



**LINDSAY  
ANDERSON  
REVISITED**

**UNKNOWN ASPECTS OF A FILM DIRECTOR**

**EDITED BY  
ERIK HEDLING & CHRISTOPHE DUPIN**



# Lindsay Anderson Revisited



Erik Hedling • Christophe Dupin  
Editors

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Unknown Aspects of a Film Director

palgrave  
macmillan

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ISBN 978-1-137-53942-7      ISBN 978-1-137-53943-4 (eBook)  
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-53943-4

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016938717

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The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd. London

*This book is dedicated to the memory of our co-worker Isabelle  
Gourdin-Sangouard*



FOREWORD REMEMBERING THE PAST/  
FOR THE FUTURE: LINDSAY ANDERSON AND  
WHAT CAN BE DONE IN CINEMA

*Revisiting Lindsay Anderson* assembles fifteen thoughtful, often heartfelt essays. Many are undertaken, as Charles Drazin puts it, in the spirit of the Free Cinema epitaph Anderson crafted: ‘No film can be too personal’/‘No essay can be too personal.’ Several of the contributors have previously written about Anderson’s films, television, and/or theatre productions. Two were friends of his; others knew him rather well. Some met him only once; a few never met him.

I myself never met Lindsay Anderson and have not written about his films or, indeed, about any British filmmakers, though I did edit a piece on Derek Jarman’s documentaries. Jarman appreciated Anderson, for reasons one readily understands. That both were ‘queer’ in today’s parlance (*not* a word Anderson would have used; I’m guessing Jarman would have said ‘gay’ and perhaps also ‘queer’) is the least of it. More importantly, both challenged form, engaged art, critiqued land and landscape, and in so doing detonated—if at times tenderly, lyrically so—conservative cultural principles and imperialist political practice.

I am, however, a fan of many of Lindsay Anderson’s films. I am honored to be asked to write this preface because I am genuinely excited that he and his work are again receiving attention. In many ways his movies do not age. In other ways each is of an era. All merit fresh consideration, as do Anderson himself, his work with collaborators, his sparring with opponents, and his jousts against select institutions.

The reasons I am so glad to see this new anthology about Lindsay Anderson and his work are nostalgically inflected, yet arc forward, too. I first saw some of Anderson’s films in high school and college, 1968–1975,



at movie theaters in Washington, D.C., and Maryland. It was the heyday of the hippies, the era of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll, the height of anti-Vietnam war protests, a time of anti-imperialist internationalist activism, and Second Wave feminist liberation, the beginnings of 'out' lesbian and gay movements, and the radicalizing of civil rights struggles.

My friends and I were regulars at the movies. There was no cable TV, no VHS tapes, no DVDs, let alone computer downloads and rentals. Campus film societies showed 16 mm prints several times a week. D.C. 'art house' movie theaters brought 'rep' classics such as Marcel Carné's *Les Enfants du Paradis* (1945), Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et la bête* (1946), and Vittorio de Sica's *Umberto D* (1952). On campus I programmed Genet's *Un Chant d'amour* (1950). There were contemporary foreign features, documentaries, and experimental animation to see as well. We discovered Antonioni, Bergman, Truffaut, Godard, Fellini, Resnais/Duras, Polanski, Wajda, Borowczyk, Lenica, Laloux, and many more. These films appeared alongside *Deep Throat* (1972) and *Behind the Green Door* (1972): by the early 1970s, the same 'art theaters' also showed feature-length porn. There were scores of US countercultural treats. To name just a few: *Easy Rider* (1969), *Alice's Restaurant* (1969), *Don't Look Back* (1967), *Medium Cool* (1968), *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Pink Flamingos* (1972), *The Boys in the Band* (1970), *Punishment Park* (1971), and *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971). We saw avant-garde theater (Ionesco, Beckett, Brecht, and Brook) and ourselves staged guerrilla theatrical productions. We embraced all things oppositional in style and anti-Establishment in attitude.

Lindsay Anderson's films were electrifying. We sympathized with his belief that 'no art is worth much that doesn't try to change the world'; after all, this dictum was roughly in line with one of our favorite Brecht sayings, featured on T-shirts at the time: 'art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it.' *If...* (1968) impressed us immensely. The following year Stanley Kubrick's *Clockwork Orange* was all the rage and of course it too showcases the young Malcolm McDowell. We were primed for the next Anderson/McDowell collaboration—in somewhat the same way as we impatiently looked forward to the next Rainer Werner Fassbinder film. Fassbinder was at that point more prolific; Anderson lived longer but made comparatively few films in 30 plus years. We had to wait longer for each one: four years for *O Lucky Man!* (1973), but it was well worth the wait. We did not know Anderson's early documentaries.

To remind myself of the stimulation, provocation and joy to be found in watching Anderson and his actors, editors, writers, composers, and other crew craft brain-teasing, sometimes off-putting yet always-unforgettable movies, I indulged in a mini-film festival before writing this preface. I returned to the films I had seen in high school, at university, in and just after graduate school: *This Sporting Life* (1963), *If... O Lucky Man!*, and *The Whales of August* (1987). I did not have time to rescreen all of *Britannia Hospital* (1982). For the first time I saw *The White Bus* (1967), *In Celebration* (1975), *Is That All There Is?* (1992), and several of the early documentary shorts: *O Dreamland* (1953), *Thursday's Children* (1954), and *Everyday Except Christmas* (1957). (Seeing little blonde Rosemary in *Thursday's Children* was eerie: in 1956 I looked much like her—hair bow, side part, anklets, and all.) I also watched Anderson's 1986 television documentary, *Free Cinema*, and Malcolm McDowell's homage, *Never Apologize* (2007). For the first time I perused some of the previous writing on Anderson: Erik Hedling's book; John Izod, Karl Magee, Kathryn Hannan, and Isabelle Gourdin-Sanguard's survey of Lindsay Anderson's Cinema Authorship. And I read the essays collected here.

I take away from my screenings primarily, from my reading secondarily, Lindsay Anderson's talent for introducing startling images by shock cuts—be it the horrific point of view flash from a cocky Mick Travis (McDowell) to a moaning man with a hairy pig body, the chilling upshot of clinical experimentation in *O Lucky Man!*, or the rapid montage between well-fed Sainsbury's shoppers and starving Somali-children, repeated three times for emphasis, in *Is That All There Is?* I am struck by the carefully chosen close-ups, framing, blocking, and lighting Anderson and his cameramen employed to highlight the performers' physicality and skill. He was always 'on the side of the actor,' as David Robinson comments here, and he had such fine actors in his stable. Not just the leading men—Richard Harris, Alan Bates, and McDowell—but also the featured women and supporting players are excellent; witness, to name but a few: Rachel Roberts in *This Sporting Life* and *O Lucky Man!*, Constance Chapman in *In Celebration* and *O Lucky Man!*, and Arthur Lowe in *This Sporting Life* and the trilogy. As is widely recognized by those who know Anderson's films, à la Brecht Anderson at times deployed actors in multiple roles within a single film or across a film cycle, thereby featuring the fact and the forms of acting. He involved his male leads (notably Harris and McDowell), composers (especially Alan Price) as well as his writers (David Storey and David Sherwin principally) in 'authorship' while retaining oversight and control. Among

the directors of photography Anderson worked with, Miroslav Ondříček (*The White Bus, If...,,* and *O Lucky Man!*), Mike Fash (*Britannia Hospital* and *The Whales of August*), Denys Coop (*This Sporting Life*), and Dick Bush (*In Celebration*) stand out. I am struck by how profoundly, in the surrealistically satirical films and also the poetically quotidian ones, he is sensitive to sound and finely attuned to rhythm—of dialogue, editing, and movement. He played with narrative and song, again à la Brecht with Weill, making films that were experimental but intelligible, and often popular. As Brecht insisted: ‘With lightness of touch, all degrees of the serious are accessible’.<sup>1</sup>

Utilizing the relatively recently established Lindsay Anderson Archives (after Anderson’s death in 1994, first held by the Scottish Screen Archive in Glasgow and now owned by the University of Stirling), this anthology contextualizes Anderson’s work in theater and, primarily, film. Mention is made not only of his directing but also of his acting. Some authors comment on the importance of his producers; others on Anderson’s ever-so-articulate critical, epistolary, and autobiographical writing. Some speak of his directing, others of his acting. Several remark on the ways Anderson worked in the British and US film worlds of the times. Several provide biographical and institutional insights. A childhood fan of the *Robin Hood* TV series starring Richard Greene, I was pleased to learn, for example, that one of my favorite ‘men’ in tights (Peter Pan is another) stole from the rich to give to the poor in allegorical tales devised by blacklisted Hollywood writers working under pseudonyms: ‘good men, principled men, ... forced out of their rightful employment and forced to become outlaws’, in Michael Eaton’s ringing words. With Robin and his merry men aided and abetted by a tomboyish maiden, no wonder I liked the show so much! Ring Lardner, Jr.’s comment that these programs were ‘perhaps, in some small way, setting the stage for the 1960s by subverting a whole new generation of young Americans’<sup>2</sup> was certainly true in my case.

Every contributor here is sympathetic to Anderson’s over-arching goals. Many remark upon his generosity and kindness, though they are also cognizant of his insecurities and flaws. More than once his attraction to and reli-

<sup>1</sup> Cited by René Huleu (1975), ‘Images à défendre,’ *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 256, Feb.–March, p. 18 in (1978) *May ‘68 and Film Culture*, London: British Film Institute, p. 82. The translation is, I believe, Harvey’s.

<sup>2</sup> Ring Lardner, Jr. (2000), *I’d Hate Myself in the Morning*, New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press/Nation Books, n. p.

ance on heterosexually partnered—and hence doubly unattainable—lead male actors (Harris, McDowell, Alan Bates, and Serge Reggiani) is mentioned, though the anthology includes no in-depth and/or contextualizing study of the homoeroticism present in many of the films. There is more to be said in future about the performances, soundtracks and scores, and the production design. Given the size of the archives, the richness of the films, and the shifting vantage points of today’s film studies—away, for example, from the high theory Anderson disdained to concrete examination of production cultures—we will, I hope, see further studies of Anderson’s many cultural contributions, including focus on his nearly 40 theatrical productions. Meanwhile, his films serve as reminders of what can be done in cinema.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We express our deepest thanks for financial support to the Lauritzen Foundation, Stockholm, the Royal Society of Arts and Letters, Lund, and the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, Stockholm. We thank Sune Sunesson and Bengt Pettersson at the Pufendorf Institute at Lund University, Sweden, for providing rooms for our discussions. Elisabet Björklund kindly helped us out while there. We also thank the Lindsay Anderson Archive, University of Stirling, Scotland, and its archivist Karl Magee, for supplying much of the archival materials consulted in this book. Thanks also to Dan Ford, grandson of John Ford, for permission to quote from his correspondence with Lindsay Anderson.

Lund and Brussels, October 2015

Erik Hedling  
Christophe Dupin



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# Lindsay Anderson's Legacy: An Introduction

*Erik Hedling and Christophe Dupin*

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Lindsay Anderson (1923–1994) was a major British filmmaker, theatre director, and film critic. Although his cinematic output was rather limited in quantitative terms (half a dozen feature films, added to a few documentaries and some occasional TV work), some of his feature films were highly influential. He is probably best known for his ‘trilogy’—the Cannes-winning *If....* (1968), *O Lucky Man!* (1973), and *Britannia Hospital* (1982). Here, Anderson follows his anti-hero Mick Travis, played by Malcolm McDowell in all three films, through the hidden corners of modern society. With razor sharp social satire as the preferred artistic method, Anderson, and his scriptwriter David Sherwin, dissect what they perceive as various dysfunctions in contemporary Britain: the public school system in *If....*, neo-colonialism in *O Lucky Man!*, and the emerging—and catastrophic—effects of New Public Management in *Britannia Hospital*. Anderson’s sometimes-idiosyncratic direction called for Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekts*, theatrical stylization, and a large portion of ingenious humour.

Anderson was also the director of the British New Wave classic *This Sporting Life* (1963), a strong drama, realist in style, about a Rugby League-player in the north of England. He also directed the elegiac American film *The Whales of August* (1987), where acting legend Lillian Gish made her farewell to a lifetime in cinema (it was Bette Davis’s penultimate film). Despite making relatively few feature films over his 40-year

career, Anderson left a rich legacy on film when he died of a heart attack at the age of 71 in France in August 1994.

Anderson was born in India in 1923 into a military upper middle-class family; his father eventually reached the rank of major general. He had an upbringing typical of his class, attending boarding school at Cheltenham College, and Oxford University, graduating with an MA in English in 1948. By then, Anderson was already devoted to film, having with some colleagues established the classic journal *Sequence*, which was published between 1947 and 1952. He later came to write film criticism for the BFI journals *Sight & Sound* and *Monthly Film Bulletin*.

He had already at that time begun to make films himself, starting in 1948 with *Meet the Pioneers*, a documentary about a conveyor-belt factory. From then on he established himself as a regular maker of documentaries (as many as fifteen between 1948 and 1957, ranging from commissioned industrial films to more personal and poetic essays). Highlights of this early career include the beautiful *Thursday's Children* (1953), codirected by Guy Brenton, a film about the Royal School for the Deaf in Margate,



**Fig. 1.1** Lindsay Anderson and his cameraman Walter Lassally shooting *Three Installations* (1952)



which earned him an Oscar, and *Every Day Except Christmas* (1957), winner of the Grand Prix at the Venice Film Festival, and since acknowledged as a classic of British documentary. Between 1956 and 1959, Anderson also created a series of film programmes at the National Film Theatre under the heading 'Free Cinema', and he became the undisputed leader of the eponymous movement, advocating a new realism and political commitment in films.

It was through his work as a director at the Royal Court Theatre in London that Anderson would finally make his debut as a director of feature films with *This Sporting Life*. The film was a critical success and enabled the filmmaker to embark on his trilogy. Over the years, he would alternate between the theatre and the cinema, much like other great directors like Ingmar Bergman, Orson Welles, and Andrzej Wajda. In the 1980s Anderson's career, however, was somewhat in decline. *Britannia Hospital* had been both a critical and box-office failure, and he had problems securing new film projects. Consequently, his career became mostly geared towards the theatre. He managed a few more film projects, such as the Canadian TV-series *Glory! Glory!* (1988) and his final project, the auto-biographical 'mockumentary' *Is That All There Is?* (1992).

Lindsay Anderson was a complex man, a celibate homosexual, and a fierce anti-Establishment figure. He was highly temperamental, controversial, and radically uncompromising, and he became towards the end of his life increasingly embittered. All of these characteristics made him enemies in the film business, among film workers, scholars, and journalists. This perhaps is the main reason his output of films is relatively small. Critics and scholars disagree on the qualities of his small *œuvre*, although many seem to cherish particularly *This Sporting Life* and *If...* as two cinematic masterpieces. However, for almost half a century he was undoubtedly a very important figure in British film history, particularly on account of his now classic writings on the cinema, his documentary work, and his role in Free Cinema. Accordingly, his life and work have become the object of a steadily increasing stream of scholarly and other biographical works, the most recent ones having greatly benefited from the availability of a rich collection of personal papers (correspondence, diaries, press cuttings, etc.) which Anderson carefully collected throughout the years. These documents now constitute the Lindsay Anderson Archive at the University of Stirling in Scotland.