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Table of Contents

Shadows of Progress: Documentary Film in Post-war Britain (1951-1977)

Dir: Various, BFI, 2010

A Review by Dai Vaughan, Independent Scholar, London, UK

Two years ago the BFI issued a box set of four DVDs comprising a selection of British documentaries from 1930 to 1950 under the title *Land of Promise*. This has now been followed with a matching set, covering the period 1951 to 1977, called *Shadows of Progress*. The titles seem to parallel each other, even to the initial P for their abstract nouns, until we notice that the word 'of' has subtly reversed its meaning. It is the land that has promise, but progress that has shadows. This sense of reversal, of the decline of documentary at least in its Griersonian incarnation, seems to have governed the selection of material offered here, which is predominantly sponsored and predominantly shot on 35mm.

Certainly few of these 32 films are inspirational in the way that even such a modest item as *Night Shift*, in the former set, managed to be (and remains). This is partly a reflection of the loss of the socialist conviction which had animated documentaries of the '30s and of the patriotic unity of the war years which, disappointingly, failed to project itself into the Attlee era after 1945. The replacement of the Ministry of Information by the Central Office of Information in 1946 gave formal endorsement to a change which would probably have taken place regardless. Films were now to be commissioned by government departments and allocated by the COI to the various units, rather than - as seems largely to have been the case during the war - projects being initiated by the film makers and simply rubber-stamped, or not, by the Ministry. Never happy with the new order, the Crown Film Unit was finally dissolved in 1952.

What confronts us here is a change in civic consciousness; and the prevailing discomfort, the documentarists' uncertainty as to their role, sometimes manifested itself oddly within the films themselves. Paul Dickson's *The Film That Never Was* (1957), sponsored by the Ministry of Labour, was intended to promote the establishment of Works Councils as a way of resolving industrial disputes. We see a film-maker pitching ideas to a group comprising representatives of management, the unions and the Ministry. When two of these proposals have been enacted for us, and both have been rejected by one or more of the parties, it is decided regretfully that the project will have to be abandoned. The inability of this committee to agree on a common approach might surely be read as negating the proposition that differences of interest can

be reconciled by discussion: as negating, that is, the film's brief. One assumes no such sabotage was intended.

But changes in social attitudes were not the only factor affecting documentary in the period under review. I remember this as a time of great restlessness within the industry: of a feeling that our language had grown stale, that the possibilities of 35mm (largely non-synch) production had been more or less exhausted. Everyone was looking for ways to extend the reach of documentary towards the realm of individual experience, sometimes with judicious re-enactment or with various substitutes for conventional commentary: and these efforts, too, could lead to uneasy results. Guy Brenton's *Four People: A Ballad Film* (1962) uses songs by Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger to narrate the stories of four people unexpectedly struck down by polio. My initial assumption, until I recognised it to be incorrect, was that these stories, doubtless taken from real life, were being performed by actors. Why did I assume this? Because each began with a sequence showing the character before and during the onset of the disease; and it seemed obvious that the film-makers could not have known in advance who was going to be so afflicted. Only when I looked again at the opening, knowing the degree of disability each character had been left with, did I see how, with a little cheating, including in one case the use of a double for back-shots, these 'before' sequences could have been done after the event. But the intuitive drawing of conclusions as to the status of the image is an essential component of the documentary reading. This otherwise admirable film had been a little too imaginative for its own good.

I do not wish to give the impression that this collection is a parade of duds, though it must have been something of a challenge for those compiling it to demonstrate the decline of the medium without presenting us with material no-one would wish to watch. As it is, few are without some points in their favour. *Stone Into Steel*, made by Paul Dickson for United Steel Companies in 1960, is a majestic study in the industrial sublime, arguably no more blameworthy than the sublime of Francis Danby or Salvator Rosa, until a troubling moment when, towards the end, cold cuts of the workers' lives are presented to us on the same platter. Peter Hopkinson's *Today in Britain*, made for the Foreign Office in 1964, is in effect an update of Jennings's *Family Portrait* (Wessex Films, 1950). James Cameron was chosen to write and speak the commentary, perhaps in the hope that his sardonic manner would mitigate the pomposity almost inevitable in any attempt to characterise a nation; and to an extent it does. But 1964 was surely too late for such an exercise. (Indeed, some might say it was too late in 1951.) *Shellerama*, a survey of the production and uses of petroleum, directed by Richard Cawston for the in-house Shell Unit in 1965, may seem a slightly unfair choice to those who remember such productions as *The Back of Beyond* (1954) or *The Rival World* (1955) from the mid-1950s, a time when that unit was noted for not allowing the Shell logo to appear on screen except at the opening and

close of each film — self-promotion at its most gentlemanly. This one is a world tour, elegantly shot, cleverly edited and vacuous, and is accompanied by a musical score of appropriately mind-numbing repetitiveness.

That said, there are enough real gems here to keep anybody happy. Lindsay Anderson's *Henry* (1955), for the NSPCC, is a subtly expressionist use of black-and-white which also, in its night-in-the city sequences, looks forward to Free Cinema. For the same sponsor, John Krish's *They Took Us to the Sea* (1961), an apparently simple record of a children's day trip to Weston-super-Mare, is a truly extraordinary piece which shows just how much could still be done with mute shooting and lightly applied music and FX plus a sparse narration apparently recorded *post facto* by one of the children. Early scenes of infants having luggage labels attached to them inevitably draw upon memories of wartime evacuations; and the emphasis on clasped hands and protective gestures of parents hints at depths of experience well beneath what is shown. Partly perhaps because of the tone struck by this departure sequence, a sense of secret currents is maintained throughout. There is not a single boring, makeweight or merely routine shot. Krish, in fact, is well represented here. In addition to the much loved *The Elephant Will Never Forget* (BTF, 1953), we have the COI-sponsored *Return to Life* (1960), a story about refugees whose dramatic tensions may well have been enhanced by the unspoken hatred between the two cast as a married couple. Then there is his study of an old man's solitude (1964, for the Craignish Trust), whose most brilliant stroke is its title, *I Think They Call Him John* — since there is no-one in the film who actually says this. Other lively items are Eric Marquis's wonderfully meandering *Tomorrow's Merseysiders* (for the Liverpool *Daily Post* and *Echo*, 1974) and Sarah Erulkar's *Picture to Post* (1969 for the GPO), which points in one of the directions television was to take. It is also good to be reacquainted with Paul Dickson's *David* (1951, for the Welsh Committee of the Festival of Britain), though I would have categorised this as short fiction rather than as documentary.

Derrick Knight's *A Time to Heal*, made for the National Coal Board and released in 1963, is, true to criteria of date and subject-area, placed towards the end of the second DVD. But there would have been a very good case for putting it last, since it marks the advent of the mode of film-making which, having crept up swiftly on our blind side, was soon to make the classic 35mm documentary more or less redundant. A year or so before the introduction of the silent-running Éclair camera, Knight had managed to lash up some sort of a system with a blimped Arriflex which made it possible to shoot spontaneous hand-held material, in synch, on 16mm; and the resulting film, for all it is about the rehabilitation of men injured in mining accidents, grasps the new possibilities with delirious abandon. It remains a masterpiece of the genre of which it was perhaps the first British representative, and there is nothing else like it in the box.

This brings us back to the question of selection. It was never going to be possible to trace all the strands of documentary film-making over a period of 26 years, with all the multiple dichotomies in play at that time, in a mere 32 examples; and the choice to focus on the fate of sponsored production, mainly 35mm and (therefore) conforming to the classic Griersonian grammars, was a perfectly reasonable one. But there is a danger that this may be taken for the whole story. The notes in the accompanying booklet on Knight's *Faces of Harlow* (1964), made for the Harlow Development Corporation, mention his independently produced follow-up film, *The Pied Pipers of Harlow* (1965), which had an airing on TV. I remember this as being much the better of the two. Shortly afterwards the unit produced *The Great Steam Fair* (1964), co-directed by Derrick Knight and David Gladwell (editor of *A Time to Heal*), privately financed and shot on a short-lived system called Techniscope, which involved dividing the four-perforation 35mm frame horizontally into two wide-screen areas of two perfs each. Meanwhile Gladwell was working in his spare time on his own 16mm production, *28B Camden Street* (1965). I just happen to know about these films because at the time, 1964, I was employed as an assistant editor with Derrick Knight's company; but I am sure there must have been many other people currently turning out work which, without falling under the umbrella of Free Cinema and probably seen by very few people, sidestepped the Griersonian orthodoxy in one fashion or another.

Still, limitations aside, it is instructive to be reminded of that intermediate, exploratory period between classic documentary and *cinéma vérité*. One forgets how readily audiences would accept, for example, a convention whereby, in a scene fully furnished with sound effects, someone clearly speaking in the foreground might go unheard. No-one would risk that today. Synchronous sound, widely and rightly greeted as a liberation, shows itself to be also, in certain respects, a straitjacket.

Almost the only residue of documentary on today's television is the presenter-led lecture on history, science or the arts. These are sometimes excellent; but the abandonment of all other genres, a consequence of the rule of philistine executives concerned only with short-term ratings, leaves us culturally impoverished — not least by the implication that all knowledge must be dispensed to us by the hand of authority. Aside from anything else, *Shadows of Progress* opens up a world of forgotten possibilities. As much for their weaknesses as for their strengths, I find myself falling in love with documentary all over again.

Bonnie and Clyde

Dir: Arthur Penn, USA, 1967

A Review by Ian Murphy, University College Cork, Ireland

Outlaw Love: Fantasy and Reality in Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde*

Bonnie and Clyde opens with a series of sepia photographs of what appears to be the real Barrow gang. Led by Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker, the Barrow gang blazed a trail through the Central United States during the Great Depression, robbing banks, gas stations and grocery stores, and killing several police officers and civilians along the way. The snapshots are presented with police blotter information outlining the early bios of the title duo. Over the distant hum of Rudy Vallée's Depression-era ballad 'Deep Night,' the clicking shutter of a camera on the soundtrack adds an extra dose of authenticity, seeming to signal a promise of documentary veridiction on the filmmakers' part. As Alan Vanneman has noted, however, the snapshots flash by so fast that it takes a while for us to realise that they are actually fakes, or, rather, reconstructions – this is not Bonnie and Clyde we are witnessing, but Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway (Vanneman, 2004). It makes for a suitably disorienting introduction to Arthur Penn's film, which plays famously fast and loose with the historical facts. It also broke with classical Hollywood tradition in such radical ways that it was widely credited with kick-starting the cinematic movement we now casually refer to as New Hollywood. Tributes and retrospective screenings following Penn's recent death have served to maintain *Bonnie and Clyde*'s cultural import, as have the re-release of a two-disc Special Edition DVD and the hotly contested announcement of a Kevin Zegers-Hilary Duff remake in the works.

In this article I will consider Penn's film in light of larger issues of realism and representation. This approach requires me to take several factors into account: the influence of French New Wave cinema upon its screenplay; the degree to which the film honoured and rejected its basis in history; its revolutionary approach to ideas of genre, tone and violence; and, perhaps most importantly, the cultural context it was produced, released and received in. After all, this film emerged during one of the most turbulent periods in recent American history, and there is a profound sense that whenever people discuss its canonical importance in American cinema, they are never really just discussing the *film*. Indeed, few modern films have proven as inextricable from their moment in time as *Bonnie and Clyde*.

Before principal photography took place, a conscious departure from classical Hollywood narrative was carved into the film's script by *Esquire* scribes Robert Benton and David Newman. Like many young American artists in the early 1960s, Benton and Newman were heavily influenced by the first substantial influx of European cinema into America's artistic consciousness. College campus and arthouse screenings of films by directors like Bergman, Fellini and Antonioni introduced their generation to a different type of film language than had hitherto been shown possible by native filmmaking. In Benton and Newman's case, they fell in love with the cinema of the French New Wave, a disparate collection of highly modernist films whose stylised form and self-conscious tone betrayed a vision of life as a sort of absurd tragicomedy. Protagonists were typically young and glamorous, cool and free-spirited, and seemed to care about nothing. Their witty nonchalance and anti-establishment attitudes, romantic on the surface, usually belied a deeper moral nihilism, and their lives often escalated into violence. Ironically, these films had been influenced by older Hollywood forms of genre filmmaking, particularly the gangster picture. As Pauline Kael would observe in her groundbreaking *New Yorker* review of *Bonnie and Clyde*,

if we recognise the make-believe robbers whose toy guns produce real blood, and the Keystone Cops who shoot them dead, from Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player*, and Godard's gangster pictures *Breathless* and *Band of Outsiders*, it's because the young French directors discovered the poetry of crime in American life (from our movies) and showed the Americans how to put it on the screen in a new, "existential" way. (Kael, 2000: 187)

Benton and Newman crafted a heady fusion: an American script baldly influenced by a French perspective on classical Hollywood forms. In mirroring the New Wave's preoccupation with subjective experience as much as its tragicomic tone, they proved less interested in capturing concrete historical truths about the real Bonnie and Clyde than in mining their bizarre story for a more abstract brand of cinematic truth. On a formal level, they achieved this by scripting a series of zooms, jump cuts, cropped framings and unreliable eyeline matches that serve to transport the viewer into disjointed first-person perspectives; on a narrative level, they did so by forsaking the classical structures of backstory, rationale and continuity. As Vanneman notes, "There are no revelations or explanations in *Bonnie and Clyde*. We don't need to know why the characters do the things they do because we see them as the people they are" (Vanneman, 2004).

Seeing them as the people they are is one thing, but in terms of historical accuracy, the Benton and Newman script is a sea of fabrications, compromises and elisions. "There were at least three people that they picked up along the way," Benton later confided, "and we melded those three characters into one just for narrative sake" (Benton, 2008). Michael J. Pollard's mechanic C.W. Moss

emerges as one of the film's more memorable inventions: a baby-faced, white-trash goofball with an idiosyncratic speaking style that Pollard, by his own admission, patterned after the vocals on Bob Dylan's epochal 1966 album *Blonde on Blonde*. More problematic liberties were taken with their decision to include in the original script a bisexual love triangle between Bonnie, Clyde and C.W. as a nod to persistent rumours about the real Clyde's sexual orientation, as well as their eventual substitution of Clyde's bisexuality with impotence because "there had to be some sexual complexity. They couldn't just be a happy couple" (Benton, 2008). Yet the fact that the real Bonnie was already married to another jailed criminal, and was still wearing his wedding ring when she died, probably would have added *too* much sexual complexity. A quick scan of documented history suggests that Clyde's brother Buck Barrow was a far cry from the jolly salt-of-the-earth hillbilly type embodied by Gene Hackman; nor was his wife Blanche a hysterically shrill and nervous preacher's daughter whose incompetence (as played amusingly by Estelle Parsons) repeatedly endangered the gang and allowed for caricaturish comic relief.

Of course, the greatest liberties were taken with Bonnie and Clyde themselves. It is hardly in this film's interest to show us how they first met casually at a mutual friend's house, or were temporarily separated by Clyde's imprisonment in 1932. The mythology of outlaw love dictates that Bonnie and Clyde meet in a "movie" way, an instant and explosive conflation of sex and crime, of the desire to escape and the hunger for personal glory: Bonnie, restless beyond words, looks out her bedroom window and sees Clyde trying to steal her mother's car. What follows is a lazy courtship stroll through the deserted Dallas streets that comes straight out of *Breathless*, and Bonnie bearing excited witness to the impotent (but manly) Clyde's sexual transference in action when he robs a grocery store at gunpoint. In true symbolic fashion, the pair only consummates their romance as they approach death, but the outlaw fantasy the film trades on would crumble without the superstar glamour and erotic tension generated by Beatty and Dunaway in the lead roles.

Ian Waldron-Mantgani states that Beatty and Dunaway "were two of the sexiest screen actors of their generation; here, they speak in Okie drawl, move awkwardly and act bumblingly, but do so with rhythm that seems to give every backward gesture the status of mythic Americana" (Waldron-Mantgani, 2003). As interpreted by Beatty, the 5'6", 125-pound Clyde Barrow becomes a 6'2" vision of charismatic masculinity, glossy black hair and toothpaste grin offsetting his white Borsalinos and double-breasted lapels. The luscious Dunaway, her bobbed hair a shade of gold only seen in oil paintings, is an even more idealised projection of the unglamorous Bonnie Parker, who stood 4'10" tall and walked with a pronounced limp after her leg was burned in a car accident. Costume designer Theadora Van Runkle has spoken of her work on *Bonnie and Clyde* as a "sophisticated concept" (Van Runkle, 2008) wherein Dunaway "combined all the visual elements of elegance and chic" (ibid.) in her trend-setting black beret,

while Dunaway herself speaks of how Penn "really did understand what the dramatic material needed to work for an audience" (Dunaway, 2008). It is apparent, then, that a commitment to gritty verisimilitude was not at the forefront of anyone's mind when making *Bonnie and Clyde*. It is also apparent that audiences would never have bought into that peculiarly cinematic conflation of sex and crime, or felt such sympathy towards these amoral antiheroes, if they did not believe the heat between Beatty and Dunaway when he tells her, "You're a knockout."

Nevertheless, the film keeps playing games with notions of realism and veridiction. Following one of the Barrow gang's more competent hold-ups, we are treated to a rollicking rural car chase, stylishly intercut with after-the-fact eyewitness testimonials from a security guard who shows an off-screen reporter the bullet hole in the hat Clyde shot off his head ("There I was, staring square into the face of death"), and a sympathetically aged farmer whose money Clyde refused to steal ("All I can say is: they did right by me, and I'm bringing me a mess of flowers to their funeral"). What we remember most about this scene, though, is the picturesque beauty of the car speeding through sunlit green hills and dirt roads; the exhilarating sense of camaraderie between the gang, laughing as they huddle together in the cramped space; and the infectious banjo riff of Flatt and Scruggs' bluegrass tune "Foggy Mountain Breakdown" on the soundtrack. The tone is one of farce, broad and irreverent, and it highlights a startling chasm between the reality of a traumatic event and the filmic representation of it as something else entirely. Another set piece of slapstick humour, deriving from the gang's bumbling incompetence after C.W. double-parks the getaway car, is rudely interrupted when Clyde shoots a bank official in the face, the man's head veritably exploding in blood against the car window.

The New York Times' Bosley Crowther – a man famously unmoved by notions of life as an absurd tragicomedy – felt that Penn's "blending of farce with brutal killings is as pointless as it is lacking in taste, since it makes no valid commentary upon the already travestied truth" (Crowther, 1967). The ever-contrarian Kael, however, felt that this juxtaposition of comedy and violence helped the film attain its own strange truth: "Tasteful suggestions of violence would at this point be a more grotesque form of comedy than *Bonnie and Clyde* attempts," she argued. "*Bonnie and Clyde* needs violence; violence is its meaning" (Kael, 2000: 188).

Violence is indeed the meaning of *Bonnie and Clyde*. The film was largely credited with creating a new language of cinematic violence – tame, perhaps, in comparison to today's numbing excesses, but still harsh and visceral, with gunfire ringing louder than life, and liberal use of projectile bloodshed long before squibs were a regular part of the special effects kit. With the assistance of cinematographer Burnett Guffey and editor Dede Allen, Penn situates his

violence in an uneasy space between raw realism and heightened lyricism: it is choreographed like ballet, shot like poetry, and edited like a music video. This is never truer than in the 54-second ambush that ends Bonnie and Clyde (both the characters and the film). Drawing equally on Eisenstein's choppy montage and Kurosawa's poetic approach to combat scenes, it shows Bonnie and Clyde exchanging one final lovers' look before they are gloriously machine-gunned to pulp in slow motion.

Clichéd as it may seem, one cannot overlook a certain dialectic between *Bonnie and Clyde*'s representation of violence and the greater shift in America's cultural consciousness. As Vietnam escalated steadily, the nation was forced to watch a savage war unfold on its television screens for the first time, and saturation news coverage of both the war and the resulting anti-war protests raised awareness of social unrest to an unprecedented degree. In addition, the burgeoning civil rights movement had sparked a series of brutal race riots in Philadelphia, Cleveland and Los Angeles at the heart of the decade, and while the year 1967 has been referred to as the Summer of Love, that same summer witnessed record levels of violence in American history. In the three months alone before *Bonnie and Clyde* received its world premiere at the Montreal Film Festival on 4 August 1967, there had been race riots in Detroit, Tampa, Buffalo and Newark. The hothouse climate of cultural unease caused Roger Ebert to read into the film's violence a resonant extra-diegetic discourse with real life that perhaps mattered more than issues of factual accuracy or romanticised representation.

When people are shot in *Bonnie and Clyde*, they are literally blown to bits. Perhaps that seems shocking. But perhaps at this time, it is useful to be reminded that bullets really do tear skin and bone, and that they don't make nice round little holes like the Swiss cheese effect in Fearless Fosdick. (Ebert, 1967)

The technical innovations of Penn's *mise-en-scene* also suggest methods of reflecting reality that extend beyond veridiction. In 1967, when the Hollywood studio system was dying a slow, sad death, making a film that took place almost entirely on the road presented fresh new possibilities in location shooting. *L.A. Confidential* director Curtis Hanson, then a freelance photographer who was invited to observe part of the filming in Texas, notes how "in the studio system everything was very controlled. It started out on soundstages, but even on location they controlled it. This was the beginning of giving up control" (Hanson, 2008). Giving up control meant that Penn often worked against the wishes of DP Guffey to use source lighting, as with the scene where Bonnie flees into a golden wheatfield straight out of an Andrew Wyeth painting, and a passing black cloud weighs over the frame like a harbinger of death. Sporadic process shots of the Barrow gang driving against rear-projected backdrops remind us that even an uncommonly adventurous Hollywood director was not yet able to fully shrug off

the strictures of classical studio filmmaking, but more often than not, to watch *Bonnie and Clyde* is to watch Penn dealing up close with the tactile, physical elements of filmmaking – outdoor location space, natural light, unpredictable weather. This approach does more than charge the film with a rush of spontaneous energy; it allows previously unparalleled interjections of reality to bleed into the frame.

Similarly, Dede Allen's groundbreaking use of shock-cutting single-handedly introduced a modernist editing style to Hollywood cinema, creating filmic rhythms that were excitingly new to mainstream American audiences. An average shot in *Bonnie and Clyde* lasts less than four seconds, compared to the average shot length of six to ten seconds in most Hollywood films of its era (Snider, 2010). In films as in real life, the world was moving faster than ever before, and Allen's shock-cutting vividly evoked the chaos, confusion and velocity of modern life better than a classical shot-reverse-shot format could. The formal experimentalism struck a chord with college-educated youth audiences who not only had enough pop-cultural savvy to decode "[the film's] irony, its blatant Freudianism, its references to Keystone Cops slapstick, and its debt to the European art cinema" (Carr, 2000: 82), but were also beginning to actively question structures of authority and justice. Encouraged by tastemakers like Kael and Ebert to read layers of cultural commentary and symbolic meaning into a film, viewers interpreted *Bonnie and Clyde* in whatever manner best fitted their individual realities. As its screenwriters later testified, "Critics and interviewers have told us that *Bonnie and Clyde* was *really* about Vietnam, *really* about police brutality, *really* about Lee Harvey Oswald, *really* about Watts. After a while, we took to shrugging and saying, 'If you think so'" (Newman and Benton, 1972: 17).

Above all, it is easy to see how audiences – then as now – latch onto Bonnie and Clyde themselves. Detractors of the film usually argue that, in addition to being a historical whitewash of the outlaw couple, it spins them into dubious folk heroes. Certainly, viewers seduced by *Bonnie and Clyde*'s humour, romanticism and spirit of escapist adventure, by the sheer movie magic of it all, tend to uncritically accept the position that, in Stefan Kanfer's words, "when the two take up their aimless career as thieves, they try to see themselves as striking back at the haves on behalf of the have-nots – although there is no hint of ideology or social protest in their actions" (Kanfer, 1967). Perversely, though, it is his very exploitation of Beatty and Dunaway's star power that allows Penn to capture the truest aspect of the duo: their narcissism. Often forgotten amidst the mythology of Bonnie and Clyde is the fact that they were chronic *self*-mythologisers, a pair of performers who often "seemed to others to be acting out forbidden roles and to relish their roles" (Kael, 2000: 180) and also that "in contrast with secret criminals – the furtive embezzlers and other crooks who lead seemingly honest lives – the known outlaws capture the public imagination,

because they take chances, and because, often, they enjoy dramatising their lives" (ibid.). Penn thus shows Bonnie and Clyde reading their headlines with glee, documenting their crime spree (Bonnie writes a doggerel ballad which gets published in a newspaper), and posing for publicity shots with cigars and tommy guns. They even introduce themselves to the banks they rob; "I'm Miss Bonnie Parker and this here is Mr. Clyde Barrow," Dunaway announces when they first meet C.W., counting a beat before she delivers the kicker: "We rob banks!"

As if the film had not already signposted its sympathies loudly enough – as if Bonnie and Clyde's moral transgressions were not already rendered sufficiently funny, sexy and charming to side with – the authority figures that finally destroy them (the walrus-moustached Texas Ranger, C.W.'s two-faced father) are invariably old, mean, ugly and self-righteous. Stephen Hunter is hardly alone in thinking that

it was an easy generational transference for the nascent Boomers to see themselves as so beautiful, so in love, so radical, so entitled to self-expression, so embittered by a failing economic system, so martyred by a crusty older generation that despised them for those attributes exactly. (Hunter, 2009)

Rather than being repelled by a film of moral ambiguity and schizophrenic tone changes, young American viewers clearly saw in it a very real mirror to the confusion they had been feeling about Vietnam, about the civil rights movement, and about their own futures. They would find similar mirrors held up by a bountiful number of violent, socially conscious Hollywood masterpieces over the next decade, from *The Wild Bunch* to *Chinatown*, *Taxi Driver* to *The Godfather*, *Dog Day Afternoon* to *Badlands*. One wonders if this post-classical revolution in cinematic truth would have taken hold without some of the groundwork laid down by *Bonnie and Clyde*. In this light, it seems fitting to leave the final word to Pauline Kael, whose original review David Newman considers "the best thing that ever happened to Benton and myself" (Biskind, 1998: 40). More than most critics back in 1967, Kael sensed the beginning of an important new chapter in Hollywood history.

Bonnie and Clyde brings into the almost frighteningly public world of movies things that people have been feeling and saying and writing about. And once something is said or done on the screens of the world, once it has entered mass art, it can never again belong to a minority, never again be the private possession of an educated, or "knowing," group. But even for that group there is an excitement in hearing its own private thoughts expressed out loud and in seeing something of its own sensibility become part of our common culture. (Kael, 2000: 179)

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Filmography

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Cracks

Dir: Jordan Scott, UK/ IE/ ES/ CH/ F, 2009

Tell-Tale

Dir: Michael Cuesta, UK/USA, 2009

Robin Hood

Dir: Ridley Scott, UK/USA, 2010

The A-Team

Dir: Joe Carnahan, USA, 2010

A Review by Laurence Raw, Başkent University, Ankara, Turkey

Recent years have witnessed a steady stream of releases from Scott Free, the production outfit helmed by Ridley and Tony Scott. For television they have co-produced three series of the presidential drama *The Good Wife* (2009-11*)* for CBS; eight episodes of the miniseries *The Pillars of the Earth* (2010) starring Ian McShane – nominated for three Golden Globes; and a sequel to their 2003 hit *The Gathering Storm*, called *Into the Storm* (2009), focusing on Sir Winston Churchill's career as British Prime Minister during the Second World War. In the cinema Ridley Scott has co-produced *Cracks* (2009), *Tell-Tale* (2009) and *The A-Team* (2010), as well as directing the big-budget version of *Robin Hood* (2010) with Russell Crowe and Cate Blanchett in the leads. The four cinema releases have enjoyed varying degrees of box-office success: according to the latest figures (December 2010) *Cracks* has taken just over £104,000 in Britain, *Robin Hood* has only recouped $177m of its initial $200m outlay; while *The A-Team* has currently made over $200m for Twentieth Century-Fox. Nonetheless all four films are worth looking at, as they all reveal Ridley Scott's tendency to invoke the past as a way of commenting on the present. This has been evident in several of his recent works as director and producer – for example *Gladiator* (2000), *Kingdom of Heaven* (2003), *American Gangster* (2007) (set in the early 1970s), and *The Assassination of Jesse James* (2007), which Scott produced.

Cracks (the debut feature of Scott's daughter Jordan Scott) is set in a girls' private school in mid-1930s Britain; *Tell-Tale* offers a contemporary interpretation of Edgar Allan Poe's 1843 short story *The Tell-Tale Heart*; *Robin Hood* takes us back to the time of Richard the Lionheart and King John at the beginning of the thirteenth century; while *The A-Team* breathes new cinematic

life into the hit 1980s television series. More significantly, all four films demonstrate Scott's continuing preoccupation with the relationship between the personal and the political. Individuals should learn to cultivate such qualities as tolerance and loyalty, so as to encourage peaceful co-existence between people of different ideologies and/or faiths.

Cracks makes this point in microcosm by returning us to the kind of environment previously explored in the remake of *The Browning Version* (1994), produced by Scott with Mike Figgis as director. In the earlier film, attention focuses on Crocker-Harris (Albert Finney), who has spent all his life in the confines of a boys' public school. Unable to tolerate the students in his charge, he has earned the soubriquet "The Hitler of the Lower Fifth," whose idea of an "end of term treat" consists of having the students read the Agamemnon by Aeschylus out loud in Latin, even though none of them have the faintest idea what is going on. However Figgis and Scott show that Crocker-Harris is a product of his environment – a school obsessed by history and tradition that represses rather than encourages individual talent. Nonetheless the film offers some hope for the future at the end, as Crocker-Harris stands up in front of the school and apologizes to the students for his failings. When he started eighteen years previously he was something of an idealist; but now he has neither enthusiasm nor aptitude for the job. Once he has retired, he leaves the school for the last time and throws off his gown, symbolically suggesting that he has now rid himself of the shackles of his previous life and looking forward to a brighter, more tolerant future.

Miss G. (Eva Green), the swimming teacher in *Cracks*, knows nothing of the outside world, having spent her entire life at a small girls' public school as a student and a teacher. We know something scandalous has happened to her in the past – exactly what is left unclear – but the experience has transformed her into a helpless agoraphobic, who cannot pay a visit to the local baker's shop without breaking out into cold sweat. Her whole life revolves around her girls to such an extent that she develops an 'unnatural' passion for some of them. At the beginning of the film her favourite student is Di (Juno Temple), a no-nonsense British girl with a talent for sport and leadership. However Miss G. soon switches her affections to a new girl, the Spanish aristocrat Fiamma (Maria Valverde), who is not only a proficient diver, but has an air of self-confidence that the teacher obviously envies. The infatuation is doomed from the start: although Fiamma abhors Miss G., she ends up being victimized by the teacher, who incites Fiamma's class-mates to chase her through the school grounds in a sequence strongly reminiscent of Peter Brook's *Lord of the Flies* (1963). Exhausted, Fiamma collapses to the ground in an asthmatic fit; Miss G. promises the girls that she will look after her, but lets Fiamma die by refusing to give the girl her inhaler. Following Fiamma's death, Miss G. is sent away on indefinite leave: as in *The Browning Version*, the school deliberately hushes up the incident so as to preserve its reputation (and thereby attract more students). Miss G. is

left completely isolated in a grubby bed-sitting room, the victim of a repressive and intolerant environment which refuses to acknowledge the individual.

Although set in a quintessentially English milieu, *Cracks* makes some intelligent political points about the destructive effects of intolerance and xenophobia. As in *Kingdom of Heaven*, many of the students in the school fear the presence of "the other" - in this case, Fiamma, who is not only Spanish (and therefore bilingual), but appears far superior in the academic and sporting fields. Their pursuit of her represents their opportunity for revenge; to show the Spanish girl once and for all the supremacy of their English public school ideals such as strength and group (as opposed to individual) identity. These ideals have been corrupted: the English students work towards social exclusion rather than inclusiveness. It is only after Fiamma's death that Di understands the implications of this belief. The film's final sequence shows her embarking on a quest to find Fiamma's home in Spain; although she might never reach her destination, at least she has plucked up sufficient courage to reject the collective identity of the public school ethic and trust in her own convictions.

Terry Bernard (Josh Lucas), the hero of Michael Cuesta's *Tell-Tale*, also experiences a personality development. Following a heart-transplant operation he discovers to his horror that he is gradually being transformed into a ruthless killer. As the film unfolds, Terry understands that he has been possessed by Vieillard's spirit: the donor seeks revenge on all those people – nurses, cab-drivers, auxiliary staff, as well as the surgeons- who contributed to his own death as well as that of his wife Frances (Cassandre Fiering). The surgeons were involved in an illegal organ scam, in which they deliberately removed the organs of terminally ill patients (Vieillard included), and sold them on to hospitals desperate to perform life-saving operations. Frances was an innocent victim; she was killed while trying to stop the surgeons operating on her husband. Revenge is sweet: Terry kills everyone involved, and thereby enables Vieillard's spirit to rest in peace.

With its emphasis on possession of a (male) individual by another life-form, the film has strong echoes of *Alien* (1979), as well as several episodes in the late 1990s anthology series *The Hunger* (1997-8, 1999-2000) (produced by Scott). In *Battle of Smoke* (2000), for instance, a male genie grows inside a woman, transforming her into a dominatrix. *Tell-Tale* asks us to consider whether there are any ways to protect oneself against this, particularly when it seems on the surface that Terry has been given a new lease of life as a consequence of his operation. The film suggests that he has to learn how to negotiate between the two different sides of his character; to acknowledge the justness of Vieillard's cause while sustaining his own qualities as a working single parent. Such struggles recall similar conflicts in Poe's *Tell-Tale Heart,* between the old man (representing the scientific, rational mind), and the narrator (the imaginative,

emotional side). Eventually Terry reconciles the two extremes within himself – despite the evil surgeon Dr. Lethe's (Ulrich Thomsen's) attempts to give him a lethal injection of potassium solution, Terry finds a hitherto undiscovered strength, enabling him to dispose of the surgeon once and for all. This strength, it is suggested, derives from his ability to reconcile the two sides of his character. He becomes a much stronger, self-confident person.

Terry's individual development also helps him to make a positive contribution to society, as he triumphs over the doctors who willfully try to end his life. Like Tyrell in *Blade Runner*, Dr. Lethe (the choice of name is deliberate, as Lethe was one of the five rivers of Hades in Greek mythology) is a brilliant surgeon trying to control his patients' minds through his experiments. He claims that stealing organs can actually be considered a social service: patients are given a new lease of life, while the donors are put out of their misery. However Cuesta suggests that this argument is specious: Lethe treats human beings as guinea-pigs, devoid of personality, who are ripe for financial and material exploitation. In his way he is as intolerant as the students in *Cracks*, even though he conceals it under a veneer of professionalism.

Robin Hood should be approached as a continuation of the story begun in *Kingdom of Heaven*: set just after the Crusades, it begins with Robin Longstride (Russell Crowe) returning to Britain as a member of Richard the Lionheart's (Danny Huston's) army, having successfully completed their campaigns in the Middle East. However Longstride is forced to flee back to Britain, having unwittingly become involved in a plot hatched by turncoat English soldier Godfrey (Mark Strong) to put the French King Philip on the English throne. As with *Tell-Tale*, *Robin Hood* contrasts Robin – who has learned how to deal with the diverse personalities comprising his Merrie Men – with the intolerant Godfrey, supported by the devilish King John (Oscar Isaac). Crowe's Robin Hood believes in a strict code of honour, more precisely defined as tolerance, a belief in fair play and trusting in one's own convictions. This explains why he can command such loyalty amongst his followers. By contrast King John is a puny, wizened little man bearing a strong facial resemblance to Joaquin Phoenix's Commodus in *Gladiator* (2000). Short of funds, John imposes higher and higher taxes on his people; if they do not comply, he sends his troops in to take the money by force, or razes villages to the ground. John cannot be trusted; he willingly agrees to cede power to the barons, but goes back on his word once the French invasion force has been driven out of England. For him the concept of 'divine right' assumes more importance than democratic agreement. Scott shows the contrast operating on a societal as well as an individual level. John's court – dominated by fear – with the idealized community in Sherwood Forest, where Maid Marian (Cate Blanchett) presides, where children play and adults happily partake of roast meat cooked over an open fire. No one even thinks of imposing their authority by force; the Merrie Men would never let that happen.

Taking up the political theme explored in *Cracks*, Scott also explores what it means to be a good English person. William Marshal (William Hurt) declares at one point that the strength of a nation depends on its people supporting one another ("We are all Englishmen") – a point that Robin comes to understand when he discovers his noble parentage. Yet, as we have seen, *Cracks* shows how this community loyalty can be used to as a mechanism for social exclusion. Thus Robin Hood further suggests that community values can only be reinforced through democracy. In a stirring speech to the barons, Robin declares that "in tyranny lies only failure;" the only way to deal with this is to cultivate the twin virtues of negotiation and mutual respect. Once such qualities have been acknowledged, then individuals should be able to work as a team; to suppress their individuality for the greater good.

To make this point clearer, Scott deliberately contrasts the English with the French invaders, who are both brutal and self-interested (they rob dead English soldiers rather than treating them with the respect due to combatants in war). Whole villages are destroyed, the inhabitants slaughtered or burned alive, and women raped. These sequences are reminiscent of the scenes in *Gladiator* where the Praetorian guards wreak havoc in the countryside around Rome by killing women and children (including Maximus' (Russell Crowe's)) family. While Robin mourns the loss of his fellow-citizens, he realizes the importance of putting such personal feelings aside and leading his troops in an effort to drive out the French invaders. It seems somehow appropriate that Robin should shoot the arrow that disposes of Godfrey, suggesting that traitors never prosper once they encounter the representatives of honour and justice.

Crowe's Robin Hood stands out as a paragon of virtue. His northern accent might be rather shaky – combining elements of Liverpool, Nottingham and Sydney – but his convictions remain unshakable. In one sequence he is faced with a choice between rescuing Maid Marian and a sheep from a bog; neither of them can move. He saves the sheep first, realizing that it cannot help itself. Marian objects (predictably) to Robin's apparent indifference, but secretly admires his decision – it is only a matter of time before they fall in love. Crowe's characterization holds the story together. His Robin Hood stands alongside other memorable performances on film and television (including Errol Flynn, Richard Greene and Oliver Tobias (*Robin of Sherwood*)).

As in *Kingdom of Heaven*, Scott uses landscape imagery to reinforce his political points. The French destruction is emphasized through panning shots of towns and villages razed to the ground, with smoke billowing from straw buildings set on fire. As Robin musters his army to repel them, Scott introduces aerial shots of England's green and pleasant land, with the iconic white horse set on the northern face of the Berkshire Downs – a timeless symbol of tolerance and democracy. Robin is not only fighting for the nation; his victory will ensure the

future of everything England represents. *Robin Hood* might be set in England, but Scott clearly intends his ideas to strike a chord with anyone who believes in democracy as the foundation of a stable society. Individualism certainly has an important role to play in promoting tolerance – as shown in the final sequences of *Cracks* and *Tell-Tale* – but *Robin Hood* suggests quite openly that national stability depends on individuals learning to co-exist with one another.

The A-Team likewise promotes community values, through a story set in the American present rather than the mythical British past. The film bristles with intertextual references to Scott's earlier work: Hannibal Smith (Liam Neeson) reminds us of Anthony Hopkins in *Hannibal* (2001); the battle-sequence involving US Army helicopters have distinct echoes of *Black Hawk Down* (also 2001); while the Baghdad scenes recall similar material set in the Middle East in *Body of Lies* (2009). The A-Team also follows *Body of Lies* in suggesting that the real 'enemy within' is neither the Iraqis, the Taliban or any other group of freedom-fighters, but rather the CIA, which controls US military operations through faceless operatives such as Lynch (Patrick Wilson). He is nothing more than a careerist, with little understanding of the responsibilities either to his staff or his country. The CIA willingly tolerates his behavior, allowing him to work under a pseudonym (Lynch is not his real name) and ensuring that he escapes punishment for his actions, once it has been revealed that he has been colluding in the illegal currency deal.

While most of the action sequences are obviously tongue-in-cheek (we know that none of A-Team will be destroyed, despite B. A. Baracus' (Quentin 'Rampage' Jackson) obvious fear of flying, or Murdock's (Sharlto Copley) rather haphazard approach to piloting, which puts the rest of his team-members perpetually at risk. Yet the film suggests that, despite their efforts, the A-Team as a whole remain pawns in the larger scheme of things. Unlike their counterparts in the 1980s television series, they cannot save America from destroying itself. Although they successfully recover the plates used for printing the counterfeit dollars, they are immediately returned to their respective "detention facilities" as escaped criminals. The social values advocated by *Robin Hood* – teamwork, honesty and integrity – seem somewhat anachronistic in a contemporary world where nothing seems quite what it appears. General Morrison (Gerald McRaney), whom Smith idolizes as a representative of all that is good about American society – democracy, honesty, tolerance – turns out to be the fence in the currency deal; disguised as an Arab, he meets with Lt. Peck (Bradley Cooper) to ensure its smooth progress. Even members of the US army are corruptible, so it seems.

Superficially it would seem that *The A-Team* questions the points made by the other three films. On the other hand the film shows how the A-Team "twisted the system and it twisted [them]." This comment reveals the shortcomings of the so-called "New Patriotism," based on democracy, loyalty and tolerance. Such

values have little significance in a dog-eat-dog world in which governments – through agencies such as the CIA – seem hell-bent on carrying out a secret master plan for purely financial motives, even if that contradicts the ideals which the US Army are apparently fighting for. On the other hand *The A-Team* values individual integrity; like Di in *Cracks* and Terry in *Tell-Tale*, the four men stand up for what they believe in even if they have to struggle to achieve it. As one of them observes: "The truth is worth the risk."

While none of the four films discussed here represent Scott's best work (*Cracks* and *Robin Hood*, in particular, seem like rehashes of his earlier films such as *The Browning Version*, *Gladiator* and *Kingdom of Heaven*), they nonetheless confirm my contention that Scott is not just a commercial director/ producer with a talent for visual detail, but someone with a keen interest in the relationship between individuals and the societies they inhabit. In his view the two are inseparable: Terry Bernard in *Tell-Tale* has to resolve his own personal struggles, so that he can become a better parent (and hence make a positive contribution to his society). However in certain contexts tolerance and loyalty are not sufficient in themselves to sustain the social order – especially in the world of *The A-Team*, where individuals are often treated as cannon-fodder in the government's overall scheme of things. Nonetheless, one should perhaps follow the example of Hannibal Smith and his associates and continue fighting for the truth. If they ever gave up, then most societies would have little hope for the future. Scott's ideas might seem somewhat naive in a world where governments seem to pay less and heed to different points of view; but at least they give filmgoers some sense of hope as they leave the cinema after the films have finished. This might perhaps help to explain why he remains a potent box-office name nearly thirty-five years after his first film was released.

The Karate Kid

Dir: Harold Zwart, USA, 2010

The Karate Kid

Dir: John G Avildsen, USA, 1984

A review by Rachel Mizsei Ward, University of East Anglia, UK

The Karate Kid (2010) is a remake of the 1984 film of the same name. Both films are similar in plot and genre and are aimed at a teenage audience. However the differences are quite marked with changes in setting and characterisation. The plot of *The Karate Kid* is mythic in its simplicity. A teen (Daniel, renamed Dre in the 2010 remake) moves to a new area and, as the "new kid in town", is subjected to bullying by members of a local martial arts school. He meets a local girl and makes friends with a caretaker who teaches him martial arts, giving him self-respect and pride. The narrative concludes with a climatic showdown at a martial arts tournament between the teen and the lead bully from the local martial arts school. The original film is based around Karate, a Japanese martial art, to work with the character of Mr Miyagi, a Japanese-American caretaker, whilst the remake has retained the title of *The Karate Kid* but substituted Chinese martial arts. This change makes the story more appropriate for a film set in China, and featuring Jackie Chan as its star. However it has been a source of criticism because of the mismatch between the title and the martial art used.

The 2010 version of *The Karate Kid* pairs Jaden Smith with Jackie Chan, imitating the already successful formula of Black/Chinese buddies in adult action films such as *Drive* (1997), *Rush Hour* (1998), *Romeo Must Die* (2000), and *Cradle 2 The Grave* (2003). The connection between black audiences, black stars and the Hong Kong martial arts film dates back to the 1970s, with the films of Bruce Lee key to this dynamic. These films were popular among black audiences who saw them as depicting ethnic minority heroes who combated discrimination and social problems. This helped to create a longstanding interest in martial arts films among black American audiences. Jackie Chan's *Rumble in the Bronx* (1995) was specifically designed to appeal to this audience and was released in a dubbed version as an attempt by Chan to break into the American market. Through its choice of actors and genre *The Karate Kid* connects to this legacy. It also refers to it in the dialogue when Dre is delighted at the mandarin shirt that Mr Han gives him, commenting that it is "just like Bruce Lee's." However this gift does not have the same emotional significance as Mr Miyagi's embroidered patch which is attached to the back of Daniel's karate outfit.

At the beginning of *The Karate Kid* (2010), Dre and his mother, Sherry, leave Detroit for a new life in Beijing. The two cities are heavily contrasted. Detroit is depicted as a dying city, with boarded up windows and closed businesses, while Beijing is a vibrant and modern place. It is important to note that this reflects the real situation in Detroit, which has high levels of unemployment and urban decay, in part caused by the decline of American car manufacturers, in particular the "Big Three" (General Motors, Ford and Chrysler), who are still based there. This contrast is much starker than that depicted in the 1984 *Karate Kid*, where the Larussos move from a New York tenement to a run-down complex in California. Lucille Larusso moves her family west because she has been offered a new job, giving them because she has been offered a new better opportunities, while Sherry, as an employee at a Detroit car factory, has little choice about the move if she wishes to keep her job. The idea of migrating west, usually to California, for better opportunities and a better life through hard work is typified by the nineteenth century American advice to "Go West, young man" [1] and seems apt in the context of the 1984 *Karate Kid*. In the 2010 *Karate Kid* the Parkers also have to go West, however they have to travel so far for a better life, that that they end up in China, the East.

A key location in Beijing is the park near the Parkers' apartment. It acts as centre for the community, enjoyed by residents of all ages, who practice Tai Chi, play sports such as basketball and ping pong, as well as being a space to socialise. This is quite different to the unusable, empty pool that is the centrepiece of the Larussos' 1984 American home, suggesting that their new life in California is far from perfect. It is interesting how the space in China encompasses both young and old, whilst America is depicted in both versions of *The Karate Kid* as somewhere without any pleasant outdoor spaces for its communities. In the 2010 *Karate Kid* this is particularly emphasised by the weather, with Detroit deluged by rain, making outdoor activity undesirable, while Bejing is mostly lit by bright sunlight.

As one would anticipate in films called *The Karate Kid*, martial arts are central to the narrative. In the 2010 version Dre asks Mr Han repeatedly to teach him kung fu, meaning martial arts, however "the phrase 'kung fu' ... is a Cantonese expression meaning accomplishment with effort (the Mandarin *wu shu* is closer to 'martial art')" (Hunt, 2003: 1). The series of training montages emphasise this idea of "accomplishment with effort", with Dre spending hours perfecting his technique and honing his body. This leads to several moments of bodily spectacle, which is unusual given that Jaden Smith was only eleven. These include Dre performing the splits on balcony railings, push-ups and high kicks, while his body becomes transformed into a muscular exterior. Daniel's transformation in the original film is far less physical, with no shots dwelling on the changes in his body. However the 1984 film exploits similar training montages which emphasise the acquisition of martial arts skills. These include

the now iconic scene on the beach where Daniel practices crane stance on a wooden post.

This meaning of kung fu also gives Dre greater equivalency with Meiying, his girlfriend, who becomes his female counterpart. While Dre practices martial arts, Meiying practices the violin so that she can audition for a place at the Beijing Academy of Music. Her audition acts as her test of competence, in the same way that the martial arts tournament is Dre's test and is given importance in the film's narrative. By comparison Ali, Daniel's girlfriend in the 1984 *Karate Kid*, is characterized as a helpmate to Daniel, rather than a talented and worthwhile individual in her own right.

An important aspect of the martial arts is how they are taught and this is heavily emphasised by the way the different schools are depicted. In the 2010 film Master Li's school teaches large groups of students on a production line in an almost industrialised manner. This is somewhat different to Kreese's Karate dojo in the 1984 version, which concentrates more on small groups. Most importantly any of the philosophy and history behind the martial arts has been jettisoned by both Master Li and Kreese, to be replaced by a slogan of "no mercy". By comparison both Mr Han and Mr Miyagi stress authenticity, with their martial art form being passed down, father to son. Although they are hard taskmasters, they stress the importance of compassion. Mr Han takes Dre to a Taoist temple in the Wudang Mountains as a way of imparting some aspects of Taoist philosophy along with his more physical training, which includes the use of looped poles to control the body movement of the student.

The poles take on a greater significance in the shadow-puppet sections of *The Karate Kid* (2010). The use of shadows in *The Karate Kid* is particularly significant because when translated literally, the Chinese word for film is "electric shadows". Shadows acts as an overarching theme throughout the film, and are key in moments of high emotion. There are two important sequences for this theme. Dre, Sherry, Mr Han and Meiying visit the *Shang Yuan* Festival together, and watch a shadow puppet play. During the play Dre and Meiying kiss and their shadow is projected onto the screen for the audience. As the teenagers first kiss, this is a moment of high emotion for the two characters and the sequence is echoed later in the film for another moment of high emotion.

This second shadow sequence takes place after a distraught Mr Han has told Dre about the deaths of his wife and son, and Dre recalls the death of his own father. Dre then forces Mr Han to train with him, using poles where the trainer can place the student's limbs into the correct position. However rather than Mr Han moving Dre, Dre instead moves Mr Han's limbs. This image becomes projected onto the wall of Mr Han's house as shadows, and the audience can no longer tell who is moving whom, with both figures moving in synchronicity. Their emotions of loss are mirrored in each other, but Dre appears to have dealt with his

feelings better than Mr Han, and is able to show him, metaphorically, how to move forward, by copying him. This sequence is a deliberate attempt to mirror both the shadow puppets (which are controlled by sticks) of the earlier scene and the sequence in the boat where Mr Han trains Dre using the same poles.

The back-stories provided for the trainers Mr Miyagi and Mr Han are key to understanding the characters and the differences between the two films. In the 1984 *Karate Kid* it is suggested that while Miyagi served with distinction in the 442 Infantry Regiment [2], his wife and unborn child were placed in an internment camp, like many Japanese-Americans after Pearl Harbour. Tragically his wife and child then die during childbirth, while he is away at war. This back story is related to a political and racial injustice and highlights an aspect of the Second World War that is rarely shown in film. One would expect a similar backstory for the 2010 remake, but the death of Mr Han's wife and son in a car accident is of a different order. While Mr Miyagi feels guilty because he wasn't with his wife, Mr Han feels guilty because he feels responsible for the accident, given that he was the driver of the car. Although this has greater emotional impact because of a good performance by Jackie Chan, it has less historical punch. Before this revelation it could be anticipated that Han's wife and son might have died during the Cultural Revolution or at Tiananmen Square, rather than in a car accident. The death of Han's wife and son becomes somewhat meaningless against the wider narrative of Chinese history.

In the modern film such a political backstory, however relevant, may have been rejected in development because the 2010 *Karate Kid* was in part produced by the China Film Group, a state run body which oversees co-productions such as this, as well as funding film production and importing foreign films. However politics is still present in this new version of *The Karate Kid*, albeit in a more subtle way. The central presence of the Communist Party of China (CPC) is undeniable. The film features shots of a large public statue of Chairman Mao, with pictures of important party members in the background of scenes set at the school that Dre attends in Beijing. Arguably these are a more positive representation of Communism in China but only because the political context is, or has to, remain absent.

The only sign that life may be more restrictive in China is the presence of an armed police officer outside Dre's new school in Beijing. These more problematic elements are subsumed by the display of key tourist attractions in China including the Great Wall, the Forbidden Palace, the Beijing National Stadium (also known as the Bird's Nest), and the Taoist temples in the Wudang Mountains. These are combined with beautiful countryside and images of a vibrant local culture via the inclusion of the Lantern Festival (*Shang Yuan* Festival) in an extended sequence. It portrays China as an exciting holiday destination, with varied unique locations to visit. In addition Beijing looks like a

historic, yet modern city, with many opportunities for those willing to emigrate, rather than a nation where the freedoms of speech, movement and religion are restricted.

The film depicts Chinese culture as something that can be appropriated by the West. Sherry appropriates China through fashion, wearing a t-shirt with an image of the Buddha and a red cheongsam dress, while Dre does the same through martial arts. They both enjoy traditional festivals and local food, rather than attempting to pursue more Western forms of entertainment. Dre and Sherry's interest in China and Chinese culture is reciprocated by the people they meet. A motif that appears several times is a fascination by Chinese children with Dre and Sherry's African hair. It's interesting to note that the styles chosen for both of these characters are quite natural and emphasise the different qualities of black hair. In particular Sherry's hair isn't depicted straightened, even when she goes to work. If the politics of black hair are considered, this is unusual because in America many black women find it necessary to straighten their hair to conform to social expectations at work.

This remake of *The Karate Kid* partially relies on an audience's assumed prior knowledge of the original version. For example at the end of the film the trainer Mr Li instructs his student to hurt Dre in their match. This dialogue is in Chinese, without subtitles. A viewer familiar with the original would recognise this scene from the 1984 original, with Kreese telling his student to aim for the leg. For younger viewers (the intended audience of *The Karate Kid*), unfamiliar with the plot of the original, this un-translated scene may be hard to understand. This assumed knowledge was even extended to marketing tie-ins, with the UK chain Pizza Hut promoting the film with a child's cardboard hat that was made to look like the headband that Daniel wears in the 1984 film, whilst there is no similar headgear in the new film. This piece of marketing is therefore only meaningful to the parents or grandparents of the intended audience, who would have seen the original.

The 2010 version of *The Karate Kid* builds on the 1984 original, while refashioning it for a new audience. It uses the martial arts to suggest a notion of meritocracy, where what you can do is more important than who you are. Not only that, it is possible to work hard and gain advancement. This is relevant for not only Dre and Mr Han who train hard so that Dre can succeed at the tournament, but also for other characters such as Meiying who practices her violin so she can gain a scholarship and even for Sherry who has got her new job in China because of her valued skills.

Notes

[1] The popular phrase "go West, young man" is attributed to the nineteenth century American journalist and politician Horace Greely. (Shapiro, 2006: 322-

323) It reflects contemporary belief in the manifest destiny of America to expand westwards across the North American continent. The West was seen as a place where hard-working people could succeed.

[2] During the Second World War the 442 Infantry was mostly composed of Japanese Americans, who served while their families had been placed in internment camps. The unit was the most highly decorated in American military history, including 21 recipients of the Medal of Honor.

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