

ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT

The definitive, peer reviewed and edited version of this article is published in:

Film Studies, 14: 1, Spring 2016, pp 93-111

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7227/FS.14.0006>

Elevating the Film Review: Critics and Critical Practice at the *Monthly Film Bulletin*

Richard Lowell MacDonald
Goldsmiths, University of London

Abstract

This article focuses on the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, a magazine devoted to what is often regarded as the lowliest and most ephemeral form of film criticism: the film review. Studying the *Bulletin's* publication history, with a particular emphasis on the 1970s, the article challenges the dismissal of 'journalistically motivated' film criticism in academic discourse. It argues that the historical interest of the *Bulletin's* late period lies in its hybrid identity, a journal of record in which both accurate information and personal evaluation coexisted as values, and in which a polyphony of individual critical voices creatively worked through a routinised reviewing practice and a generic discursive format.

Keywords

criticism, film reviewing, political modernism, counter-cinema, *Monthly Film Bulletin*

Film studies established itself as an academic discipline by turning its back on film criticism. In Britain, in a context of expanding higher education provision, the push to embed the study of film in universities – an agenda supported by the British Film Institute (BFI) education department – involved the self-conscious alienation of film study from film criticism. Symptomatic of this breach, or rather enacting it, film criticism was consistently attacked in the journal of the Society of Film Teachers, *Screen*, when it was re-launched in 1971. *Screen's* editorial board announced that its freedom from the routine journalism of other film magazines, a privilege afforded it by a grant-in-aid from the BFI, provided an opportunity and a responsibility to promote

the development of theories of film. Theory, it was said, would introduce an attitude of self-awareness, rigor and self-criticism that were considered to be entirely absent from English film criticism, the achievements of which were, in Claire Johnston's withering estimation, 'almost primitive'.¹ *Screen* would 'go beyond subjective taste-ridden criticism and try to develop more systematic approaches over a wider field.'² Hostile to 'massively available criticism', *Screen* agitated for a shift in the agency producing legitimate film knowledge from cinephile magazines and the professional writers and journalists who wrote for them, to the university and educational professionals. Those of us now situated in academia are both the beneficiaries of the ambition to theorise and the inheritors of a prejudice towards writing that derives from a journalistic context. In other words, the making of film studies as an academic discipline was marked by a foundational act of boundary work which resulted in the rejection or subsequent cooption of journalistic film criticism.³ Broadly intervening in the current reconsideration of film criticism and cinephilia in film studies, this article focuses on *The Monthly Film Bulletin*, a magazine devoted to what some regard as the lowliest and most ephemeral form of film criticism: the film review. Studying its publication history, with a particular focus on the 1970s, the decade in which film studies became established in higher education, the article challenges the dismissal of 'journalistically motivated' film criticism in *Screen* and its legacy. Rather than exemplifying a tradition of anti-intellectualism, Johnston's charge against the 'established magazines' of British film criticism, the *Monthly Film Bulletin's* latter history reveals the most intellectually fertile of contact zones between domains of film culture – journalistic and educational, critical and theoretical - otherwise moving apart. The article makes a case for the critical and intellectual value of the *Bulletin's* journalistic orientation, its address to a broad cinephile readership and, in particular its proximity to and contact with the

increasingly diverse distribution and exhibition landscape in 1970s Britain, It takes issue with the notion that the most critically rigorous and reflexive of film publications acquire their distinctive personalities through polemic.⁴ Instead I argue that the historical interest of the *Bulletin's* late period lies in its uniquely hybrid, syncretic identity, a journal of record in which both accurate information and personal evaluation coexisted as values, and in which a polyphony of individual critical voices creatively worked through a routinised reviewing practice and a highly generic discursive format.

Reassessing Film Criticism

Over the last few years there has been a growing interest in engaging film criticism within film studies; not as a primitive, untutored other, evolutionary precursor to the sophistication of analytical film studies, but as a source of writing that materialises domains of film experience and imaginative, expressive response often inadequately dealt with in the modes of discourse and knowledge production sanctioned within the discipline.⁵ Criticism, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith argues in an article tracing the rise and fall of its filmic variant, is 'a form of writing applied to works of art that pursue the general through the particular and is not ashamed to be subjective in its choice of particulars and in the generalizations that it hazards on the basis of that choice.'⁶ In other words, he continues, criticism is a 'journey without maps and its justification lies in the fact that the terrain it crosses is one that can never be fully known but only observed, experienced and reported on scrupulously and yet with imagination.'⁷ That balance of scrupulous presentation and imagination, of intuitions that originate with an individual writer, and evidence that is verifiable and shareable, was to a great extent the legacy of the critical revolutions of the late 1950s and early 1960s, which set serious criticism on a path distinct from off-the-cuff opinionated reviewing. Writing in a spate

of fringe publications turned out on a shoestring during that period (*Oxford Opinion*, *Movie*, *Motion*, *Definition*), a younger generation of aspiring critics attacked establishment writers and their illustrious magazines for their lack of precise attention to visual style, for prioritizing evaluation over careful analysis and for unexamined prejudices towards popular Hollywood genre films.⁸

With a similar emphasis, Alex Clayton and Andrew Klevan also invite a reconsideration of the poor esteem in which film criticism has been held in academic film studies.⁹ With reference to Stanley Cavell's reflections on the functions of criticism they tease out the sense in which a critical perspective issues from a singular, subjective experience but one that becomes contestable when directed towards others and justified with reference to detailed evidence located in the object of criticism. They write: 'For this reason, and despite the fact that criticism by necessity originates in personal experience, the aspiration towards intersubjective understanding means that it cannot straightforwardly be called subjective.'¹⁰ Later Clayton and Klevan contrast film critical writing with the academic procedures of textual analysis that came to characterise film studies. Scholarly textual analysis performed a discourse of sobriety, adopting a 'formal demeanor' characterised by an impersonal mode of address and a 'severely curtailed choice of vocabulary' providing an aura of analytical observation uncontaminated by subjective impressions.¹¹ This bracketing out of the individual consciousness in the form of the writer responding to an art work, what Dai Vaughan has called the 'hinge between the world and its representation',¹² created an absence that had to be filled with reference, either explicit or implicit, to a generalised, abstractly conceived subject or 'spectator-in-the-text'.

The aim of the modes of textual analysis widely adopted as bearing the hallmarks of rigor within the discipline was to push past impressionistically registered details, the particularities of style and expression to the underlying structure, system of codes or devices through which meaning is produced. What is striking – as Clayton and Klevan demonstrate with reference to such theoretically dissimilar analytical procedures as the shot-by-shot semiotic analysis of the orchestration of point of view in a single sequence by Raymond Bellour and the formalist narrative analysis of Bordwell and Thompson – is how much of a film's diverse expressive and aesthetic resources slip through the analytical grid and go either unobserved or unmentioned: movements, sensations, mood, posture, gesture, sound, texture, colour are all so much aesthetic collateral to be discarded in a process of analytical refinement. Undoubtedly there were discoveries to be made, and persuasive readings of individual films, through such analytical procedures, but there were costs to academicisation too, as the breadth of approaches to film writing typical of an earlier phase of film criticism narrowed to the repetition of rarefied analytical procedures of interest only to other trained specialists.

These important reassessments of film criticism as a form of writing must be supplemented, however, in order to grasp the agency of a sentient, writing critic within the film cultural context of the authoritative critical institutions which filter and disseminate criticism. Through these institutions, critics furnish or refine the arguments that establish the value of a particular work of art. They exercise judgement about artistic or cultural value and in collaboration with exhibiting and promotional institutions, such as film festivals, perform a discovery function with respect to new film artists and movements. These discoveries, bringing new filmmakers to public visibility, in turn inform the selection activities of distributors. Critics also seek to

persuade their readers concerning the possibilities inherent in a newly conceived work. Their advocacy might involve claiming kinship or proximity between new work and a work whose value has already been recognised and established, and it may draw explicitly on a theoretical rationale. Often it provides readers with a rationale for what has been done in the work, suggesting ways to appreciate and respond to it, bearing on the possible experiences it offers to an audience. Commenting on art worlds broadly conceived, Howard Becker has observed that the function of criticism becomes particularly influential when engaged in explaining the necessity for formal or stylistic departures, which is to say when it demonstrates the limitations to previous criteria of judgement and makes the case, often underpinned by explicit theoretical rationale, for the legitimacy of alternative ways to appreciate and value the art work.¹³ Films that in one way or another transgress conventional practice inevitably defy some of the expectations held by viewers. And as Raymond Williams has suggested, if the demands and expectations of established taste and criteria of value are to be challenged by experimentation and artistic innovation, as ought to happen in a healthy democratic culture, then open discussion that seeks out and maintains contact with the public is required.¹⁴ To historically grasp the force and directions of this advocacy work over time requires us to take the critical institution, its historical function, its material organisation of critical practice and its structured relations with other film cultural institutions as our object of study. But given the nature of criticism as a form of writing it remains necessary and relevant to consider and appreciate the contribution of individual critics. This negotiation of individual writers with the material institutional forms of a particular historical critical practice underpins this article's subject and method of investigation.

From Appraisals by Committee to Authored Reviews

Monthly Film Bulletin was published by the British Film Institute every month for fifty-seven years, from 1934 until 1991, when it was partially incorporated into *Sight and Sound*. For much of this span of time its reputation was that of a rather solid reference publication, laudable, ‘unobtrusive’, as one BFI annual report put it, and of minority interest.¹⁵ Its purpose was to be a comprehensive guide to all films licensed for exhibition with the UK Board of Trade. For reasons I will come on to discuss, my interest is in the magazine of the 1970s, a decade that saw it rise to meet the challenge of the most formally challenging and diverse filmmaking practice, and new currents of film scholarship. For convenience the *Bulletin’s* history can be broadly divided into three phases (1932-48; 1948-71; 1971-91), with the transitions from one phase to another occurring at moments of crisis and renewal in the BFI.¹⁶ The trajectory over the course of these three phases constituted a shift from a wholly impersonal, institutional ‘voice’ to a more polyphonous critical space in which the individual voices and identities of writers was more prominent. And yet something of the earlier history persisted in the material format of the individual review itself, which proved extraordinarily durable.

If criticism is defined as judgement and intuition originating in the personal experience of the individual writer, then it is questionable that the *Monthly Film Bulletin* was a space for film criticism during this first period of its publication. A defining characteristic of the early British Film Institute was the organisation’s attempts to construct an atmosphere of authority through the proliferating presence of expert committees and panels. For the first twenty-five years the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, available on subscription to the BFI’s members along with its sister publication *Sight*

and Sound, consisted of appraisals of ‘educational’ and ‘entertainment’ films collectively authored by the BFI’s many subject committees. The *Bulletin* adopted an approach to film reviewing which conceived the review primarily as an assessment of suitability for specific audiences, primarily the users of educational films. The user or consumer orientation of this reviewing practice was stated explicitly in a 1938 article for the *Cine-Technician* written anonymously by ‘an official of the Institute’. Echoing the value orientation of *The Film in National Life*, the report which led to establishment of the Institute, the official was at pains to position the Institute at the service of the ordinary cinemagoer:

We try to help through lectures and or publications – the average man in industrial areas and in the country to shop for his films... We attempt to tell him in our Monthly Film Bulletin what the entertainment films of the month are about and whether they are good of their kind – i.e. whether they are good westerns, or love stories, or dramas and whether his children are likely to enjoy them. We never attempt to preach and tell him that this film, although boring, is good because of its art and that one, although thoroughly amusing, is bad because it is produced to succeed commercially.¹⁷

‘Good of their kind’ implies an approach to the exercise of judgement grounded in processes of horizontal categorization, particular films suitable for particular needs and interests, rather than a singular hierarchy of value. The identity the Institute carved out for itself depended significantly on this conception of a common-sense service to the ‘average viewer’, a brand of evaluation that would not ruffle too many feathers.

As Nowell-Smith relates, both the *Bulletin* and *Sight and Sound* were revitalized as a central plank of the reforms of the BFI made by Denis Forman who became its director in 1949.¹⁸ Forman persuaded the team of young Oxford graduates (Gavin Lambert, Penelope Houston, Lindsay Anderson and Karel Reisz) then producing the film magazine *Sequence* to join the BFI and edit and produce its two periodicals. Lambert introduced a new hierarchy in the *Bulletin*'s reviews; longer notices, written by one or other of the core team of critics, identified by their initials, would be reserved for films considered to merit fuller treatment. Films given shorter reviews were unsigned.

The role of editor at the *Bulletin* changed hands several times during the 1950s and 1960s: Penelope Houston, David Robinson, Tom Milne, Peter John Dyer and David Wilson all did double duty in that role and as assistant editor for *Sight and Sound*. Despite these changes of personnel there appear to have been few shifts of editorial policy with any noticeable impact on *MFB*'s critical practice. Indeed, the continuity of its practice can be gleaned from successive BFI annual reports for the period, the author of which clearly struggled to find something new to say each year, settling for a variation on: the *Monthly Film Bulletin* 'continues to provide detailed factual information and critical comment on all feature films shown in this country and a number of short films.'¹⁹ The magazine's primary readership were BFI members who benefited from discounted subscription, but there were important secondary readerships for its reviews, notably audiences for National Film Theatre screenings. These screenings frequently used *Bulletin* reviews as an authoritative critical source for programme notes. Long-standing contributor to the *Bulletin*, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith has suggested that in writing a review for *Monthly Film Bulletin* one was also consciously addressing National Film Theatre attendees and anticipated the review's reception accompanying the film in this specific context. *Monthly Film Bulletin* reviews

were also referenced and occasionally cited in extract in the film society movement's reviewing publication *Film News*, and incorporated into the programme notes of individual societies.

In 1971 Jan Dawson – who had joined the *Bulletin* as assistant editor the previous year – was appointed editor and the magazine was substantially revamped. Some changes were relatively minor: alterations in appearance and cover design that suggested a desire to appeal to a wider readership.²⁰ Others, however, indicated a significant rethink of its reviewing practice. Previously published in quarto size, the magazine was enlarged to A4 and the cover redesigned to incorporate for the first time a black and white still selected from one of the films under review. The postwar *MFB* had been spatially organized according to two principles: entertainment films were grouped together and distinguished from 'current non-fiction and short films'. Reviews of entertainment films predominated and were divided in turn between longer and shorter 'notices'. Both long and short reviews were composed of three paragraph-length sections: the credits, a synopsis and a critical assessment. Long reviews were followed by the magazine's own rating system of audience suitability (A: for Adults only, B: adults and adolescents, through to D, meaning 'films for children over 7...which children will enjoy and which contain no frightening or disturbing elements'), and by the author's initials; although no list of contributors was provided regular readers would no doubt have been able to identify the critic. Short notices were written anonymously and received, in addition to a suitability rating, a numerical grading of the film's quality – with three grades: good (of its type), average and poor. This rather complicated yet crude rating and ranking apparatus was modified in the new *Bulletin*: the audience suitability grading was scrapped, as were the quality grades that had been applied,

curiously, only to shorter notices. The *Bulletin* retained a vestigial rating system, a star awarded to outstanding films, for another couple of years until this too was discontinued. Long and short notices were no longer distinguished under separate headings, neither were entertainment and non-fiction. Instead feature films were simply listed alphabetically and followed by short films similarly arranged. Every review now appeared with a byline identifying the critic, and the inside cover listed the magazine's editors and all contributors.

The new prominence given to the names of individual writers coincided with an expansion in the number of critics writing for the magazine. The new *Bulletin*, first under Jan Dawson, who was succeeded as editor in 1973 by Richard Combs, featured a significantly larger pool of freelance contributors: thirty-six writers contributed reviews in 1971, and this number continued to grow. The *MFB* of the 1950s and 1960s was the product of a fairly close circle of writers all of whom wrote regularly as senior contributors for the *MFB's* sister publication *Sight and Sound*: Tom Milne, David Wilson, John Gillett, David Robinson and Penelope Houston were prominent among them. Whilst these critics – and Milne, Wilson and Gillett in particular – continued to write regularly for the *Bulletin*, their reviews were increasingly juxtaposed with those produced by the new freelance contributors, including a younger generation of critics, writers in their early to mid-twenties who had not established critical reputations through contributions to *Sight and Sound*. New contributors like Tony Rayns (who would be a prolific reviewer for the next two decades), coming as they did from outside the pool of established writers, broadened the critical investments, intellectual backgrounds and aesthetic tastes found in the *Bulletin*.

The greater diversity of critical positions and expressive styles that resulted from the opening up of the magazine in the early 1970s contrasted with the impersonal house style and collective critical line that characterised previous decades, a product of both authorial anonymity and the relatively tight pool of regular contributors.²¹ Reflecting on his role as editor during the *Bulletin's* late period Richard Combs noted the extent to which editorial processes increasingly depended on mobilising and encouraging a critics' personal interests, assigning films to critics based on the depth of their knowledge of the genre or area of film practice. Translating these interests into text inevitably meant negotiating the material constraint of the review format, limitations of space, layout and function. What remained unchanged during the *Bulletin's* revamp was a uniformly imposed three-section format for every film review: credits, synopsis, critical interpretation and evaluation. Some critics chafed at these constraints and their contribution to the magazine was consequently short-lived. Another material constraint on the pursuit of personal critical agendas was time. It was rare for critics to have the time or opportunity to view a film more than once. Combs recalled that Robin Wood's period as *Bulletin* reviewer was brought to an end due to the critic's reluctance to conform to the review's fundamental requirement to present a more or less definitive critical opinion on a film. Having been assigned a new Bergman film to review Wood's subsequent text was a list of initial reflections and impressions of the film that he felt could only be extended and consolidated on further viewing, which the magazine's pressing deadlines precluded.

The longevity of the *Bulletin's* review format was in part a testament to the high esteem in which factual information – correct and full credits and accurately summarised synopses, background research drawing on other sources – was held at the *Bulletin*.

Historically, the provision of accurate production credits within the *Bulletin's* reviews can be seen as a consequence of the BFI's identity, during its early phase, to facilitate film culture as a clearing-house of information. In the mid-1970s the informational function of the magazine was renewed and extended. In March 1976 *MFB* editor Richard Combs and assistant editor Rosenbaum took the decision to permanently drop from the back page the 'critics choice' feature, a tabulation of the star ratings awarded to a selection of the more prominent films on release by critics from *MFB*, *Sight and Sound* and the mainstream press. This was replaced by a monthly information led supplement featuring filmographies, bibliographies of critical writing by filmmakers such as Jacques Rivette and Eric Rohmer, translations and republications of historical film criticism (Franju on Lang), republications of interviews from academic journals (an interview with Yvonne Rainer republished from *Camera Obscura*), and short original features linked to films under review (for example Tony Rayns on George Kuchar, Kevin Brownlow on filming *Winstanley* (1975) and David Wilson on postwar Greek political history tied to Angelopolous's film *The Travelling Players* (1975)). This development was consistent with the magazine's shift away from impressionistic ratings and signalled its increasing distance from the reviewing practices of the mainstream press, much to the chagrin of prominent newspaper critics.²² It is also suggestive of the *Bulletin's* relationship with trends in film scholarship, specifically the critique of speculative history in favour of more systematic and methodologically rigorous approaches to researching film history emerging at that time.²³

***Monthly Film Bulletin* and the 1970s film distribution and exhibition landscape**

The *Bulletin* occupied a unique position in the field of criticism: a *sui generis* hybrid incorporating elements of the film trade press, the library catalogue and cinephile film

criticism. A fundamental aspect of its identity was its remit to be a comprehensive reference source on all films shown publicly in the UK. In this respect the magazine bears a superficial resemblance to the film trade magazine with the closest ties to the film industry exhibition and distribution sectors, *Kine Weekly* and its rival, later successor, *Today's Cinema*, both of which provided regular bulletins of information on films offered for public exhibition, alongside film business news. But the terse film reviews in these trade publications were intended to guide readers in the film business. Appraisal of a film's commodity value was therefore of paramount importance. With column space at a premium the mainstream press critics reviewed the week's new films on a far more selective basis, prioritising films on wide release therefore deemed to be of interest to a paper's readers and excluding the detailed credits and synopsis that were essential components of a *Bulletin* review. The leading film periodicals *Sight and Sound* and *Films and Filming* were likewise selective, their coverage of commercially distributed films, generally prioritising films about which there was an established critical consensus. In contrast, the *Monthly Film Bulletin* positioned itself as a comprehensive survey of films in distribution, including the catalogues of independent distributors primarily serving non-commercial and non-theatrical exhibitors like film societies. Whilst remaining responsive to an evolving distribution and exhibition landscape the *Bulletin's* critical priorities were less markedly determined by either commercial scale, the films given general release, or critical consensus, than other film reviewing practices.

Through the late 1960s and 1970s this landscape was formed by three conditioning factors. Firstly, and of greatest significance, was the contraction of audiences for mainstream commercial cinema. Audience numbers dropped vertiginously in the

1960s, and continued to fall throughout the following decade, only reaching their nadir in 1984 at which point the cinema audience had decreased an extraordinary 89 per cent from its postwar high in 1946. The effects of competition from television and other domestic entertainment were compounded by the loss of many screens as cinema chains pursued a strategy of preemptively selling off their less profitable theatres. Secondly, the relatively permissive censorship regime that had prevailed in the 1960s under John Trevelyan at the British Board of Film Classification continued. In 1970, the classification system was revised so that the X certificate, which had been introduced almost twenty years earlier, applied to those over the age of 18, rather than 16. This change led to a progressive liberalisation of the censor's judgements, and a greater willingness to test them, especially with the inclusion of explicit sexual content in films for commercial exhibition. Both this liberalisation and the prolonged crisis in film exhibition would open the door to a proliferation of sexploitation genre films, combining soft-core sex with lowbrow comedy or exotic travelogue. Many independent cinemas lower down the distribution chain and unable to secure guaranteed access to the most popular first-run releases – a diminishing supply due to Hollywood's retrenchment – turned to other genres and sources of films, including home-grown and imported sexploitation films. Meanwhile the art cinema circuit was expanding, if we take that term to include both the regional subsidized theatres, the sizeable amateur film society sector and more commercially exposed operators, who also found that audiences could be found for more sexually permissive material imported from the continent. A third factor shaping the distribution and exhibition landscape was the formation of small-scale independent film production, distribution and exhibition collectives committed to politically and/or aesthetically radical cinema. The seminal initiative of this kind was the formation of the London Filmmakers Co-operative in

1966, initially as a distributor, later expanding into exhibition and filmmaking, with the goal of furthering access to experimental film in the UK. As Knight and Thomas have documented, a number of radical film production collectives were established in the following years, linked to movements of social activism, feminism, the labour movement, anti-racism and Black political activism.²⁴ Whilst some groups undertook their own distribution, new independent distribution initiatives like The Other Cinema, established in 1970, developed expanding distribution catalogues of international and domestically made radical cinema.²⁵ *Monthly Film Bulletin* devoted considerable space on a regular basis to films offered by these independent distributors.

Any single issue of the *Bulletin* featured inside its covers reviews of films that were the products of wildly different modes of film practice and which traversed an increasingly fragmented distribution circuit, finding their intended destination at very different, geographically dispersed and socially differentiated sites of exhibition. Consequently, we find the most eye-opening juxtapositions on the pages of the *Bulletin* during this period: *Black Emanuelle 2 Goes East* sits on the page next to Jonas Mekas's *Lost, Lost, Lost*; *Confessions of a Danish Cover Girl* next to Godard's *Numero Deux*; *The Erotic Adventures of Pinocchio* with James Benning's *11X14*. The *Monthly Film Bulletin* was not a space for purists. What strikes a contemporary reader is the sheer volume of adult films that the *Bulletin* staff had to routinely review. According to the *Bulletin*'s editor Richard Combs, the magazine's remit to comprehensively review all films in distribution regardless of their quality or genre was fundamental to its ability to project a distinctive identity as a journal of record. As much as this could be perceived as a hindrance, burdening the magazine and its reviewers with recording the existence of a multitude of sexploitation films, it nevertheless had strategic value, enabling coverage

of less commercial and less ephemeral areas of distribution. Another sense in which the *Bulletin* was an index of a distribution landscape was the fact that many of these reviews also included detailed commentary not only on the film as a text, but also the circulating print in all its material fallability: the various versions of a film in existence, the cuts imposed by the censor, the quality of subtitling, infelicities of dubbing or music added insensitively by a distributor.

***Monthly Film Bulletin* and The Politics of Film Form**

An unusually broad range of film practice was reviewed in *The Monthly Film Bulletin* by writers of diverse intellectual formation and critical commitments. Where a more polemical film magazine would have excluded writers who did not share a common approach to cinema, diversity of critical approach was fundamental to the *Bulletin* which brought critical adversaries together between its covers. Writers associated with *Screen* (including Ben Brewster, Mike Wallington and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith) were invited to contribute to the magazine, as were critics linked to *Movie*, such as Robin Wood, along with regular contributors to *Sight and Sound*. A frequent criticism made by *Screen*, on critical film writing in Britain, was that there was a prevailing lack of depth and seriousness. Alan Lovell writes for example: ‘Criticism is still principally a matter of expressing a personal taste that needs no other justification than that it is to be considered to be a superior taste: an impressionistic account of the critic’s immediate response to a film is still the characteristic method...’²⁶ Johnstone similarly contends: ‘All the critic is required to give is an impressionistic account of his immediate responses on viewing a film.’ Consequently, she adds: ‘If the work cannot be assimilated to the critic’s own experience, it is written off as exotic, or if necessary, simply a ‘failure’.²⁷ In one respect the conditions under which the *Bulletin* was

produced were not dissimilar from newspaper reviewing, critics were rarely in a position to watch a film they were reviewing more than once. But the ability to draw from a wide pool of writers and ‘cast’ critics and films, pairing knowledgeable writers with subjects in which they were interested produced a very different kind of review, one enriched by the deployment of a broad contextual frame of reference. Take for example Tom Milne’s *MFB* review of Oshima’s intense masterpiece *Death by Hanging* (1968) compared with John Russell Taylor’s review of the same film for *The Times*. Taylor’s review exemplifies the characteristics highlighted by Johnstone and Lovell in their justifiable critique of the state of ‘orthodox’ film criticism: the review is an apparently off-the cuff expression of taste offered without further elaboration, rounded off with a condescending tone. Thus Taylor opens his review: ‘...Death by Hanging [is] as puzzling a piece as we have been confronted with for some time now. It leaves me with the feeling that I can’t make head nor tail of it, and, worse, with precious little desire to try.’²⁸ By contrast Milne’s review drew insightfully on his detailed knowledge of Brecht’s writings and practice and intimate familiarity with the plays of Jean Genet, an important creative inspiration in Oshima’s cinema. Milne had begun his professional career as a theatre critic at the magazine *Encore*, and in that context was a figure who shaped the first-wave of Brechtianism in British theatre criticism of the 1950s and 1960s.²⁹ Significantly the adjective Brechtian is not used as an empty signifier of the critic’s apparent erudition but is explored through a sympathetic discussion of specific cinematic devices and their effects. Milne writes, in one particularly stimulating sentence towards the end of the review:

Indeed the film is Brechtian throughout: in the chapter headings which baldly announce the point of the sequence to follow, robbing it of narrative

suspense in order to crystallise its meaning; in the absurd reenactments of R's life and crimes by the prison officers, interpreting them both for him and the audience, which observe Brecht's dictum (preface to *The Mother*) that the actor "must make himself observed standing *between* the spectator and the text"; and above all in the functional beauty of Oshima's superbly geometrical, black and white compositions, which allow the texture and meaning of objects (the uniforms, the priest's cassock, the noose, the knife, the bare walls in their various transformations) to emerge fully.³⁰

Another example of the advantages of pairing film and critic so as to produce highly personal and knowledgeable writing can be found in Tony Rayns' review of the Japanese erotic genre film *Violated Angels* (1967). Opening his review with a reflection on the challenges of approaching Japanese cinema out of the context of its original circulation Rayns proceeds to inform his readers of the genre conventions of the 'so-called Eroducton' genre which are 'short, cheaply made features usually shown in triple-bills in Japan – which deal exclusively with the sex-and-violence subjects that strict state censorship still keeps to an evasive minimum in major studio productions.'³¹ The substance of Rayns' review, strengthened by insightful biographical information about the filmmaker, the censorship regime in Japan, the film's blighted exhibition history in Japan and the factual event on which the film is based, concerns the complex and highly reflexive dialogue that *Violated Angels*, made by a veteran of the Eroducton genre, Koji Wakamatsu, enters into with that genre's misogynistic conventions. The review concludes with a thoughtful comparison between the anti-authoritarian aesthetics of Wakamatsu's film with those of Oshima, as an equally 'brave and vital attempt to broach areas that remain taboo at deeper levels than those that preoccupy the

critic. By no means did every film under review benefit from such felicities of pairing but when they did the results significantly elevated the standard of criticism.

Undoubtedly some of the *Monthly Film Bulletin's* most arresting and subtle writing in the late 1960s and 1970s came out of serious and sustained critical encounters with the late flowering of modernist European auteur cinema (filmmakers such as Bergman, Buñuel, Pasolini, Kluge, Fassbinder, Syberberg, Bertolucci, Rivette, Godard, Antonioni, Jansco and many others). Regular *MFB* critics, notably Jonathan Rosenbaum (who was assistant editor from 1973 to 1975) and Tony Rayns were also knowledgeable and sympathetic commentators on the formal strategies of counter-cinema. A grounding in political modernism, as Rodowick has retrospectively termed the anti-illusionistic discursive framework of 1970s film theory, constituted an important area of common aesthetic ground between some prominent critics at the *Bulletin* and theorists at *Screen*.³³ Not that any such common ground was admitted on the pages of *Screen*, where productive adversarial postures could easily slide into self-mythologisation of its vanguard role. An example of this investment in its own isolation and singularity can be found in the preface to a 1974 *Screen* interview with Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen about their film *Penthesilea: Queen of the Amazons* (1974). The interviewers Paul Willemen and Claire Johnston stridently emphasised the polemical character of the published interview, given that both the ideas discussed and the film itself were 'totally aberrant when seen in the context of British film culture at the present time.'³⁴ In keeping with the informational tone of the *Bulletin* and its mediating role, readers of Jonathan Rosenbaum's review of *Penthesilea* in December that year were pointed in the direction of the *Screen* interview, described as a useful supplement to the film. Rosenbaum's review sympathetically elucidates the film's

formal strategies, which through their accumulation and juxtaposition foreground the question of *how* one perceives the mythical figure of *Penthesilea*. In the closing sentences, Rosenbaum writes that *Penthesilea* ‘suggests a beginning – a step forward in the European avant-garde that cross fertilises more active currents (from the American structural film to *Tel Quel*) than this review could hope to enumerate. An object for reflection and inquiry more than a finished statement, it is a theoretical do-it-yourself kit – or stated differently – an exploratory tool of the first importance.’³⁵

This review exemplifies the *Bulletin's* engagements with the currents of political modernism. Rosenbaum, Rayns, Verina Glaessner, Rosalind Delmar and others were knowledgeable and appreciative but independently minded critics of avant-garde films. In his February 1975 review of *Wavelength* (1967), a still from which graced that issue's cover, Rosenbaum again referenced other sources of commentary on the film (Manny Farber's criticism, Snow's writings and statements in *Film Culture*, *Cinim*) whilst looking to convey what he enthusiastically termed the ‘epoch-making fascination’ of a film that ‘proposes like few films before it a model of cinema as perceptual and philosophical investigation and is witty and sensible enough about its own aim to phrase its journey partially within the contextual framework of a mystery thriller.’³⁶ Slipping into the first person plural Rosenbaum's review aims to register the richness of the ‘thorough going education’ of *Wavelength*, a film that ‘redirects our attentions while expanding the possibilities of what “subject matter” on a screen entails’. As with the review of *Penthesilia* the critic intimates that here too the public are confronted by an object for reflection and inquiry, one that in Rosenbaum's metaphor will ‘take years to taste and chew properly, much less digest. In the meantime,

for an open mind, attached to equally open eyes and ears, it provides an intoxicating adventure.³⁷

Alongside its critical engagement with avant-garde, experimental and underground films in distribution in the 1970s, the *Bulletin* deserves to be acknowledged as a source of radical critical writing on another important strand of political modernist cinema: post-Brechtian narrative cinema. The *Bulletin's* engagement with the work of filmmakers Straub and Huillet is especially instructive.³⁸ Screenings were rare and – although a number of magazines had featured interviews with Straub – sympathetic critical commentary was sparse. *Othon* (1970) was shown at the UK National Film Theatre in 1971 and reviewed on that occasion in the *Monthly Film Bulletin* by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. In the mid-1970s there were signs of growing critical interest in Straub and Huillet's films. In 1974 Martin Walsh wrote an extended piece in the newly founded journal *Jump Cut*, which contextualized Straub and Huillet's work in relation to the critique of illusionist aesthetics in the tradition of Brecht, Vertov and Godard.³⁹ Through detailed analyses of individual films Walsh carefully attempted to illuminate the strategies of deconstruction in Straub's films, and made a case for the political value of an aesthetic that foregrounded the materiality of the medium rather than representational transparency.

The *Bulletin's* focus on the work of Straub and Huillet was both informational and critical. Acting as a clear statement of intent the first back cover information feature, following the removal of the critic's choice feature, was a compilation of references to published resources on Straub and Huillet: interviews, scripts and other statements and texts in German, French, Italian, Spanish and English.⁴⁰ Inside the covers of the March

issue the *Bulletin* included reviews of four Straub-Huillet films acquired for distribution by The Other Cinema. The two features *History Lessons* (1972) and *Not Reconciled* (1965) and two shorts were reviewed by four of *MFB*'s critics: Rosenbaum, Rayns, Jill Forbes and Yehuda Safran. Underlying the way the *Bulletin* diverged from the exigencies of the trade press, this appears to have been a decision prompted less by the pretext of a specific exhibition event (such as a National Film Theatre retrospective) than by the editors' assessment of the contribution that the *Bulletin* as an institution could make to the critical and theoretical debate over Straub and Huillet's work, stimulated in part by the filmmakers' appearance at the 1975 Edinburgh Film Festival. The *Bulletin*'s focus on Straub and Huillet can be contrasted with that of *Screen*. The latter's enthusiasm for the filmmakers, following the example of *Cahiers du Cinema*, was principally channelled into reprinting the scripts for *History Lessons* and *Introduction to Arnold Schoenberg's Accompaniment to a Cinematographic Scene* in 1976.⁴¹ Several years later, on the occasion of a New York retrospective, Rosenbaum criticised this approach and lamented the lack of quality criticism on Straub-Huillet: 'The most familiar act of piety towards [Straub-Huillet films], by now something of an international mania, is to print one of their scripts – which practically everyone does and no-one else reads.'⁴² Meanwhile, the mainstream press scarcely discussed their work at all.⁴³

The four *MFB* reviews in the March 1976 issue possess the stylistic stamp of their authors but have common features, indicative of a shared reading formation and critical strategy. First, all assumed an auteurist framing, insofar as each explicitly relates the formal qualities of the particular film under discussion to those of a larger series of works by the same filmmakers and to statements by the filmmaker in interview. (As an

aside it is interesting to note that none of reviewers grapples head-on with the challenge of the filmmakers' collaborative partnership to conventional notions of auteurism.) For example, Jill Forbes regards the 'insistent contrapuntal structure' of *Introduction to Arnold Schoenberg's Accompaniment to a Cinematographic Scene* (1973) to be consistent across many Straub films.⁴⁴ Furthermore, she also offers an assessment of the film's significance within the oeuvre: 'the most perfect small-scale illustration of the Straub method, [which] helps us to understand in what sense the political claims he has made for earlier films, *Bach* in particular, could be true.' Second, each critic mobilises a range of cultural and intellectual references (filmic, literary and philosophical) in order to more clearly identify and elaborate on the respective work's distinctive qualities. One obvious element of the intellectual hinterland of the reviews is contemporaneous work in film theory and avant-garde practice, most evidently the theorisation of counter-cinema and reflections on the materialism of film.⁴⁵ Rosenbaum considers the structuring presence of *materialism*, italicized in the original, in *Not Reconciled*, contrasting this as an aesthetic impulse and strategy from the lyricism that bridges and binds fragmentary episodes in Alain Resnais' *Je t'aime, je t'aime* (1968) and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*.⁴⁶ Rayns similarly attends to the viewer's experience of establishing connections between 'different levels of discourse' and across the disparate fragments of *The Bridegroom*, a film 'without a dominant unifying diegesis', in which 'insistence on the materiality of the medium...provid[es] the common base.'⁴⁷ Like a number of *Bulletin* reviews of similar films, there is a refreshingly provisional and contingent character to Rayns's reading of *The Bridegroom*, the conjunction of formal and thematic resonances he enumerates being only fraction of the connections made possible by 'the density of Straub's assemblage'.⁴⁸ Other reviews (see for example Rosenbaum's review of Dreyer's

Vampyr 1932⁴⁹) explicitly conduct dialogues with emergent film theories and their analytical procedures. But even when the intellectual moorings of these critical positions are evident, they are not overbearing. As befits a film review they help illuminate a particular film alongside other ways – images, metaphors – that unlock the film's complex forms: Forbes's 'contrapuntal' structure or Rosenbaum's evocative description of *Not Reconciled* as a 'lacunary' film.

Among the most intriguing aspects of *Monthly Film Bulletin* during this period was the way critics wrestled with the constraints inherent in the publication's format. Unable to breach the three paragraph format of each review, the third paragraph devoted to interpretation and assessment elongated considerably to accommodate a fuller expression of the writers' interests. This was particularly noticeable for films reviewed in the magazine's Retrospective section, introduced to deal with rereleased films from the past. Despite the prevalence of experimental films, plot synopses were an apparently non-negotiable component of the review. Consequently throughout the 1970s it became increasingly common for critics, required to provide a clear synopsis for films which themselves deconstructed coherent narrative syntax, to open their reviews with a meta-commentary on the impossibilities or irony of plot summary. In several notable instances, such as Rosenbaum's write-up of *Vampyr*, this unsummarisable quality serves as the springboard for the evaluation that follows: 'If there are few films in narrative cinema as inimical to the notion of a synopsis as Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr*, this is essentially because the narrative conventions that it uses are largely present to be contested and dismantled.'⁵⁰ Similarly, Ian Christie began his review of Dovzhenko's *Arsenal* (1929) thus: 'It is instructive to attempt a plot synopsis of *Arsenal*. Quite apart from the difficulty of identifying characters and events with any certainty, the exercise

actually creates a largely spurious “narrative” of spatio-temporal continuity, cause and effect, which is not supported by Dovzhenko’s remarkable syntax.’ This syntax and Dovzhenko’s expressionist style, Christie goes on to explain, were an attempt to resolve the contradictory political demands that surrounded the commissioning of the film in late 1920s Soviet Union.⁵¹ In 1982 the magazine was expanded to include two or three contextual articles each month, along the lines of the existing back page feature and linked to the films under review. The *Monthly Film Bulletin* continued in this format until it was folded into *Sight and Sound* which was revamped under a new editor in 1991.

In closing, let us return to Nowell-Smith’s evocative description of criticism as a ‘journey without maps’, a metaphor implying the individual critic’s openness to discovery that resonates with V. F. Perkins’ critique of the direction of an earlier film aesthetics from general a priori positions to particular judgements of individual works. By contrast, this conception of criticism insists on a proximity with its object, its defining quality as an encounter between an individual writer and the particularities of the object of criticism, shared with others. Although *Monthly Film Bulletin* was not solely a forum for radical film criticism, it provided authoritative advocacy for the ‘unofficial canon’ of ‘political modernist’ films, whilst also shaping the critical and evaluative frameworks that mediated their reception. Nevertheless, it was not the *Bulletin*’s function to be partisan for a specific aesthetic tendency, a particular type of film or mode of film practice in the way a ‘little magazine’ might be. Behind the apparent surface homogeneity of the review format, the heterogeneity of critical investments, approaches and styles – as concretely embodied in writers of different generations and intellectual and critical formations – coupled with the magazine’s remit

for comprehensive and information-rich coverage account for its enduring interest and freshness. In that respect the *Bulletin* was able to provide endorsement, provisional and qualified, for the strategies of formal deconstruction without turning these same strategies into a collectively held set of prescriptive expectations, let alone a permanent aesthetic hierarchy. Nearly a quarter of a century has passed since *Monthly Film Bulletin* ceased publication, its reviewing function absorbed into *Sight and Sound*. I have portrayed the magazine in its final phase as a contact zone, critically engaged with cinema in all its manifestations, drawing a wide range of film writers of different generations into its orbit, and creatively engaging theoretical and critical discourse from other areas of film culture, absorbing these into its critical frameworks. Long after the demise of the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, its reviews possess an impressive afterlife. Resurrected by DVD releases of cinema's recent past and by internet cinephilia, both the reviews and the reviewing practice from which they came are ripe for further historical recovery.⁵²

Acknowledgements

With thanks to Richard Combs, Jonathan Rosenbaum and David McGilivray for sharing insights and to Mattias Frey for comments and suggestions.

¹ Claire Johnston, 'Film Journals: Britain and France', *Screen*, 12:1, 1971, 42.

² 'Editorial', *Screen*, 12:1, 1971, 5.

³ Dudley Andrew makes a similar argument in his penetrating criticism of the 'narcissistic' historiography underpinning the first two volumes of the *Cahiers du Cinema* anthology edited by Jim Hillier. Dudley Andrew, 'Historical Critique and the History of Criticism: *Cahiers du Cinema*, the 1950s and *Cahiers du Cinema*, the

1960s, ed. Jim Hillier,' *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism and Film Theory* 18, 1988, pp127-136.

⁴ See for example Claire Johnston, 'Film Journals: Britain and France', *Screen*, 12:1, 1971

⁵ For earlier interventions see: Dudley Andrew, 'Historical Critique and the History of Criticism: Cahiers du Cinema, the 1950s and Cahiers du Cinema, the 1960s, ed. Jim Hillier,' *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism and Film Theory* 18, 1988, pp127-136; Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Placing Movies: The Practice of Film Criticism*, Berkely: University of California Press, 1995. More recent scholarship on film criticism includes Mattias Frey and Cecilia Sayad (ed.), *Film Criticism in the Digital Age*, Rutgers University Press, 2015. Interest in film criticism has also been driven by the recent publication of anthologies of prominent critics: see Henry K Miller (ed.) *The Essential Raymond Durgnat*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014; Michael Temple and Karen Smolens (eds.) *Decades Never Start on Time: A Richard Roud Anthology*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014.

⁶ Nowell-Smith, 'The Rise and Fall of Film Criticism,' *Film Quarterly* 62:1, 2008,
⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ See Mattias Frey, *The Permanent Crisis of Film Criticism: The Anxiety of Authority*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014, pp. 61-79; Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'The Sight and Sound Story, 1932-1992' in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Christophe Dupin (eds), *The British Film Institute, Government and Film Culture, 1933-2000*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012, 237-251.

⁹ Alex Clayton and Andrew Klevan (eds), *The Language and Style of Film Criticism*, London: Routledge, 2011.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

¹² Richard MacDonald and Martin Stollery, 'Dai Vaughan:"Between a Word and a Thing/You Encounter Only Yourself"', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 8.3, 2011, 445.

¹³ Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

¹⁴ Raymond Williams, *Communications*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970.

¹⁵ *British Film Institute Annual Report*, London: British Film Institute, 1953, no pagination.

¹⁶ See Nowell-Smith and Dupin (ed.), *The British Film Institute, Government and Film Culture 1933-2000*.

¹⁷ ‘What is This British Film Institute?’ *Cine-Technician*, 4:17, September-October 1938, 88.

¹⁸ Nowell-Smith, ‘The Sight and Sound Story, 1932-1992’.

¹⁹ British Film Institute, *Annual Report 1957-58*

²⁰ In 1974 the *Bulletin*’s monthly circulation was just under 11,000, more than twice what it had been in 1960.

²¹ David McGillivray, a freelance contributor throughout the 1970s and briefly assistant editor to Jan Dawson observed in an interview conducted with the author: ‘After the war the style that we got used to was established by a handful of critics and I think I would say that that style was the work largely of Tom Milne, John Russell Taylor, John Gillett, Peter John Dyer. That style was established by them and we had to copy it. So for example when I was asked to write a sample review I did it in the style I knew and I could copy.’ Interview with the author conducted on 27 July 2015 by telephone.

²² Both Jonathan Rosenbaum and Richard Combs recall the objections raised by the critic Alexander Walker to the discontinuation of the critics choice feature on the basis that this table presented a counterweight to the political and aesthetic bias of the *Bulletin*’s reviews. Jonathan Rosenbaum: interview with the author conducted on 13 July by telephone. Richard Combs: interview with the author conducted on 25 October, 2015 in person.

²³ In her 1971 *Screen* survey of film journals Claire Johnstone argued that the *Monthly Film Bulletin* as an informational magazine performs ‘an extremely useful function in providing data for the film historian.’ She added: ‘A strong argument could be put forward that the *Monthly Film Bulletin* should confine itself exclusively to this function and extend it.’ Johnston, ‘Film Journals: Britain and France’, *Screen*, 12:1, 1971, 45.

²⁴ Julia Knight and Peter Thomas, *Reaching Audiences: Distribution and Promotion of Alternative Moving Image*, Bristol: Intellect, 2011.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Alan Lovell, ‘Robin Wood – A Dissenting View’, *Screen*, 10:2, 1969, 42.

²⁷ Claire Johnston, ‘Film Journals: Britain and France’, *Screen*, 12:1, 1971, 42.

²⁸ John Russell Taylor, *The Times*, February 26, 1971, 11.

-
- ²⁹ On this postwar Brechtian culture see Ian Christie, 'Knight's Moves: Brecht and Russian Formalism in Britain in the 1970s', in Annie van den Oeuver (ed.), *Ostranennie: On Strangeness and the Moving Image*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010, 81-98.
- ³⁰ Tom Milne, Koshikei (Death by Hanging), *Monthly Film Bulletin*, April 1971, 76.
- ³¹ Tony Rayns, 'Okasareta Byakui (Violated Angels)', *Monthly Film Bulletin* July 1977, 151
- ³² *Ibid*, 152.
- ³³ D. N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- ³⁴ Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen, 'Penthelsilia: Queen of the Amazons, Interview Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen', *Screen*, 15:3, 1974, 120-134.
- ³⁵ Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Penthesilea: Queen of the Amazons', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, December 1974, 282.
- ³⁶ Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Wavelength', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, February 1975, 42.
- ³⁷ *Ibid*.
- ³⁸ Richard Roud's 1971 monograph on Jean-Marie Straub, published in the BFI's pioneering Cinema One series, was an early exception. Roud justified his choice of a relatively unknown filmmaker for a book-length study by framing it as 'an attempt to widen the circle of admirers' for a rare filmmaker who integrated formal and political radicalism. Through his involvement as director and programmer at the London and New York Film Festivals in the 1960s, Roud programmed the features *Not Reconciled* and *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* and the shorter works *Machorka-Muff* and *The Bridegroom, The Comedienne and the Pimp*. For a discussion of the importance of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet to 1970s intellectual film culture see the conclusion of Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Making Waves: New Cinemas of the 1960s*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013, 226-227.
- ³⁹ Martin Walsh, 'Political Formations in the Cinema of Jean-Marie Straub', *Jump Cut* no. 4, 1974, 12-18. Accessible online at <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC04folder/Straub.html>.
- ⁴⁰ *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1976
- ⁴¹ 'Scenario: Introduction to Arnold Schoenberg's Accompaniment to a Cinematograph Scene', *Screen* 17:1, 1976, 77-83.

⁴² Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Once it Was Fire: Introduction to a Straub-Huillet Retrospective', Public Theatre, New York, [1982]. Republished and accessed at: <http://www.jonathanrosenbaum.net/1982/11/once-it-was-fire-introduction-to-a-straub-huillet-retrospective-1982-tk/>.

⁴³ A rare mention of Straub and Huillet in the mainstream press came when *The Times* critic David Robinson briefly reviewed a retrospective of the directors' work at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. Politely dismissive, Robinson wrote: 'If you are minded for more serious things and have the nerve for "minimalist cinema" of a degree so minimal that (for my taste) cinema ceases the ICA is presenting a week long retrospective of the films of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet.' David Robinson, 'Fortunate Timing for the Treacherous Tie', *The Times* February 1, 1980, 13.

⁴⁴ Jill Forbes, 'Introduction to Arnold Schoenberg's Accompaniment to a Cinematographic Scene', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1976, 70.

⁴⁵ See especially Peter Wollen, 'Godard and Counter-Cinema: *Vent d'Est*', *Afterimage*, no. 4, Autumn 1972, 6-17 and Wollen, "'Ontology" and "Materialism" in Film', *Screen* 17:1, 1976, 7-25.

⁴⁶ Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Not Reconciled', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1976, 60.

⁴⁷ Tony Rayns, 'The Bridegroom, The Comedienne and the Pimp', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1976, 69-70.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴⁹ Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Vampyr', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, August 1976, 180.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Ian Christie, 'Arsenal', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, September 1977, 200

⁵² Examples includes: the republication of *Monthly Film Bulletin* reviews of Ousmane Sembene films (*Ceddo* (1977), *Camp de Thiaroye* (1988) on the Senses of Cinema website. These were originally written in the early to mid 80s by James Leahy, and the publication on the cinephile website *Rouge* of Thomas Elsaesser's *Monthly Film Bulletin* review of the Raul Ruiz film *The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting* (1978). DVD distributors Second Run and Criterion frequently promote and contextualise their releases with extracts from *Monthly Film Bulletin Reviews* written in the 1970s and 80s.