theory, rather than the other way around. See Ian Penman, “Sheet Music”, *NME*, 31 July 1982, pp. 24-26, 45. I am again grateful to Simon Reynolds for proving a scan of this article during the lockdown period.

For anyone who wasn't entirely certain as to who was providing the framework for Scritti Politti's new pop sound, Green Gartside abandoned all pretences of clandestine gestures in releasing a single in 1982 simply entitled "Jacques Derrida".³⁶ In Baert's terms, this is a remarkably direct use of labelling to flag one's own position.³⁷ His copious appearances in the music press, with his refusal to perform live rendering interviews even more of a necessity, contributed to this labelling. Green was unquestionably charismatic, eloquent and, due to the fluidity of his positioning, somewhat difficult to work out: all of this added to his appeal.³⁸ But it was the "Jacques Derrida" single which explicitly positioned Green as an advocate of French theory in Britain. The lyrics indicate a deep affection for Derrida; Green stating that he simply needs to "read a page [of Derrida]" which allows him to "take a-part my baby's heart". In short, Green is showcasing his advocacy for deconstruction, the form of literary analysis which questions the fundamental conceptual distinctions, or oppositions, extant in Western philosophy through a close examination of the language and logic of philosophical and literary texts. Deconstruction offered Green a rationale for questioning the concept of a science of history; as his hitherto Marxist anchors of political, moral and religious understanding began to diminish, his readings of Derrida allowed him to celebrate a politics of desire despite being conscious of the contradictions inherent within such a belief system. Indeed, through a rather fey rap at the end of the song, Green embodies desire as "so voracious" that he now wants to "eat your nation state".³⁹

The single "Jacques Derrida" was a minor chart success in Britain but its success in bringing the name or referent "Derrida" into the consciousness of music fans is immense, if

³⁶ Scritti Politti, "Asylums In Jerusalem/Jacques Derrida", (Rough Trade Records, 1982).

³⁷ Baert, "Positioning theory and intellectual interventions", p. 311.

³⁸ On charisma and the charismatic ideology, see Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, p. 167.

³⁹ Scritti Politti, "Jacques Derrida".

unmeasurable.⁴⁰ Within the ongoing achievement of positioning, Scritti Politti's explicit alignment with Jacques Derrida represents a substantial intellectual intervention. Amusingly, Green pronounces Derrida incorrectly in his singing, achieving something that sounds more akin to "Jack the Reader" rather than the more correct phonetic rendition which places the stress on the first syllable. But this is reflective of Derrida's unknown status beyond academic circles in Britain during 1981; Green apparently had not met anyone who knew how to pronounce Derrida's name correctly, and nobody within the field of popular music was able to criticise him for this error. This intervention, however, works as a "position statement", which, according to Baert, is a necessity to "identify the work upon which the [positioning] builds, the work that complements and supports it". It is also worth pointing out that Green's positioning was entirely intentional which is "necessary when justifying new work for publication", or in this sense, as a recording.⁴¹ Scritti Politti's positioning, therefore, was explicit and had considerable effects, to which we will now turn.

The Parlance of Pop

In 1983, Scritti Politti left London, changed management and moved to New York, signing a record deal with Virgin Records. In adapting a more commercial sound, the band were provided with the opportunity for increased symbolic recognition and commercial reward. At this juncture, Scritti Politti had truly embraced the pop medium but former punks and post-punks "going pop" was not an isolated move;⁴² many of the British pop stars of the mid 1980s had cut their teeth within the punk circuits – Simple Minds, New Order, The Cure,

⁴⁰ The single just missed out on the Top 40, charting at number 43 in August 1982, before dropping out of the Top 100 after one week.

⁴¹ Baert, "Positioning theory and intellectual interventions", p. 318.

⁴² For example, see the discussion of the Sheffield group ABC in Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again*, pp. 361-383

Siouxsie & the Banshees – and such a move was certainly within the culture of Thatcherite Britain: outward-looking, upwardly mobile, materialistic and often brashly energetic.

The earliest results of Scritti's major label dalliance was released in 1984: the curiously titled "Wood Beez (Pray Like Aretha Franklin)"⁴³ was a shining, chrome-like piece of hi-tech musical creation which, in three and a half minutes, announced the key move in the dramatic transformation of Scritti Politti from marginal post-punks to mainstream pop contenders. While elements of direct quotations from French theorists remained in Green's lyrics for this song, his positioning with regard to French theory became less explicit from the time of "Wood Beez" onwards. Indeed, the lyrics of this particular song are particularly fruitful for analysis in a post-structuralist manner: this is important for our study in that it represents a uniquely playful take on French theory in a British context. Indeed, Cusset makes the point that, as a tool, French theory has "invigorating and confidence-inspiring effects...leading to naïve or caricatured views", and reading the lyrics of "Wood Beez", or indeed any of the songs on the subsequent Scritti Politti album *Cupid and Psyche 85*, one is inclined to agree with this observation, in that the lyrics read as simple love songs operating within the standard parlance of pop.⁴⁴ Green later observed that "there were references to theory and political texts in almost everything — or an awful lot of what I wrote — that continued through. We didn't 'sneak it in there', it was *in you*" [my italics].⁴⁵ Therefore, the theories of Barthes and Derrida have become so immersed in Green's lyric writing that they produce this naïve form of song writing, one which is far removed from the heavy duty theorising of *Screen* journal yet deploys many of the same sources from French theory and demonstrates a unique encounter between French theory and popular song writing. We will now turn to a

⁴³ Scritti Politti, "Wood Beez (Pray Like Aretha Franklin)", Virgin Records, 1984.

⁴⁴ Scritti Politti, *Cupid and Psyche 85*, Virgin Records, 1985.

⁴⁵ Gavin, Butt, Kodwo Eshun, Mark Fisher, eds., *Post-Punk Then and Now*, (London: Repeater, 2016), p. 377.

more thorough, if playful, analysis of this single in order to demonstrate the depth of French theory's influence on Scritti Politti's lyrics.

The song title "Wood Beez (Pray Like Aretha Franklin)" continues Green's penchant for listing names of his cultural touchstones with Aretha Franklin replacing Jacques Derrida. The phrase "pray like" refers to Franklin's hit "I Say A Little Prayer", a massive pop hit between 1967 and 1968.⁴⁶ Franklin's original single was produced by Arif Mardin, a renowned soul producer who also produced Scritti's "Wood Beez". The "Wood Beez" of the title, repeated throughout the song as "would be, would be", can therefore be linked to Aretha Franklin through Mardin; in sharing a producer, this new song "would be" like Aretha Franklin's song. In fact, the entire song itself appears to be a play on the concept of the sign of "would be": would be and w.o.o.d. b.e.e.z. are almost phonemes. In the chorus, Green sings "I'm a would be, would be... [before spelling out the letters] w.o.o.d. b.e.e.z"; w.o.o.d. b.e.e.z. is what he is not while "would be" would be "W.o.o.d b.e.e.z". The aberrant "z" can be interpreted through the Derridean play of difference; "z" is a meeting point between two forces or phonemes: a form of writing that reveals the accidental, the chance, the mistake, as a necessary possibility.⁴⁷ Whereas Derrida uses the letter "a" to signify *différance*, Green goes to the other end of the scale and inputs a "z" at the end of his phoneme. Would be becomes wood beez. Within this play, Green teases that he is about to become: but the reader familiar with French theory, particularly that of Derrida's work, knows that the transcendental signified will never appear.⁴⁸ The signifying chain carries on and Green is

⁴⁶ The song was written by the Bacharach-David song writing team and reached no. 1 in the US in 1967 and no. 1 in the UK the following year.

⁴⁷ Perhaps Green was also thinking of Roland Barthes's *S/Z* in his deployment of this specific letter.

⁴⁸ "..... the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the interplay of signification *ad infinitum*." Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", in *The Structuralist Controversy*, p. 249.

permanently “would be”, failing to achieve presence. In effect, Green Gartside transfers Derrida’s *différance*, the infinite delay in signification implicit to language, to the field of the love song. Green renders his use of language as a mere object for play and his thoughts on his potential future selves run aground, as each of these iterations of the self collapse into frustratingly indefinite deferrals of signification or unfulfilled desires. In effect, “Wood Beez” is a hymn for agnostics – or a paean to the joys of French theory.⁴⁹

It is worth noting, at this juncture, the “turn” in Green’s own singing voice. Shorn of its overtly English-folk accented edges, by 1985, Green’s singing resembled an eerie falsetto which sounded not just vari-speeded but transcending any gender vocal norms. This mutation of the singing voice from the heavily accented to the heavily accentuated indicates Green’s engagement with Kristeva’s notion of the “thetic” drive, the “deepest structure” of enunciation, signification and proposition and one which is crucial in establishing the identification of the child-subject: “All enunciation, whether of a word or of a sentence, is thetic. It requires an identification; in other words, the subject must separate from and through his image, from and through his objects”.⁵⁰ Re-calibrated through the medium of pop vocals, Green appropriated the thetic drive as a desire to develop a faux-naïf aspect to his singing.

This faux-innocence was perhaps best defined by the aforementioned single “The Word Girl” which, on the surface, is a relatively simple four-minute pop song. But the lyrics betray a

⁴⁹ While also making a casual reference to Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* in the final verse – “oh, that’s the gift of *Schizo*” – the success of this single, both in the UK and USA, catapulted Green into the commercial realm of the pop market.

⁵⁰ Julia Kristeva, “Revolution in Poetic Language”, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). p. 98. See John O’Reilly, “My Dinner with Derrida”, *The Independent*. July 1999. <http://www.aggressiveart.org/sp_uk/interviews/spuk_1999_6.htm>, [accessed 12 April 2021] where Green confirms the influence of the thetic drive on his singing voice.

specific acknowledgement of both Lacan and Kristeva, alongside the re-appropriation of Lacan for the cover text which we encountered in the introduction to this chapter. Jacques Lacan describes condensation as “the structure of the superimposition of the signifiers, which metaphor takes as its field, and whose name, condensing in itself the word *Dichtung*, shows how the mechanism is connatural with poetry to the point that it envelops the traditional function proper to poetry”. Displacement, meanwhile, is described as “the idea of that veering off of signification that we see in metonymy, and which from its first appearance in Freud is represented as the most appropriate means used by the unconscious to foil censorship”.⁵¹

How does this apply to “The Word Girl”? In effect, the lyrics describe how through the effects of condensation and displacement, the term “girl” has become meaningless; its meaning, up to this point, was accrued from a whole tradition of listening to pop songs which reference the “girl”. Accordingly, the word “girl” has become fixed in the speaker’s consciousness but has veered off its singular reference point and passed on its whole charge to other, possibly unrelated reference points. Thus the signifying chain, as referenced in the single’s artwork, is represented in the lyrics as the “name the girl outgrew, the girl was never real...it’s a word for what you do in a world of broken rules, she found a place for you along her chain of fools”. The ubiquity of the word “girl” in pop music ensures its meaning is constantly being deferred, or emptying itself out of meaning over and over again. The chorus — “how your flesh and blood became the word” — also appears to reference Lacan: “symbols in fact envelop the life of a man in a network so total that they join together before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him ‘by flesh and blood’”.⁵²

⁵¹ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 122.

⁵² Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 50.

As demonstrated above, Scritti Politti's lyrics refuse the often-standard idea that theory ought to be difficult and esoteric. The French theories of Derrida, Lacan, and Kristeva are embedded *in* the lyrics and performance, and can be extracted in a sophisticated manner. But this is not a necessity; one does not need to be familiar with these theories to simply enjoy the music. By adapting such a non-mimetic style -- Green is being disruptive by using a non-disruptive aesthetic -- Scritti Politti's use of theory marks a significant difference from theory-inspired work of, say, Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey during the previous decade as I argue that any enjoyment of the latter is dependent on a familiarity with the source theoretical texts. Instead of insisting upon an experimental form to deconstruct the artistic medium, Scritti Politti go in the complete opposite direction and embrace the most popular form of music available at that time. This allows the reception of Scritti Politti's work to exist on a number of levels: appealing to the pop music fan with no real interest in French theories; but also to the intellectual music fan with an interest in music, popular or otherwise. But it also allows for a third site of reception, that of the music fan who is introduced to French theory through Scritti Politti's work and thus uses the music as a connective bridge between contemporary pop and contemporary French thought. Rather than purely existing on a textual or medial level, the influence of French theory across Scritti Politti's output is immense.

Both "Wood Beez" and "The Word Girl" appear on the album *Cupid and Psyche 85*. The album comprises nine songs, fizzing with lyrics which are slippery and playful but also represent a desire to reconstruct a transcendental realm that is absent. Celebrating gaps, lacks, absences and deficiencies, there is a sense of the disappearance of the world behind language, consciousness going astray, the possibility of non-sense. The album's biggest hit in the USA was "Perfect Way", which reached the Billboard Top 20 in the summer of 1985 and featured

a whole index of lines which could be slogans of French theory: “You got a-way with the word”; “You gotta heart full of complacency too”; “I’m empty by definition”; “I got a lack girl that you’d love to be”; “I got a perfect way to make a certain a maybe”. The brashness of Green’s lyricism in this song demonstrates a confidence within his own positioning; armed with his imported copies of Derrida and Lacan, he has not only “a perfect way to make a proposition” through his Kristevan thetic-inspired vocals but more immediately “a perfect way to make the girls go crazy”.⁵³ The Lacanian discourse of lack and empty speech — the discourse of the imaginary — jostles for space with deconstructive slogans (“wanna do damage that you can undo”) and the crisis of the human subject. “I wanna forget how to remember” suggests the idea of active forgetfulness, which Foucault, after Nietzsche, warns is a result of our descent into an independent form of being: what we forget is that our existence was never truly independent.⁵⁴ Recalling the huge Stateside success of “Perfect Way”, Scritti’s manager Bob Last remembers the sheer euphoria of this point when the band “achieved this high-gloss sound that could penetrate mainstream American radio”. Scritti Politti’s turn towards pop, pivoted upon a series of intellectual interventions and remarkably fluid positioning, had achieved stardom.⁵⁵

⁵³ Scritti Politti, “Perfect Way”, Virgin Records, 1985. This song was covered by Miles Davis the following year.

⁵⁴ See Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon trans., in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 86-87.

⁵⁵ A crucial component of Scritti Politti’s success was also due to their music videos, tailor-made for the MTV generation, ultra-stylish productions featuring models and dancers of the calibre of Michael Clark. Green himself was also a *fashionista*, even taking part in modelling assignments for the Italian *Vogue*.

Conclusion: The Pleasures of the [Song] Text

In 2012, Green Gartside remarked that “on my travels, I’ve had pressed into my hands — and it usually is [by] bright young men — publications, theses or books, usually men teaching philosophy who credited to me an awakening in them of an interest in theory and ideas. And some of them would locate that [awakening] as late as *Cupid & Psyche 85*”.⁵⁶ Green’s work through the Scritti Politti name brought French theory to an audience far beyond the immediate reach of our previous sites of reception: this is why an analysis of their work is so important for this study. This allows us to return to the theoretical framework proposed by Bourdieu and his insistence that a “foreign reading [of a text] is sometimes more free than a national reading of the same text”⁵⁷, Scritti Politti’s reading and dissemination of French theory brought an entirely new audience into contact with these ideas and concepts, one which was less conventionally academic but one which ensured that the circulation of theorists was able to work its way into the language of the music press. Crucially, this allowed for French theory to circulate untethered to a pedagogical framework. This journey of theory as promulgated by Scritti Politti and the music press resulted in an exciting cerebral epiphany for consumers of pop music and the pop music press; to associate oneself with Scritti Politti was to align oneself with the work of French theory, albeit in a fashion practically devoid of peer-review. The subtle references and signifying chains scattered across the band’s lyrical and aesthetic output provided a form of cultural capital for those “in the know”.

⁵⁶ “Mark Fisher and Green Gartside Interview”, <<https://egressac.wordpress.com/2011/02/11/off-the-page-2012-green-gartside-and-mark-fisher-on-politics-and-music/>>, [accessed 19 July 2021].

⁵⁷ Bourdieu, “The Social Conditions...”, p. 222.

While our study of *Screen* highlighted the dangers of importing French theory without proven assertions of its worth, this final chapter demonstrates the “profitability” of such an intervention. The pressures created by *Screen*’s presentations of Lacan were not mirrored by Scritti Politti’s presentations of Derrida within the popular music landscape. Indeed, the Derrida introduced by Scritti Politti was a very attractive proposition: a philosopher, unknown to the popular music world, yet with all the illicit attraction of oppositional chic which, as we have seen throughout this thesis, is so central to French theory’s trajectory in Britain. This chapter has also highlighted a new form of appropriation of French theory through performativity. This is why Baert’s methodology on positioning is useful as it has allowed us to draw attention to the significance of the performative aspects of interviews and song-lyrics to explain the movement of French theory through Scritti Politti’s work, as well as its diffusion through the music press.

In providing such a close analysis of the pleasures of the song-text, I hope to have conveyed something of the ferment and intoxication of reading and using French theory. Indeed, it is at this juncture where we can return to the “social life of ideas” referenced in the introduction to the thesis: Scritti Politti’s work is unquestionably a powerful vehicle for “the circulation of ideas and intellectual exchange” and demonstrates French theory in Britain at its furthest remove from its original source. The strategies employed by Scritti bring together much of the earlier work of this thesis: the presentation of French theorists before an audience unfamiliar with the work; the use of French theory as a challenge to accepted Anglo-Saxon bulwarks of common sense; and the allodoxic association of theorists and theories. The fact that all of this occurs within the context of slick and sophisticated popular music ensures that Scritti Politti’s role in French theory’s British trajectory is essential for our consideration.

Thesis Conclusion: It Works In Practice...But Will It Work In Theory?

The time-span of our project has now come full circle. By 1986, Scritti Politti were at their commercial apogee and Green Gartside had become firm friends with Jacques Derrida, discussing the merits of jazz with him over dinner at the Beaubourg.¹ The ICA had cemented its position as the premier site for in-person conversations with French theorists, becoming, in its own terms, “an empire of theory”.² The institution also afforded Malcolm Bradbury the space to expound upon the cautionary tale of Henri Mensonge whom you may remember from the opening to this thesis.³ *Screen*, no longer a predominantly theoretical enterprise, was on the cusp of losing its funding from the BFI, which would finally occur in 1989, whereupon the journal officially moved from the para-academy to the actual academy, as Oxford University Press took over its publication. *New Left Review* had continued to champion and publish deeply theoretical and influential work including Fredric Jameson’s “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism”.⁴ Therefore, it is safe to say that French theory, as shown throughout this thesis, greatly impacted upon each of these sites of

¹ Green often talks of his encounters with Derrida, most vividly in the 1999 interview with John O’Reilly of *The Independent* newspaper: “I went to the Beaubourg to have dinner with him. I think his students had played him the ‘[Jacques] Derrida’ single when it first came out and he’d been intrigued by it ever since. He claimed to have kept up with any press about me. I didn’t acquit myself at all well. We were talking about music and I asked him why he had never written a book about music expressly, and he said that is the most difficult thing. In a sort of slippery Derridean way, he said something to the effect that his books aspire to the condition of musicality, that’s the loftiest aim he had. Then he said how much he liked jazz. I had a little go at him. I had used his arguments against jazz in the past in relation to ideas of spontaneity, improvisation and unmediated expression”. John O’Reilly, “My Dinner with Derrida”. In a much later BBC Wales documentary on Scritti Politti, titled “Tinseltown to the Boogie Down”, Green can be seen visiting Derrida at home in 1999. “I can see how and why our interests are crossing quite a lot”, teases Derrida at one point, “...the way [Green Gartside] mixes his voice, the songs, the words, the sentences, the way he plays with the linguistic side...this I understand. I admire and enjoy the musical embodiment of this linguistic and poetic invention”. See “Scritti Politti // Tinseltown To The Boogie Down”, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fE11zN8j1qY>>, [accessed 20 July 2021]. Professor Christopher Norris, who was also instrumental in disseminating Derrida and deconstruction to a wider audience, also remembered that he was asked by BBC Radio Wales to have a discussion with Green Gartside live on radio at some point in the early 1980s. From his recollection, he met Green beforehand and found they had practically nothing to say to each other; the radio interview was hastily abandoned. Interview with Christopher Norris, 03 July 2019.

² This term is used to describe the ICA in the 1980s in *50 Years of the Future* (ICA: London 2008), a commemorative publication, coinciding with the fiftieth anniversary of the very first ICA programme.

³ This occurred at “Crossing the Channel”, the ICA event curated by Lisa Appignanesi in late 1985.

⁴ Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism”, *NLR* 1/146, July/August 1984.

reception and intellectual scenes. Throughout this research, the theoretical method deployed has come from the sociological work of both Pierre Bourdieu and Patrick Baert, particularly Bourdieu's seminal essay on the social conditions of the international circulation of ideas and Baert's invaluable investigations into positioning and intellectual interventions. Both of these methodologies have been crucial in analysing the reception, survival and diffusion of French theory in Britain.⁵ The intellectual interventions of the key agents in promoting French theory in Britain has touched upon, or even collided with, existing forms of cultural criticism, film studies, contemporary art gallery curation and popular music. As suggested in the introduction, this emerges from French theory's emergence as an *ex nihilo* creation, one which combines oppositional chic, resistance to normativity, and an intellectual approach grounded in specific theoretical strategies. This allowed left-cultural circles to open up and incorporate not just Francophone theory, but film and feminisms as legitimate areas of interest. This departure from intellectual provincialism is key to the study: Marxism was detached from its atavistic connection with economics and re-calibrated as a form of cultural criticism; film studies was relieved of its nebulous attachment to "appreciation" to become an altogether more rigorous form of "film culture"; while feminism, with its very different view of history, was belatedly allowed to become a legitimate concern within Marxist circles. And Scritti Politti arguably went in the other direction, and allowed for a legitimation of their move towards commercial pop through readings of Derrida, Lacan, and Kristeva.

Within the context of Louis Althusser's explorations of history as a process without a subject, this intellectual provincialism became a theoretical vacuum which demanded filling.

Althusser's form of theoretical practice became the scaffold for much of the important work undertaken by *Screen* in the mid-1970s, an undertaking that was so comprehensive, it soon

⁵ See Baert, "Positioning Theory and Intellectual Interventions", p. 4.

collapsed under the weight of its own grand theorising. This leads us towards the dangers of French theory about which Raymond Williams, in writing about Lucien Goldmann, had already warned us: "...what looked the theoretical breakthrough might become, quite quickly, the methodological trap".⁶ These traps abound in using travelling theories, but my aim has not been to denigrate French theory nor offer another notice of its demise.⁷ Instead my aim has been to convey some of the richness of French theory's interactions with British intellectual and cultural life, impacting upon a variety of fields, and often resulting in wildly differing effects. This richness was often elucidated through the archival investigations, particularly through the BFI and ICA archives, which revealed the administrative undertakings and bureaucratic bottlenecks facing the agents of French theory within these institutions. However, this thesis is not just a consideration of French theory *contra* British traditional values. It is an exploration of the intoxication generated by *using* these theories. It is an attempt to understand why intellectuals, working within Britain during the late twentieth century, were so captivated by these Francophone works from such diverse fields. Juliet Mitchell, Peter Wollen, Laura Mulvey, Green Gartside were very skilled in marshalling these theories to both challenge existing norms and create new and invigorating forms of expression through essays, filmmaking, and popular music. The academic Claire Pajaczkowska neatly surmised this work as reminiscent of "pioneers and working [as if one was taking an] agit-train. It was incredibly sustaining and people were committed even though there was no glory. It was [about] being part of something new".⁸

⁶ Raymond Williams, "Literature and Sociology: In Memory of Lucien Goldmann", *NLR* 1/67, May/June 1971.

⁷ See, among others, Michael Payne ed., *Life After Theory* (New York: Continuum, 2003). A more recent tendency has been to *blame* theory for the culture wars of the early twenty-first century. For example, see Timothy Brennan, *Wars of Position* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

⁸ Interview with Claire Pajaczkowska, 10 June 2020. Pajaczkowska, along with Anthony McCall, Andrew Tyndall and Jane Weinstock made the film *Sigmund Freud's Dora* (1979), which heavily drew on the work of Jacques Lacan.

This comment also directs us towards the intellectual generosity underpinning much of this work. Works from France, as yet untranslated, were discovered, translated, published, and simply shared across different means of mediation, creating a form of theoretical revolution, whose repercussions are still being felt today. *NLR*, *Screen*, BFI Education pamphlets and the *NME* may be very different publications in orientation, but for a brief period they shared a commitment to diffusing French theory to their very different audiences. It is this unique trajectory that this thesis attempts to bring to light.

Furthermore, through the on-going programme of translations, new French theorists were also coming into purview from the mid 1980s. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's texts were steadily translated into English by the Athlone Press during the 1980s, and their importance was declared by Keith Reader in a 1987 article published in *Screen* entitled "The Scene of Action is Different".⁹ The title of Reader's article is useful for our study in that it indicates the idea of French theory as a moveable phenomenon: while the theorists, their discoverers, and the sites of reception began to change, the key facets of this cross-channel invasion – the difficulty of the texts, the sociological antagonism, the appropriation of the texts to say what the discoverer wants them to say – remain intact. By the late 1980s, the pages of the music press, particularly that of Simon Reynolds and Paul Oldfield's writings for *Melody Maker*, were teeming with references to Kristeva and Foucault, exemplifying what Mark Fisher refers to as "popular modernism".¹⁰ In this respect, the *performativity* of French theory was in full evidence, stretched so far from its original context that it was now being deployed to

⁹ Keith Reader, "The Scene of Action Is Different", *Screen*, Volume 28, Issue 3, (Summer 1987), pp 98–103. A striking example of the influence of Deleuze and Guattari on music writing in Britain is through the aesthetics and texts of Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than The Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (London: Quartet Books, 1998). See also magazines such as *ZG*, edited by Rosetta Brooks and published from 1981-1984 in London and New York by Gallery House Press, which pioneered another form of theory-influenced writing about popular culture, particularly the visual arts.

¹⁰ See "Test Dept: Where Leftist Idealism and Popular Modernism Collide", in *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher* (2004-2016), (London: Repeater, 2019), pp. 415-419.

describe left-field, and often quite nihilistic, forms of music, in a tantalising clash of high and low culture.

And what of the wider fate of French theory? And of allowing these theorists and theories to disseminate within British culture, unencumbered by cultural, disciplinary or institutional borders? We see this symbolic power today through former government advisor Dominic Cummings's blog post, where he scouted for new talent but warned against "Oxbridge English graduates who chat about Lacan at dinner parties with TV producers" or Conservative MP Liz Truss warning against ideas which "have their roots in postmodernist philosophy – pioneered by Foucault – that put societal power structures and labels ahead of individuals".¹¹ These bizarre criticisms indicate the continuing power of French theory to provoke; in eliding the singularity of the work of the theorists being referred to, these commentators still grant French theory a symbolic power where it becomes indelibly linked with a form of unfettered pretentiousness, or, worse still, a pernicious foreign influence. Many of the theorists themselves – Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault, in particular – have become so unhinged from their actual work that they circulate as floating signifiers in a manner which allows them to be captured to serve an existing agenda, one which is often used against traditional Anglo-Saxon values of empiricism, common sense, and lucidity. And while these uses of French theory cannot be empirically linked back to any singular event, I hope that this thesis does not serve as a benign, nostalgic reminder of *how-things-used-to-be* but a stark reminder of the importance of progressive, vanguardist intellectual work, one which allows

¹¹ "'Two hands are a lot' — we're hiring data scientists, project managers, policy experts, assorted weirdos...", <<https://dominiccumings.com/2020/01/02/two-hands-are-a-lot-were-hiring-data-scientists-project-managers-policy-experts-assorted-weirdos/>>, [accessed 01 March 2021]. Liz Truss's post was hastily deleted hours after its original publication.

the transnational, intellectually challenging, and even the performatively stylish to surge up and challenge the political realities of the contemporary moment.

Illustrations

- p. 8, Cartoon by Maurice Henry, originally published in *La Quinzane Litteraire*, 01 July 1967
- p. 36, *New Left Review* 1/24, March/April 1964
- p. 103, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, 2nd edition, BFI Publishing
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- p. 247, Scritti Politti, “The Word Girl”, 12” single

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