



EYE TO IT





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THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

EYE ON IDENTITY:

A study of three films by British director,
Nicolas Roeg.

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INTRODUCTION.

This thesis sets out to study the work of British film director Nicolas Roeg. He has made six movies since 1970. For the purpose of this thesis I have chosen to look at three films in particular. These three I feel are representative of his work as a whole.

The first chapter of this work charts his professional career in the cinema up to his directorial debut in 1970. A brief synopsis will also be given of British New Wave Cinema in the early sixties and the role Roeg played in the movement,

The three central chapters analyse the Roeg films: 'Performance', 'The Man Who Fell to Earth', and 'Bad Timing'. In these chapters I will discuss the 'Roegian Style' of film making. Methods and techniques he employs to give greater plasticity and depth to cinematic form will also be examined. I will trace some of the recurrent images and themes that can be found through all his films. The title of this thesis, 'Eye to Identity', refers to one of Roeg's fundamental preoccupations, that of people in quest of self-discovery. The person may either be a character in one of his films or the viewer of his films. Roeg does not pander to his audience. His films demand concentration. Not only does Roeg ask us to look, but also to think. Most films these days offer very basic diets of entertainment and because of this people have become lazy in their attitudes of what cinema has to offer. They expect to be spoon fed sensational tonics, that seem to get more and more absurd year by year. Nicolas Roeg's films are complex and at first sight seem to be intangible in their meaning. If the viewer begins to question what is happening on the screen, more questions will follow, and slowly one is being lured into the world of Nicolas Roeg.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO ROEG'S CAREER UP TO 1970.

Nicolas Roeg was born in London in 1928. At the age of seventeen he began his career in the cinema by becoming a clapper-board boy. From this groundfloor start he elevated his way up to the rank of cinematographer. There was a twenty year wait before he was to make his directorial debut with 'Performance' in 1970.

Roeg's formative years in film production were occupied with an assortment of jobs. He became an assistant camera operator on 'Bhowani Junction' (1956). He progressed to camera operator on 'Trials of Oscar Wilde' (1960). By the early sixties, Roeg was also turning his hand to scriptwriting. One of these scripts was the original story for 'Prize at Arms' (1960). This film was a competent 'heist' melodrama, with a good central performance by the late Stanley Baker, but not distinguished enough in any other way to be memorable.

A rejuvenation of the British Cinema Industry took place in the early sixties. This was the period of 'The Angry Young Men'. It was a radical creative spirit begun by young playwrights and novelists. The British filmmakers soon followed suit and broke away from conventional attitudes of movie production.

From the beginnings of the British Cinema, the main source of inspiration and direction was copied from the Hollywood process of film making. Studios such as Ealing, Elstree and Shepperton were modelled on those of Hollywood. By the late fifties the dinosaur studios in Hollywood and Britain were faced with the quickly growing phenomenon of television. People could now be entertained at home instead of going out to the local nickelodeon. The once infallible movie monarchs now began to lose control over their industry. Change was demanded. Shallow gimmickery was used such as 3-D vision, cinemascope and stereophonic sound by the big companies to lure people back to the flea pits. While many technical innovations did occur to improve the quality of cinema viewing, novelty had taken over from quality and people soon tired of it.

From this ebb and decay of old ways sprang the British New Wave. One of its leaders was Richard Attenborough, who made a series of films in the late fifties and early sixties which looked away from Hollywood and outside London for their inspiration

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and reference. London up to this time because of its glamour and opulence, tended to dominate the attitudes and locations presented by British filmmakers. Attenborough shot his films on small budgets, often in black and white and the characters they depicted were ordinary working class people. Soon other young movie makers were following his example.

Films were shot on location in areas of England not fashionable before. For the first time filmmakers attempted to chronicle the dramas of ordinary men and women in places like Yorkshire, Manchester, Liverpool etc. This was the trend towards realism in British cinema, and a means of helping define the English character on screen through the eyes of Englishmen, rather than through the myopic viewpoint of the Hollywood manner.

This outburst of energy brought forth many vital and fresh talents. The list of acting and directing careers that blossomed from this renaissance is quite formidable. Actors such as Albert Finney, Tom Courtney, Richard Harris, Peter O'Toole and directors like Richard Attenborough, Lindsay Anderson, John Schlesinger, Dick Lester, Tony Richardson etc... These were prominent figures, all born out of the British New Wave. It was a watershed of influential filmmakers who have remained to the forefront of world cinema ever since.

Roeg too, was swept into this torrent of brazen creativity. He was cinematographer for director Clive Donner on the film adaptation of Harold Pinter's play 'The Caretaker' (1962). A year later he worked with Donner again on 'Nothing but the Best'. David Lean incorporated him as second unit cameraman on the epic 'Lawrence of Arabia' (1962). Roeg's involvement in sixties cinema seems to have been a professional participation rather than having an empathy with New Wave doctrines. As will be shown later, Roeg's films are hard to categorise. His work is individual in aspect and cannot easily be fitted in with any specific genre of film that has gone before.

The critical and commercial success of these angry young moviemakers soon made the big production companies take notice. Many of the British prodigies were lured away to America with promises of mammoth financial rewards. Some sunk without trace, others like Attenborough, Schlesinger, Boorman and Lester have survived erratic careers. Thus the British radicals were tamed, by the very vices they set out in reaction against. There was one notable exception—Lindsay Anderson has continued to make films that document in a satirical and detailed way the changes in British society over the last twenty

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years .For sureness of purpose and imagination,he is a director much admired.Both he and Roeg have remained mavericks of the British Cinema.Their films lie outside convention and cynicism;ailments that stifle the majority of modern movies.Of the British directors working over that last twenty years they are two of the more interesting.

The boom produced a large inflow of mogul money into the British Film Industry.The initial success of the New Wave caused many to profit.Roeg found himself much in demand and worked as cinematographer on a number of lush big budget productions. He was cinematographer for Francois Truffaut on 'Fahrenheit 451'(1966). (Cyril Cusack had a feature role in this futuristic vision of a Fascist State where all books are burned.) A year later he did cinematographer for John Schlesinger on 'Far from the Madding Crowd'(1967). Film critic John Simon had this comment to make on the film:

"In this rather plodding film the unsufficiency of the foreground is partly offset by the winsomeness of the backgrounds. The very sheep are so engaging as to entice our gaze into some extremely amiable woolgathering".

(Bib;5)

The above review shows how Roeg's photography captures more of the spirit of Hardy's mythical Wessex, than all the brooding blustering of the actors and the self-conscious reverence of the director.(Schlesinger has done worse in celluliod waste but occasionally shows how good a director he can be with films like 'Midnight Cowboy'(1969) and 'Sunday Bloody Sunday'(1971).) In 'Far from the Madding Crowd',we get an early glimpse of Roeg's developing visual style.The photography is rich and colourful.Each shot utilizes the natural beauty of the countryside and endows each scene with a poetic quality reminiscent of the descriptive passages in Hardy's prose.It shows Roeg's mastery of the camera.In San Francisco he photographed 'Petulia'(1968) for Dick Lester.This film dealt with the hippie culture of the sixties.Roeg was to return to this theme of drug culture for his first work as director.'Petulia' was Roeg's last film on which he worked under the guidance of another director.

In 1973 Nicolas Roeg explained why he was so long in the movie business before he began to direct.

"When I started out I wanted to be a movie maker,and it seemed to me that the way to movie-making was to handle a camera.Then suddenly you realise you are inside a business; and that to make films you have to have a job.It was all very depart-

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mentalised and very like an industry: it was an industry. Then, by the time I'd served my apprenticeship and wanted to make my own films, the industry itself had entered another stage. 'Do it! It doesn't matter whether you know anything about it or not! Which is marvellous. But that attitude didn't exist earlier, and I'd been stuck at a point where the reaction was, 'Oh well, he couldn't do it because he's a cameraman!'" "

(Bib; 15)

Roeg's apprenticeship years taught him everything he needed to know about the complexities of attempting to make a film. The movie industry is a vast and complex one. Many talented people have been crushed by its cynicism and tactlessness. There is a traditional conflict between the producer's monetary interests and the film maker's artistic interests. Not only did Roeg become a master of his craft but he also learned how to deal with his overseers and achieve the artistic freedom he wanted in order to make his films. There are few other directors who can continually experiment with cinematic form and still command multi-million dollar budgets for their films. Roeg has been able to do this without having to compromise his vision as an artist. 'Eureka', Roeg's most recent film, was set in an exotic Caribbean island at obvious cost and boasted a cast of very good but expensive actors. Despite an estimated input of fifteen million dollars, and the pressures applied by the producers to reap a reward, Roeg still managed to make a film that was daring, innovative and a direct successor to the ideas and themes pursued in his previous work.

It would be hard to imagine Roeg as a director of the fifties or the sixties. Censorial laws on films up to the mid-sixties were very strict. It is obvious from his films that artistic licence and freedom are important to Roeg in giving full rein to his expressive talents. His accusers have labeled him gratuitous, arty, obscene... . He is much misunderstood. It is true that his films are sometimes graphic in their depictions of sex and violence, but this has more to do with Roeg's eye for details in life rather than being explicit to sensationalise. He is a perfect craftsman and not even his most extreme critics would argue that. The content of his films show how broad his scope is. The range of subjects and themes he has investigated or touched on in only six films is evidence enough of his intellect. Roeg is a pioneer personality in experimental narrative cinema. If he is misunderstood by many, it is because most innovators are not appreciated in their own time.

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Roeg has attempted to give a deeper dimension to film. What this thesis sets out to do in part is explain how Roeg has tried to redefine the visual language of his chosen craft and sought to expand and deepen its scope.

The Masque and the Mirror : 'Performance'(1970)

"Is this the most loathsome film of all?"

(Bib;12)

At the end of the sixties, Donald Camell a friend of Roeg's, had written a story which he wanted to film. Camell had been a painter then turned to scriptwriting. He scripted a film 'Duffy'(1968), which was a splendid disaster. After this debacle Camell found himself in disfavour and went to Roeg for help on his next project. Between them they persuaded Warner Bros to finance their film. It is almost certain that if Warners had been wise to Camell's and Roeg's intentions, they would never have supported the venture. Mick Jagger was cast in the lead role as Turner. This may have been an inspired choice but it was also a shrewd one for Jagger was one of the biggest popstars of the period. Furthermore a brief resume of the script and plot would not have preturbed the producers into thinking it anything but a safe commercial investment.

It is the story of Chas, a hench man for a London mob leader. Chas falls into disfavour after killing one of the gang's associates. The mob decide to track Chas down and extract revenge. Chas is forced to go on the run. Whilst waiting for a forged passport to come through so that he can escape the country, he holds up in a sub-urban house. It is inhabited by Turner a recluse rock star and two bisexual women. On Chas and Turner's first meeting there is a feeling of suspicion and inquisitiveness. They both have personalities formed by different backgrounds. But soon Turner lures Chas into a world where he is asked to question the values of the stereotype lifestyle he lived. The two grow to a closer understanding. Chas's character, once tough and almost one dimensional, mellows. He opens his view and appreciation of things. The mob finally trace Chas to Turner's house. Before they take him away to his death Chas asks to see Turner one last time. Chas tells Turner he has to go. Turner wants to go with Chas, knowing what the inevitable outcome will be. Out of a willingness to share the fate that awaits him, Chas shoots Turner. In the final scene we see the Rolls Royce taking Chas out into the country to his death. In the car a face looks out

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through the window. It is the face of Turner.

Over a year passed between the film's completion and its release to the public. Warner Bros did not know what to make of it. Their reaction was a mixture of shame and horror. After a year of constant goading by Roeg, Camell and Mick Jagger, they withdrew their reservations and released it. Warner attempted to edit it in the hope of making it more presentable to conventional public taste. They soon realised the futility of their attempt to make the film more coherent and seem to have left it to the hands of its creators.

"This film, especially when misunderstood, evokes the strongest fears and defences surrounding questions that have polarised our minds and hearts- questions of sexual identity and morality; problems of violence on the streets, in the counting house, and in the bedroom; relationships between the individual and the groups on which he depends."

(Bib; 12)

'Performance' right from its inception was destined to become a 'cult' film. It has all the distinguishing marks: the seemingly weird presentation, a charismatic youth idol, degrees of sex and violence that caused elders to voice their outrage, along with censorial and production problems. The controversy associated with the film added to its mystique.

Critical reaction to the film leaned to both extremes. Everybody seemed to have something to say, either praise or censure. If reaction is in part a measure of the success of an artwork, then 'Performance' can certainly be said to have come out admirably.

'Organic unity and consistent energy'

'that perfect poisonous cinematic flower'

(Peter Schjeldhal of the New York Times, quoted Bib; 12)

John Simon, another critic from the New York Times, is quoted at the beginning of this chapter. These differing opinions from the same newspaper are indicative of the split in views on the film. The only stance not taken was that of neutrality.

'Performance' is of interest now in hindsight for reasons other than those of a scandalous nature that were picked on at the time of its release. We can return to it now with fifteen years of experience to view it with more objective feelings.

Roeg co-directed the film with Camell. The pairing was a productive one artistically. They were friends and shared each other's general interests.

"For years the question of identity interested me. I wanted to do something on the idea of change of identity", Roeg said of his involvement with 'Performance'. (Bib, 15)

Camell too had been interested in this idea; he had written the story which dealt with this 'change of identity'. Both were then open to each other's ideas and managed to make a co-directed film, work. Cases of this happening in cinema are rare. Directors like to mother their films and get jealous if anybody else interferes.

In the film we see themes stated, questions posed, and images appear that would recur with poetical consistency through all of Roeg's later works. It is also proof of the sound working relationship between the two men, that Camell's contributions enhance rather than detract from the film's unique vision. Roeg said of Camell,

"We were perfect for each other, we could build on each other"

(Bib, 15)

The film begins with NASA footage of a rocket shooting into space, leaving the Earth behind. This is the beginning of our journey. This may be a pun on the drug term 'spaced out', or maybe a brief indication that what we are about to see is dealing with dimensions of reality not usually touched on in film. We are quickly brought back to Earth with an aerial view of a Rolls Royce speeding along a country road. It is a commodity associated with a certain social class and frame of mind. In this case the car belongs to Harry Flowers a London mob leader. The Rolls is part of the pseudo-respectable front Harry uses to cover up the vices of his profession.

Chas works as a heavy for Harry. He too, treats the crime and mayhem he is involved in in a distant business-like manner. His lifestyle is that of a trendy executive type. Chas neatly grooms himself, has a modern pad, dresses in slick suits. The business works through the understanding that Harry is the boss. Harry constantly reminds his opponents and the members of his gang of the control he believes he has. He does not really control, he rules by instilling fear.

The gang is taken to court by an ambitious lawyer. Harry sends Chas on a mission to persuade the solicitor to cease his prosecution. Chas threatens the lawyer with words, but to no avail. He then strikes out at a vulnerable point, by destroying the solicitor's

car with acid and shaving the hair off the chauffeur's head. In this scene it is pressed home the similarities between the opposing parties of law and crime. Both sides conduct their lives around the same social structure and set of morals. The Rolls becomes an object of prestige, to destroy it is a form of castration. This is further brought out by the shaving of the head, where one can draw a parallel to the biblical story of Samson. After this action the solicitor withdraws his lawsuit.

Chas has an insolent attitude towards Harry's rule. Harry sends members of his gang to give Chas a disciplinary lesson. They attack Chas in his flat. The tables are now turned as the gang destroy Chas' belongings in the flat. Chas is beaten and whipped. In the American version of the film, the whipping scene is intercut with flashbacks to an earlier scene of Chas having violent sex*. We are shown how Chas associates sex with violence. Pain excites Chas. He manages to wrench himself free from his attackers. He callously shoots Joey, the rival gang member who has led the assault on him. Chas commits the murder with sadistic slowness, letting Joey sweat and plead for mercy before the trigger is pulled. Red is a prominent colour in this scene. Not only because of the blood, but also because the gang members splash red paint across the walls of Chas's flat while they are awaiting his arrival. As they are involved in the destruction of Chas' abode, we get the camera intercutting with shots of Turner (our first glimpse of him) throwing paint on a wall. The implication of Turner's splashing of red paint is akin to the way an expressionist painter would use paint on a canvas. At the same time the camera shows that the actions of Turner and the hoodlums are basically the same. What at first seems like wanton destruction may not be destruction. Creation is an irreversible process. Chas pulls the trigger and Joey dies. The screen turns totally red. We are also shown a shot of two kids fighting; Chas and Joey as children.

Chas now finds himself in danger and on the run from Harry Flowers who is bent on asserting his authority. To conceal his identity Chas dyes his hair red. Again we have the recurrence of the colour that is used constantly as a visual reference throughout the film. In the same way, Roeg uses a plethora of objects, colours, images, icons and literary references to enhance the ideas and themes he wishes to put across in the film.

* British censors felt this scene too strong for public viewing.

As mentioned before, the major theme is that of identity. Chas, an underworld hoodlum whose values and ideas are centred around a conservatively structured but violent world, is offered new notions of life and reality when he meets Turner.

Forced to take refuge, Chas finds a hiding place in Turner's home. Chas poses as a circus juggler. Turner is dubious of Chas at first and wants him to leave. Chas is equally suspicious of Turner, though has little choice but to play to his hosts whims. Turner finally agrees to let Chas stay.

The pace of the film slows down from this point. The first half hour of the film is distinguished by quick shots and staccato editing of scenes. This works well to show the pace of the gangster lifestyle and the transient superficiality of their world. A momentum of images is built up, we are not allowed much time on any specific scene to wonder. It was perhaps the most accurate depiction of English underground crime made up to that time. What makes us uneasy is the way it is presented. These people are not psychotic murderers (at least they do not act this way), they act and dress just like everyone else. The fact that they share and are so much part of our society as say a milkman, a judge or a school teacher is what we find most acceptable and believable, despite our pretentious abhorrence. It was the second non-violent part of the film that many people took offence to.

An array of images link up the first and second parts of the movie. Some have been mentioned such as the use of red. Windows, glass shattered and mirrors are referred to throughout both parts of the movie. In doing this Roeg ensures that there is no break between both parts by giving it unity through repetition of visual and literary reference. The Rolls Royce for instance is one of the first images we see on the screen and is also one of the last, as the gangsters take Chas out into the country to kill him.

No small factor in the success of integrating both parts of the film was the acting performance by James Fox as Chas. His control and understanding of the character of Chas as he goes through his personality transition is masterful. It is probably the best performance Roeg has ever received from an actor in his films. Fox's acting may have been too intense for he suffered a mental breakdown shortly after completing the film, and has only recently made an acting comeback. This echoes an eerie statement made by Turner in the film, 'The only performance that makes it, is the one that achieves madness.'

Turner manages to get Chas to broaden his views by playing mind games. "I know who I am," Chas assured Harry Flowers earlier on in the film, as a mark of defiance. When he repeats this statement to Turner on their meeting, we begin to sense Chas' doubt.

Turner beguiles Chas into eating psychedelic mushrooms. He begins to see things in a perspective he had not known before. Life begins to take on a mystery for him. He begins to see and appreciate beauty in intricate objects. He gains an aesthetic and emotional sensitivity. Chas and Turner are beginning to see through the same eyes.

Another facet of the film, which Roeg uses to emphasise the fusion of character between the two men, is the play on bisexual qualities. The hermaphrodite can be interpreted as a symbol of human perfection: the union of male and female in one body; a whole, self-perpetuating being. This has been an aesthetic ideal in art since the time of the Greeks. In the statues of ancient Greece we see how the human body is given an almost super-human form. These sculptures depicted for the most part the Gods and heroes of the Greek people. The Greeks strove for a betterment of the individual and society in the hope that some day mortals too could ride in the chariots of the Gods. Later on in history we can see analogies with Michaelangelo's sculptural representations of the female, which very often look like males with breasts crudely applied. Michaelangelo glorifies the human figure in his work, especially in his male statues. In 'Performance', the camera constantly misleads the viewer as to the sex of the characters in certain situations.

Turner wears make-up and has definite effeminate qualities. Lucy, one of the girls who shares the house, has short hair with boyish looks. Someone sleeps beside Chas in bed. At first we think it is Turner, later we see it is Lucy. By this stage in the film however, the viewer has become accustomed to the changes taking place in Chas' personality. Had Chas been making love to Turner it would not have surprised us. The love scene between Chas and Lucy also shows us the contrast between his former self and the discovery of his new self. In the opening scenes we are shown Chas' former violent approach to sex. Roeg re-emphasised this by showing Chas holstering a gun in the crotch of his trousers. With Lucy however Chas is gentle and affectionate. This again shows how Chas has changed. Even earlier, cosmetics and a woman's wig are applied to him by Pherber, the other girl in Turner's house. He retains the wig throughout the remainder of the film.

The scene that probably best depicts unified sexuality, is one where Pherber watches over the bed while Lucy and Turner lie asleep. The background music and the decor of the bedroom is oriental. This gives the scene a far eastern, mystical feel. The oriental spiritual mood counterpoints the pragmatic materialism of the west we are familiar with and have been shown in the first part of the film. In this scene we are unable to tell whether the couple in bed are male or female, boy and boy, girl and girl. Pherber awakens them. We see it is Turner and Lucy. Pherber joins them, and the three make love. The camera closes in on the bodies as they sensually flow, it glides beneath the sheets in a yellow golden light. We are unable to distinguish the characters. They and their sexual identities have become unified. The feeling evoked is one of sensual beauty. In this scene we are asked to associate with different moral values. The oriental ambience helps to take us away from our present situation, by making us associate with far away exotic countries most of us know little about. This love scene is gentle and peaceful. It has a calm that betokens the serenity of Zen Buddhism.

At the time of making 'Performance', Camell introduced Roeg to the writings of the Argentinian Jorge Luis Borges. There is constant reference to Borges in the film. Early on we see one of the gangsters casually reading Borges' 'Personal Anthology'. Later Turner reads to Chas an excerpt from the Borges' story 'The South'.

"From a corner of the room, the old ecstatic gaucho threw him a naked dagger, which landed at his feet. Dahlmann bent over to pick up the dagger, and felt two things. The first, that this almost instinctive act bound him to fight. The second, that the weapon, in his torpid hand, was no defence at all, and would merely justify his murder".

(Bib;2)

In the story Dahlmann reconciles himself to his fate of death. His previous experience with madness and death in the sanatorium has prepared him. His life up to that time had been viewed through blinkers. Having been released from the sanatorium, he decides to go to his villa in the South. This is a place he has owned but never visited. On his train journey we notice the change in his reactions to and ruminations on life. Dahlmann is not only going to a certain geographical point, but also it is a metaphor for the mind's journey to a place of peace. His experience with sickness has filled his mind with romantic notions. So when the knife challenge is made in the barr, his reactions are of fatalistic welcome; without hope, without fear.

"He felt that if he had been able to choose then, or dream of his death, this would have been the death he would have chosen or dreamt".

(Bib;2)

There are parallels between the fate of Dahlmann in 'The South' and that of Chas in 'Performance'. Both have a changing experience, Dahlmann's sickness in the sanatorium and Chas' involvement in Turner's psychedelic extravagance. Madness and drugs alter the perceptions of their minds. They are given a clearer understanding of what their lives might mean. Their perspectives on life are broadened. It also helps them to come to an acceptance and welcome their fate; death becomes a release.

Harry Flowers and his hoods finally track Chas down to Turner's house. Chas asks to see Turner one last time. Harry agrees to the request.

Chas explains to Turner that he has to leave. Turner wants to go with him, though he knows what it means. Chas shoots Turner in the head. The camera follows the bullet as it penetrates the skull and we see a photograph of Borges. By committing this act Chas is sharing his fate with Turner. The two men have found a mutual consciousness. This is again emphasised in the final scene of the gangster's Rolls taking Chas out into the country (the country being a geographical plain similar to 'The South') to his violent death. In the car windows we are shown the face of Turner.

"Personality is persona, a mask. The world is a stage, the self a theatrical creation: 'The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing ... it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from the scene that is presented ...'."

(Bib;4)

'Performance', while co-directed with Camell, has most of the distinguishing traits that would characterise Roeg's later works. 'Performance' took film into new areas of experimentation. Probably the most striking is the breakdown of conventional cinema narrative. Roeg has created his own form and grammar in film which typifies his style. Anybody who has seen a Hitchcock film can see certain qualities that distinguish his work from other movies. A modern director like Steven Spielberg is distinguished by style from Hitchcock, but both still have the same fundamental grammar for film making, the basis of this being a straight forward plot: a film with a beginning, a middle and an end, in that order. These are the constituents of a story and the majority of films. Roeg would agree with this-but not specifically with that order!

In 'Performance', Roeg achieves a disorientation in time, by editing with verve. On first viewing of the film this is a feature that stands out. Conventional editing of film is used basically to bring about continuity in the story, by connecting each scene in a logical, causal manner. The editor's art has been so refined that it is for the most part invisible. The audience has been conditioned to a certain way of things happening on the screen. A man walks in through the door of his house in one shot, we expect him to be inside the next shot. In 'Performance' Roeg turned this technique on its head. In the first part of the film, scene after scene is followed in quick succession. Roeg introduces certain visual ploys to add coherence; a recurring choice of colours and objects which the audience can refer to throughout. Roeg often juxtaposes very different scenes either one after the other or by intercutting during a scene. At first Roeg seems to be destroying the sense of the film, but later we see that he is in fact constructing a new cinematic form.

The use of this fast editing style goes back to the Russian director Sergei Eisenstein's 'Battleship Potemkin' (1925). A fast cross-cutting technique was used to add a deeper vitality, reality and momentum to the film. It extended the range of the camera eye in what it was able to make reference to. In a scene that might last a minute if filmed directly, Eisenstein cross-cut into a length of five minutes. We are faced with a barrage of detailed shots coming one after another. This is best exemplified in the Nurse's scream sequence in 'Battleship Potemkin'. The palace guard open fire at the protesting Russian people as they march up the Odessa steps. Part of this scene shows the horror on the nurse's face as a baby in a pram falls down the steps. Shots of the pram, the confusion of the crowd, the soldiers shooting, people dying, and the torment on the woman's face are orchestrated in such a way as to give a very emotive effect.

A still photograph of the nurse's face was used by Francis Bacon as the subject matter for one of his better known paintings. In 'Performance' Bacon's paintings are referred to in a scene conjured up by Chas' drug-hallucinations. Naked gangsters lie bloody about a room, similar to the grotesque figures that inhabit the rooms of Bacon's paintings.

Roeg's editing style is used to give us extra references beyond the story of Chas and Turner, references that would be difficult to get across if the film had been made in a more conventional way. Roeg gives us images, literary and visual, as a key to understanding the film. Music too is used, from oriental islamic to modern rock, to illuminate mood; and in the lyrics, meaning. Non more so than these lines from a

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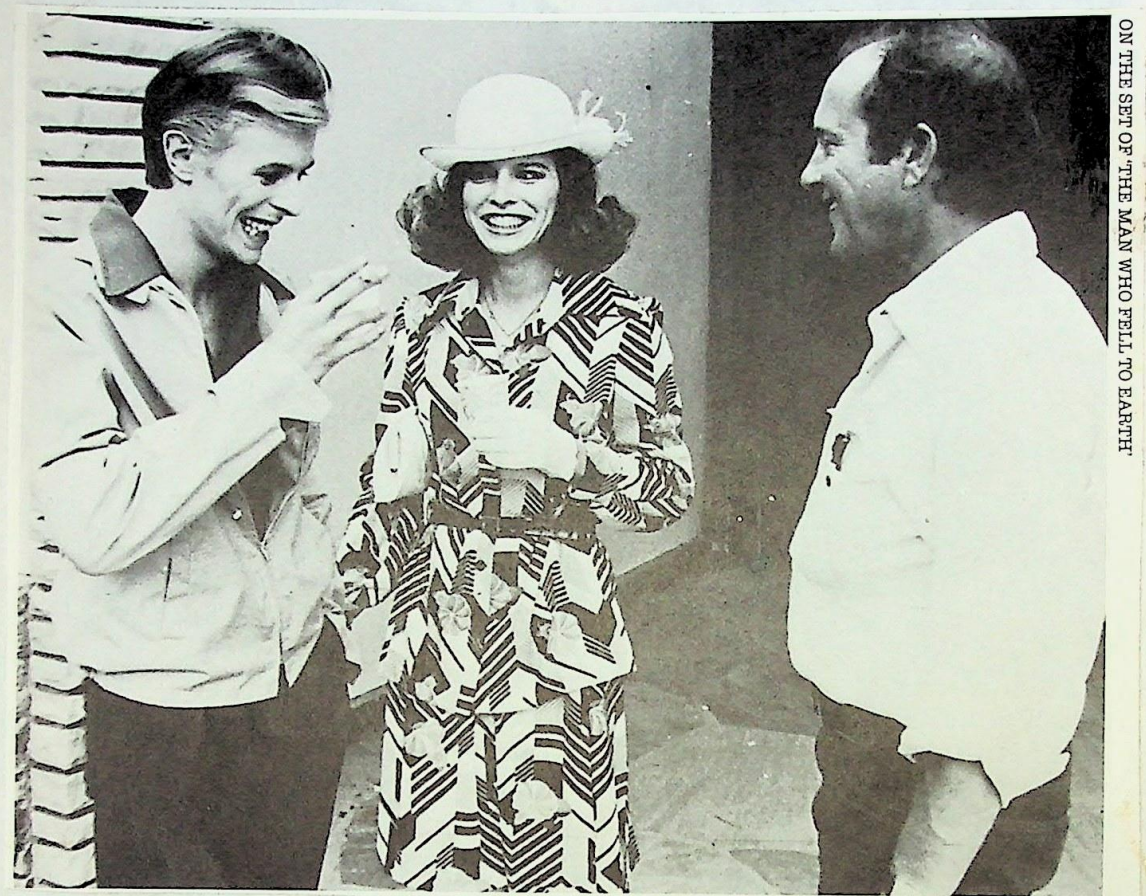
Mick Jagger/Keith Richard song, "Memo for Turner:

'Didn't I see you down in San Antone on a hot and dusty night?

You were eating eggs in Sammy's when the black man drew his knife'.

The lyrics of this song tell a similar story to that of Dahlmanns encounter with the gaucho in 'The South'.

Mirror imagery is used. Looking at yourself is turner into looking into yourself. Cars, planes, paintings, posters, photographs appear again and again in the film. These images are used as visual threads that bind the film together. They are also icons that reappear with regular consistency in Roeg's later movies. We are introduced to a rock crystal by Pherber in 'Performance'; this object reappears twelve years later in a different but not unrelated context.



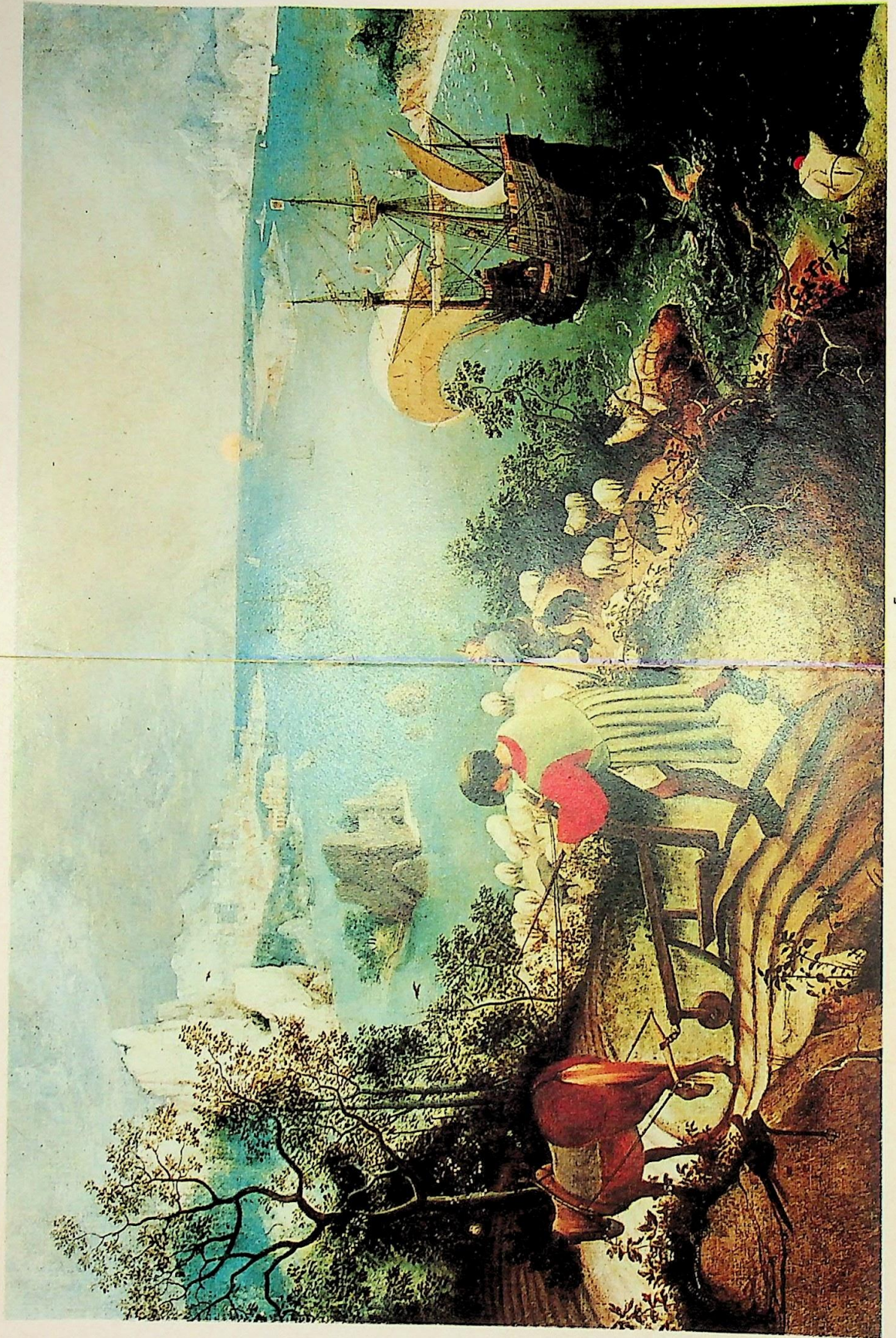
ON THE SET OF 'THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH'

Illus 1.

A break between scenes of 'The Man Who Fell To Earth'.
From left to right: David Bowie, Candy Clark and Nicolas Roeg.,

"I'd been offered a lot of scripts but I chose this one because it was the only one where I didn't have to sing or look like David Bowie. Now I think David Bowie looks like Newton. One thing that Nicolas Roeg is good at is seducing people into a role, and he seduced me completely. He told me after we'd finished it would take me a long time to get out of the role and he was dead right ... It took me about eight weeks to forget that I had been Thomas Jerome Newton."

(October 1977 :Bib 3)



Illus 2. The Fall of Icarus by Pieter Breugel.

The inspiration behind a poem by W.H Auden, a novel by William Tevis and a film by Nicolas Roeg.

Myth, Mystery, Magic ... :The Man Who Fell to Earth (1975)

"Nicolas said, 'Well, David, what do you think of the script?'. I said, 'It's a bit corny, isn't it?'... Then he started talking. Two or three hours later, I was convinced the man was a genius. There is a very strong story line as it turns out, but that only provides the backbone to the meat of it ... I still don't understand all the inflections Roeg put into the film. He's of a certain artistic level that's well above me."

(Bib;3)

Between 'Performance' and 'The Man Who Fell to Earth', Roeg completed two other films: 'Walkabout' (1970) filmed on location in Australia, and 'Don't Look Now' (1973) shot in wintertime Venice. 'Don't Look Now' was a film adaptation of a Daphne De Maurier thriller novel. It was a big commercial success and thus by most people considered his best film. Both these films continue and develop lines of thought initiated in 'Performance'.

In 'Don't Look Now', the idea of extra-sensory perception is taken up. The protagonist has a vision of his own death before it happens. He does not heed the warnings, and as a result runs blindly towards his grotesque end. Roeg continued to develop his cinematic form and imagery. In 'Don't Look Now', the colour red is again used to express the moods of the film. In its symbolic nature as a warning of impending danger, which Baxter fails to recognise, thus leading to his demise. Roeg also uses shattered glass to underline human fear; people in terror of being cut or hurt. The prop used to most effect in getting the proper tone to the film was the Venetian setting itself. The camera follows down narrow streets, through dark doorways, up isolated stairways evoking the claustrophobic oppressiveness of a city abandoned by its Summer tourist population.

In 'Walkabout' another crisis factor in human understanding is faced. A young aborigine saves a white girl and her brother from the desert where they have been abandoned by their father. On their journey back the aborigine falls in love with the girl. She rejects his advances, and he in despair commits suicide. Misinterpretation is the link between these two films. Baxter fails to comprehend the supernatural powers he has. With the aborigine and the girl it is because they come from differing cultures and they fail to communicate their feelings. Both end

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in disaster.

"The Man Who Fell to Earth" was based on a novel of the same title, written by Walter Tevis, Professor of English literature at Ohio University. At the time of its initial publication it received very little public notice, but gathered a certain cult following in America. Roeg discovered the book and showed it to scriptwriter Paul Mayersberg with the idea of filming it. At first the task of writing a script looked relatively straightforward to Mayersberg, but soon he came to a certain realization about the novel:

"I became aware that the eventual film was not going to be easy at all. Slowly I began to see why the story had not been filmed before. In a way it was too much of a good thing..."

(Bib; 14)

Through the years there had been a number of people interested in filming the novel. For various reasons no one was willing to see a film project through until Roeg came along. It would have been hard to think of another director who could have done justice to the novel.

The story is that of a clairvoyant alien who comes to Earth from another planet. His own world is stricken with drought and his mission is to seek a supply of water to save his people from extinction. Gold is found in abundance on his planet. He begins to pawn off a quantity of gold he has brought with him in the form of wedding rings. He adopts the name of Thomas Jerome Newton and starts to amass a large fortune. He invests his money in a Communications Corporation and earns even more money with five innovative patents for photographic equipment. He hires a lawyer to head his company, Oliver Farnsworth (played by Buck Henry, scriptwriter of 'The Graduate' and 'Catch-22'). The Company proceeds to revolutionize the communications industry. Newton is soon one of the world's wealthiest men.

Newton becomes a recluse, dealing only with Farnsworth by telephone and keeping well out of the public eye. He is also laboured physically by the gravitational differences between Earth and his own planet.

Shrouded in secrecy, he sets up a private space programme. It is his hope to build a space ship that will take him home to his wife and children and deliver a source of water to his planet.

After an accident in an elevator, in which the force of gravity almost kills him, he is discovered by Mary Lou, a simple girl who nurses him back to health in her apartment. She introduces Newton to alcohol and television. He becomes addicted to both. They develop a curious love relationship.

Newton eventually recovers and continues with his planned space project. Doctor Bryce, an ex-college lecturer, is taken on to help

with the project. Bryce is fascinated by Newton and tries to discover his identity. Newton and Bryce form a friendship based on mutual inquisitiveness and respect. Newton's plans are destroyed by a clandestine government body (C.I.A. or F.B.I.). Farnsworth is murdered. Newton is kidnapped and the spaceship he has built is destroyed. He is suspected of being an alien and is subjected to tests in a lab to determine his physiology and identity.

He is held in captivity for years. All those about him grow older, but he remains the same. His captors forget about him. He wanders about a decaying hotel suite, playing table tennis, watching T.V. and continually inbibing alcohol. Newton reconciles himself to the fact that his former home and family are now long dead and beyond his help. He finally returns to society and takes up recording songs. Again he becomes successful and famous. Doctor Bryce, his old assistant, visits him. Bryce now lives with Newton's former lover Mary Lou. In their conversation it is realised how Newton has become accustomed to humanity. He is left fatalistically resigned to his condition, crippled with alcohol.

There are certain assumptions made about Science fiction in film and literature. People make connotations of a Zap Stardance hero buzzing about a methane moon in a rocket, blasting hostile asteroids to the heavens. This is understandable considering the glut of space-opera movies inflicted on the public since the success of 'Star Wars' and 'E.T'. Perhaps there is a demand for films like 'E.T', but more need for films like 'The Man Who Fell to Earth'.

It would be misleading to think of 'The Man Who Fell to Earth' as primarily a science fiction film. Special effects which have become the hallmark if not the sole reason for the production of many contemporary S.F. films, are almost non-existent in the movie.

The two basic thematic elements in the film are those of love and corruption: the love affair between Newton and Mary Lou, and his decline due to the negative influence of Earth's society on him. When he first arrives on Earth, Newton possesses an alien purity. By the time the story finishes he is saturated with the vices of humanity (in this case American materialistic values). Newton has become the proverbial fallen angel.

Roeg and Mayersberg had worked on two previous projects, neither of which were completed. 'The Man Who Fell To Earth', was their third attempt and first completed collaboration. While the film is ultimately Roeg's creation, again we see how close he works with the scriptwriter. Parts of the novel were abandoned for the purpose of the film, also other ideas were introduced. Aspects only casually hinted at in the book are

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highlighted in the film. Ideas grow organically as in 'Performance'. Paul Mayersberg speaks of this particular creative process:

"When you come up with what you think is a great idea, you find you can incorporate it as a minor element, or it changes the whole concept and becomes the core of the piece, or it gets thrown out, or it is an interesting side issue, which is kept on that basis. You can never tell at the time. What seems a vital clue on Monday, turns out on Tuesday to be a drunken aside."

(Bib; 14)

Roeg carefully works out a script before he starts to shoot a film. One can be tempted to think from the way Roeg's films appear on the screen that there is a random technique involved. This is not so, Roeg plans carefully in advance: 'And then one can really have a game with the film'. (Bib; 15) What starts off as a science fiction tale evolves into other genres. In this case there is a love story, a mystery/thriller, and a play on the Greek legend of Icarus, to name a few of the many formal threads woven through the film.

A key viewpoint in the film is that of the detective, the person who asks questions and tries to discover the nature of things around him. In 'Don't Look Now' it is Baxter who dons the guise of detective in his wanderings through the labyrinthine Venetian streets in search of his dead daughter. Roeg again employed this device in 'The Man Who Fell to Earth', and also in the two films he has completed since. For the viewer it is a useful way of trying to gauge what is happening in his films, because there is always someone we empathise with in our questioning.

In 'The Man Who Fell to Earth', there are a number of questions to be asked. 'Who is Thomas Jerome Newton?', 'Where does he come from?', 'Why is he here?', are just a few conundrums posed. In this case it is Doctor Bryce who is cast in the role of truth-finder. Bryce at the beginning of the film is a debauched lecturer. He starts to feel the onset of menopause and tires of his professional position. We are given a picture of a man who is weary and down beat; an intellectual Sam Spade. Newton arrives on Earth and begins to make headlines as a Howard Hughes type tycoon. He grabs Bryce's attention. Bryce discovers an elusive attraction for Newton a long time before they ever meet, without the slightest hope of them ever meeting. Yet we are already given hints that Newton's and Bryce's fates are linked. Bryce opens an art book and begins to study a print of Breugels 'The Fall of Icarus'. He reads the lines of Auden's poem about the painting.

'...The expensive delicate ship that must have seen something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,

Had something to get to and sailed calmly on.'

(Bib; 1)

Newton has fallen from the sky and no one as yet has noticed. Bryce eventually gets a job working for Newton on the secret space project. He begins to harbour suspicions that Newton is not of this world, and sets about revealing the truth. Bryce succeeds in doing this by taking photographs of Newton. When the prints are developed they reveal a ray of light surrounding Newton's blank image. Bryce's intentions are not malicious. He seeks to learn about Newton, not destroy him. By the time the story ends, Bryce is perhaps the only one capable of understanding the extraordinary Newton. Years later we are shown a shot of Bryce dressed in a Santa Claus suit. This suggests that though he is now poor and has lost his former position, he is endowed with a happier, more appreciative outlook on life. Bryce finds in Newton cause for renewed hope in a life he had tired of. Bryce is a scientist, but Newton is more than an oddity to him. He is completely alien, proof of other possibilities of existence. For a man grown cynical of the world, Bryce is now able to see beyond immediate human turmoils to a wider perspective on life.

The parallel between Newton's arrival from space to Earth and that of Icarus's fall from the sky are referred to constantly, both in the film and the novel. One of the opening images is of Newton's space craft crashing into a lake, as he arrives to Earth. This mirrors the death of Icarus, who plunges into the water and drowns. Newton's fate too, is sealed once he falls to Earth. The purity of his alien spirit becomes diseased by human corruptions and eventually dies as Newton succumbs to life's vicissitudes.

Water is used as a symbol of purity and innocence. On Newton's arrival he first drinks nothing but water. Water is precious on his planet so Newton drinks it with great reverence. As his fortunes progress the liquid he drinks becomes alcohol. The transformation from water to hard liquor can be taken as symbolic of Newton's corruption by the ways of Earthlings, and an adjustment to their values. The irony here is that water is as precious to humans as it is to Newton's planet, but people fail to recognise it. Water is life, but is taken for granted. Alcohol is a product of civilization, which is a dubious veneer, polished by the supposition that people are civilized. A walk through a dark city street in the early hours of the morning is proof that the only difference between humans and the animals is the fact we think there's a difference. Roeg dealt with this question in his film 'Walkabout', showing the reactions of Aborigines to the desert in contrast to those of the white civilized girl and boy. The primitive is all aware of his environment. His spirit is interconnected with the rocks, the trees, the animals, the sky, the Sun and

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moon. Primitive belief is based on a respect and awe of nature. Civilized races have had this erased from their minds by technological achievement and progress. We have forgotten our origins. The upset in the ecological balance due to pollution and the extinction of animals, show this in part.

In the film there are a number of shots showing giant bursts of water. When the space ship crashes into the lake, the splash is thunderous as if the bowels of the Earth have been disturbed. Later in the film, Newton remembers back to his arrival, the giant splash is again repeated. Later on still, we see one of his secret service persecutors jumping into a Californian swimming pool, reminiscent of Hockney's painting titled 'Splash'.

Newton constantly examines himself in mirrors. Images are reflected through glass and water. Visual ploys are used as in 'Performance'. A limousine appears and cruises through scenes like the Rolls Royce in the earlier movie. The limo is dark and sleek. It has a mysterious allusive quality as it drifts along. It complements the character of its recluse owner, Newton.

In the novel the story of Newton is split into three distinct phases:

- 1) Icarus Descending.
- 2) Rumpelstiltskin.
- 3) Icarus Drowning.

The first part deals with his arrival and rise to power. The second with the unfolding of his identity. The third with his incarceration by the secret service, and the decline of his abilities through excesses of alcohol. The end of the novel sees Newton maimed with blindness, a gibbering physical and mental wreck, devoid of hope, whereas the film shows Newton more acclimatized to his life on Earth. He is again becoming wealthy and famous, but his spirit is still broken.

Newton is clairvoyant, just as Jonathan Baxter was in 'Don't Look Now'. In a scene where Newton's limousine travels through the country side, he sees an early American settlement. The car has passed back in time. The settlers are able to see the car too. Their reaction is one of amazement. A car appearing over one hundred years ago is as incredible as Icarus falling from the sky. This scene alludes to the mystery in the film. Roeg tries to achieve a timelessness in his films by editing and other techniques. In doing this he is able to connect subjects that would otherwise be separated by time and space. In this way the viewers are able to understand what is happening by making associations between the images we are shown. Newton's car passes through a gate in time and is taken back to the nineteenth century. At first we may think this odd. In the film it happens unexpectedly. When we think

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about it we see it is not so strange. Newton has come from space into our time. We are able to accept this, so why not go back further in time? Roeg in all his films has tried to give us an outside view of what is happening, a different way of looking at things. To do this he has had to extend the range of cinematic form. He has taken away the limiting unities of time and space and put the audience in a position where they can explore aspects of a subject or character not open to them in more conventional cinematic forms.

An analogy can also be made in this scene to the notion that Newton is a type of romantic hero. Reference to the wild west certainly supports this idea. The film is set in America and deals with its society. The western hero is a fundamental myth in American culture. Roeg may be telling the tale of Newton, but he is also making a close study of American culture and the pioneer spirit it was founded on.

One of the most interesting examinations in terms of the film is Newton's addiction to watching television. He sits viewing twenty screens at one time gathering information about the Earth. One thing he does not learn about is emotion. Newton is cold and laconic (Classic traits of the tragi-romantic hero). It is through his doomed love affair with Mary Lou, his friendship with Bryce and his suffering at the hands of the secret service, that he begins to feel human emotion. By the time his story ends, Newton is human. In the novel this is shown when he begins to cry for the first time in his life. In the film he is back in society and making a living in it. Life has shattered his dreams, his rocket to the stars has been destroyed, there is no means of escape for him.

The film employs many of the classic themes in its story. The romance, the thriller, the western etc ... Roeg has set out to peice together various genres and find a fundamental base that links them. Two examples are:

When Farnsworth is murdered his two assassins grab him by the legs and arms and swing him out his penthouse window. But Farnsworth's body bounces back off the reinforced glass. The effect is grotesquely humourous, added to this the 'You must be joking' manner of the victim as he addresses his transgressors. Eventually they succeed and Farnsworth falls to his death. The indroduction of humour to this murder scene does not give it a slapstick effect. It accentuates in a disturbing was the reality of what is happening.

Later on in the film, years later, Mary Lou, still holding an affection for Newton, visits him in his hotel prison. Newton, possibly disturbed by his sufferings and the seemingly false life humans endure,

acts out a scene with a gun. He points it at Mary Lou's head. We expect him to kill her. The gun blasts and blasts, but the bullets are blank. They then make passionate love to the music of "Hello Mary Lou, Goodbye Heart." Roeg leads and misleads, reinterprets and introduces ploys such as these, not only to counterpoint what is happening on the screen for added dramatic effect, but also to juxtapose and link his diverse themes. The gun in the sex scene between Mary Lou and Newton, has a number of connotations. It shows how much Newton has degenerated due to his experience of humans. The casual gun play is also something that has played a big part in American History and in its society today. It is also a phallic symbol, in much the same way he gave added meaning to Chas' gun in 'Performance'.

"Film, which coincided with the theory of relativity, is one of the most malleable forms in dealing with time and space. It's easier to consider space and time with film than with sculpture or painting or even music, which traditionally aim at timelessness. The point about film is that it is not timeless; it is without time in the sense of historical or biographical chronology. It is not timeless like Rembrandt's portraits of old age. That's timeless, as good now as it was then. Film is very often timely, good for today, as a sort of chart fashion. But it was born without a concept of chronological time ... If you are Einstein and you say that the universe is relative, you have to offer some form of evidence that it is so. So he did ... Why do we continue to believe, while accepting Einstein, that the universe is finite when it comes to our lives and our art? After Einstein, you cannot continue to think that anything happens only in conjunction with one or two other things. Everything happens in conjunction with everything else. If you accept this you must apply it. If you still believe that the world is flat, that's fine, you can go on making flat-earth movies as most filmmakers do. But if you believe the world is round, then you'd better adapt to that ... What Nic Roeg has done I think, is to give relativity a human form."

(Bib; 17)

In 'The Man Who Fell to Earth', Roeg has incorporated a myth of the past (Icarus) and of the future (Spaceman) and situated them in the present. He then made a film in which the three are woven together into one. This new form contains past, present and future, and puts the viewer on a plane outside ordinary time and space. 'The Man Who Fell to Earth' will not become a dated movie, because it explores fundamental elements of human nature, our social structures and culture. Neither is it a film where one can expect to be given straight forward answers. Roeg does not preach. The camera is his eye,

'It's a drama of discovery, the way discovery changed attitudes and feelings and lives. The assumption is that after a discovery nothing can ever be the same again. It's a man's life, pricked by a moment of magic.'

(Bib;17)

A Sensual Obsession : 'Bad Timing' (1980)

"What is it Men in women do require?

The lineaments of gratified desire.

What is it Women do in men require?

The lineaments of gratified desire."

(William Blake quoted by Alex in 'Bad Timing')

'Bad Timing' opens with the two central characters, Alex and Milena wandering through a Viennese art gallery studying the paintings of Gustave Klimt and Egon Schiele. Alex and Milena are lovers. Rays of light, through the windows, illuminate the paintings and cast the onlookers into the shadows. The images in the paintings are erotic with a raw sensuality. The paintings reflect in their subject matter, the passionate, morbid, tense dramatics that will repeat again in the film to come.

These opening scenes are quickly cut to a screaming ambulance racing through the streets. Inside Milena lies gasping for life on a stretcher. She has taken an overdose of drugs. This is followed by a quiet scene of Milena bidding farewell to her Czechoslovakian husband, Stefan. They are parting at a border crossing point on a bridge over the river Danube. Milena goes to Vienna, Stefan returns behind the Iron Curtain. This is acted out to the soft music of Pachelbel's canon. An atmosphere of melancholy is suggested as the two people separate.

We are taken back to the hospital, where doctors fight to save Milena's life in the operating theatre. Alex waits outside, anxiously. He is cross examined by police inspector Netusil, about the circumstances leading up to Milena's attempted suicide. Alex starts to probe his memory. The film then continues in flash backs from past to present. The story of Alex and Milena's ill fated relationship is constructed. We witness the course of events and conflicts of character that have taken place between the two.

As is all his other films, Roeg again draws on a wide range of reference to complement the central theme of the plot and extend the range of cultural connections. For while 'Bad Timing' is a love story set in Austria between two emigrant Americans, it is also used as an archetype relationship to study the meaning of 'love' on a wider scale. The now familiar array of visual devices are used again to give conjunction,

poetic meaning and fluidity to the film. In this film, Roeg's use of objects and images has matured. He has orchestrated his visual ploys with a precise cohesion that the editing, as drastic here as in any of his films, does not chop or jar. The look of the film is slick and glossy, perhaps because it is dealing with petit bourgeois or upper middle class people, defined by a glamorous intellectualized lifestyle.

The central theme of the film is love and sexual relationships between men and women. Roeg uses film to probe these problems with the ferocity of a surgeon's scalpel. The film cuts deeper than the emotional sentimentality common in depicting relationships on film. 'Love Story', this film is not. Indeed the scalpel and knife image is one that is recurrent in the film, and seems pertinent not only on a metaphorical level as will be discussed later, but also in the way Roeg clinically bisects Alex and Milena's affair.

Alex remembers back to his first meeting with Milena at a party. He stands toying with a miniature knife as they introduce themselves to each other. In this early scene the knife seems just a minor curiosity to us. Later there are shots of a scalpel cutting a hole in Milena's throat, to help her respire during the operation. A wound is inflicted. We are shown Alex playing with the knife in a number of scenes during the film. In one of the closing scenes he uses the knife in a most disturbing way. He cuts away the unconscious Milena's underwear and rapes her as she lies dying. Alex continually wounds Milena mentally during their relationship, through his jealousy and possessiveness.

The setting is Vienna, home of modern psychology, Freud and the painters Klimt and Schiele. It is through the work of these three that the central ideas and moods of the film are followed.

Alex and Milena review the painting 'The Kiss', depicting two lovers entwined. "The lovers seem happy", Milena comments. "That's because they don't know each other well enough yet", he replies. Alex speaks this half in jest, the irony being that their relationship is misunderstood. Alex's love is expressed as a desire to possess Milena. Milena is flirtatious and promiscuous, Alex suffers in not having the control he seeks over her.

"The kernel of all jealousy is lack of love"

(Bib;6)

Milena is what can be termed a 'free spirit', wanting her 'own time, her own space', as she puts it rather blandly in the film. She wants to be loved for what she is. Alex seeks for her to comply with his own ideals. This is continually frustrated by the fact that Milena

is having affairs with other men, and the looming presence of her husband Stefan from whom she is separated. Milena too, holds part of the blame in that she fails to deal responsively to Alex's problems. She persists with the relationship and by staying with Alex makes him suffer more. It is a relationship where neither person understands or tries to come to terms with the others feelings.

The big question in the film, posed at the beginning is, 'Why did Milena try to kill herself?'. It is left up to inspector Netusil to unravel what has happened. In him we have the familiar character type who recur in Roeg's films, the investigator, the one who questions and assimilates. We are shown a shot of Netusil in his home, flicking through a book of Schiele paintings. We see that he is a married man, he also has a degree from Harvard University on his wall. Alex too is a professor, there are similarities between both men. Netusil questions Alex over what has happened. Alex tells his story, but Netusil is not happy with the explanation.

"Netusil is the encircling agency of domination, Alex Linden the site for the unfolding discourse of the truth."

(Bib; 18)

Netusil cannot prove there is a crime until he can discover a motive, i.e., imagine a motive. He does this by identification with Alex. 'What is detection, if not confession,' Netusil says to Alex during questioning. 'Tell me what you dare not', he presses on Alex to confess the truth and absolve himself.

Alex has concealed the fact that he has raped Milena while she was unconscious in her apartment. Netusil is suspicious, because of a discrepancy in time, from the moment Alex found Milena dying and the time he phoned the hospital. Netusil has no proof to indicate anything abnormal has happened. It is intuitive instinct that makes him press forward with his investigation. The audience shares the same quest as Netusil in finding out the motives behind Alex's actions. Through the eyes of the camera we are drawn into Netusil's obsessive pursuit of the motive.

Netusil takes Alex to Milena's flat, in the hope of discovering some clues to what has happened. 'Where am I going now?' is scrawled in bright red lipstick on her mirror. Netusil's suspicions are heightened as he discovers the sheets on Milena's bed are soiled. It is the similarities between the two men, both having common educational backgrounds and cultural interests, that play a part in Netusil becoming convinced that Alex has committed an offence. It is a masculine affinity. Men may have the world of trouble understanding women, but can read other men with

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instinctive knowing.

The tragedy of Alex and Milena revolves around the misunderstanding of each others personalities. Milena has numerous affairs with other men. One of them is a German actor who hovers in the background throughout the film, though he doesn't utter a single word. A German translation of a Harold Pinter play is glimpsed among Milena's possessions. Alex becomes tense when he sees it. Roeg uses minor objects to underline, emphasise and suggest the undercurrent of tension between the two. Milena reads Paul Bowles 'The Sheltering Sky', a novel set in Morrocco. Later Alex and Milena go on holidays to Morrocco.

Alex is uneasy with the situation he finds himself in with Milena. He cowers into a half acceptance of it. Perhaps in the hope she will eventually become more rational and committed to their relationship. On vacation in Morrocco Alex proposes marriage to her. Milena rejects the proposal. From this point on there is a considerable disintegration in the love affair.

'Bad Timing' takes as a base for its plot, a story in the traditional boy meets girl vein. Roeg had tackled conventional genres before in film, 'Don't Look Now', a thriller and 'The Man Who Fell to Earth', a science fiction film. It is Roeg's purpose to take new views on such genres and penetrate them further. 'Bad Timing' is certainly such a case.

Perhaps the origins and concepts applied in the film can best be explained in an interview Roeg did on the release of 'Don't Look Now' (1973). He is speaking about a celebrated love scene between John and Laura Baxter. It caused much media disputation over Roeg's frankness in depicting two people making love.

"But we got to a point in the film where I desperately wanted the feeling that at the moment of making love she might become pregnant again. I had that in mind ...; and the way they behave afterwards in getting dressed ... I wanted to make it clear that it is not just some billing and cooing. I really hope it works on this level and that's why I'm upset by an article in the Daily Mail*, this morning which tries to make a sensation out of the love scene. It isn't a sexual scene, it's sensual; I wanted to get a reality to it of two human beings."

(Bib;15)

"Bad Timing" expands on this theme of capturing the reality of two human beings. Instead of it being a supplementary contribution

*(Bib;15) One of the frankest love scenes ever filmed is likely to plunge lovely Julie Christie (Laura) into the biggest censorship row since 'Last Tango in Paris' (Daily Mail, October, 1973) So far the row has not materialised, and Miss Christie remains unplunged. Contd-

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to the film, as was the case in 'Don't Look Now', the relationship between the two people becomes the central focus of attention. The film analyses the misfated affair with studious detail. But as with all Roeg's works the central theme is reinforced with complimentary ones. In this case obvious ones are the paintings of Schiele and Klimt, and the reference to Freudian sexual theories.

In one half humorous scene, Milena takes Alex into his office and they make love on a psychiatrist's couch. The camera focuses to the wall behind them, there we see a photo of Freud. Will sex ever be the same?

Alex becomes overly suspicious of Milena's flirtations. He discovers a photograph of Milena with another man. He reproaches her over it. The young man in the photo proves to be her brother who is now dead. It is this brooding possessiveness in Alex that drives him more insensitive and blind to the relationship. Milena's reactions to his doubts do little to appease him. In one scene Milena reacts to Alex's continual harassment by making a parody of herself by dressing up as the type of slut she believes Alex thinks her to be. She provokes Alex out of his indifference to her outlandish display and incites him into having sex with her on the stairway outside her flat. Once the deed is done Alex flees out into the street. Milena showers him with bottles from her balcony. Here Roeg uses the image of broken glass, as he did in 'Don't Look Now' to emphasise the human fear of being cut or hurt. The sound of the glass bursting against the pavement punctuates Milena's hysterical screams. The screams and the explosions of glass work to complement each other to illustrate the hurt Milena is feeling.

Objects are again used to extend the meaning of what is happening. In almost every scene Alex smokes a cigarette. The screen is filled with middle class opulence. Jewels and shining stones appear throughout the film. A rock crystal, Milena has brought back from Morocco is examined by Netusil. This not only connects Alex and Milena's trip to the investigation into their past, but also prompts a remembrance back to 'Performance' when Pherber shows Chas a beautiful red sand crystal.

...(This scene was edited by Roeg for U.S release prints, with the eroticism toned down. The segment was removed in its entirety from the prints shown in Ireland, as demanded by the Irish censor. Of course the Gaels were able to see this scene in a recent screening of 'Don't Look Now' by the B.B.C. .)

A sad irony is that Milena's love for Alex is genuine, on her own terms. 'You can be part of my life, the biggest part', she concedes to him. But for Alex this is not enough. His desire or greed makes him want to possess her. It is he (though he does not realise it) who ultimately destroys her love. Alex's narrow viewpoint of their relationship is visually represented by Roeg in various ways. In quite a number of scenes Alex's eyes are screened off from the world he sees. He looks at life with a cold objectivity. (Indeed he verbally likens himself to an observer of humanity, in a lecture he gives to a class of students). He often wears dark sunglasses, we see him peering through the window screen or his car, from behind grids and railings. Alex is in a sense a human camera. He is able to make objective evaluations but is stifled when it comes to sorting out emotional problems.

"Roeg has often said 'there is nothing simple about simple plots...'. He would be in happy agreement with Godard's famous dictum: 'A film must have a beginning, a middle and an end, -but not necessarily in that order'. For Roeg, film is a transference of thought. He believes that thought can be transferred by a juxtaposition of images. 'If you are dealing with thought on film I think it's cheating to use literary terms. I want the people to read the images in my films.'"

(Bib; 21)

The impassiveness of the camera in Roeg's films qualify the above quote. The audience is presented with the image and it is their job to use their cognitive powers and interpret what is happening. In 'Bad Timing' images are presented with a directness that does not offer us the choice of making moral judgements. We are not given the distinctions of good or bad. Roeg is giving us a detached view - this is how it is. We are then allowed to consider what is happening without bias, rather than being coaxed ~~played~~ to favour Milena's values against those of Alex or vice versa. In a sense Roeg is making us 'spies', or spies watching spies. In sharing the quest to find Alex's motive for his ravishment of Milena with Inspector Netusil, the audience shares ~~the~~ viewpoint with him also. The audience and Netusil are outsiders looking in to the relationship. We are the voyeurs, looking but not participating. "We are all spies" as Alex says in the film. It is this voyeurism that thwarts understanding. Alex's objective insight prevent him from experiencing, for he too is a voyeur. He is content to look rather than enter into a positive relationship with Milena. The voyeurism here is destructive for it breaks down two way communication between people. To Alex, Milena is an object of desire; something to possess.

We decipher the coded images on the screen. Roeg has always presented a mission for his audience. To understand a Roeg

film proper, is to review conventional methods of thought and seeing. One has to look and think in a new more fluid way. We have to be willing to work. Roeg offers no obvious conclusions on the chaotic relationship, this he leaves up to us.

Alex seeks to possess Milena. This is impossible, no person can totally own another person. This hunger and greed Roeg recognised as a fundamental aspect of human nature. He has used this theme as the main element in his most recent film 'Eureka' (1982). This is the story of one man's obsessive search for gold and what happens to him when after twenty years prospecting he finally finds it. As Roeg sees it when someone achieves their utmost desires there is nothing left for them to do but die. Their motivating factor no longer exists. In 'Eureka' (based on a true incident) this is what happens. The protagonist, on finding his fortune, retires to an island for the rest of his days. He has everything he ever wanted, but has now nothing to look forward to. His nature becomes introverted and perverse.

"I took Balzac as a model because it seemed to me that his view of greed as a root of human behaviour was as close to the truth as any Freudian or Jungian analysis."

(Bib; 117)

This too is a symptom in the case analysis of 'Bad Timing'. Alex seeks to totally devour Milena. Milena wants everything her own way and disregards responsibility towards other people. Both desperately hang on to their beliefs. Neither is willing to concede to the other. It is this failure in positive communication that leads to the complete breakdown.

Thomas Newton (the alien) in the 'The Man Who Fell to Earth', suffers from the consequences of entering a society where greed is a base motivating factor. What he learned of Earth before his arrival was what he had seen or listened to from television and radio waves transmitted across space. His knowledge of human nature is one dimensional. It is not until he lives, loves and suffers among humans that he discovers real humanity. By the end of the film, while many misfortunes have befallen Newton, he has a deeper understanding of life on Earth. His alien spirit may be broken but he is wiser for it. As Roeg's films go, 'The Man Who Fell to Earth', is the one with the happiest ending.

It becomes clear that Milena is going to survive the operation. Alex is confronted with the news by her husband, Stefan. There are apparent difficulties between Milena and her husband. He is much older than her and it is vague why they married at all. Stefan loves Milena, but she feels no desire for him sexually and loves him more as a father than

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a lover. Stefan lacks the lineaments that women do require. Stefan loves Milena in spite of her disinterest towards him. The irony here is that Milena, in not recognising Stefan's love for her, throws herself at Alex who means to destroy her with his obsessions.

Stefan lives in Czechoslovakia. Alex lives in Austria. The Danube separates them. In the film Roeg uses the river metaphorically as the boundary line of consciousness. Not only do the two men live in different countries, they also see and judge life differently.

In the conversation between Stefan and Alex the essence of the problem is touched on by Stefan when he says, "What did you get from her, Dr Linden?". He then continues, "Not enough I think. You must understand, you see, it's not enough to love a woman when she is difficult. You must love her tremendously, more even than one's own dignity. Don't you agree?". Alex makes not reply. Stefan's speech echoes Jung's statement, "To love someone and wholly understand them, takes great moral courage."

Milena's suicide bid is a failure. Not only does she not succeed in killing herself, but also because no one learns from the experience. It serves only to make their estrangement more complete.

In the penultimate scene we see Alex back in New York waiting in a taxi. He spots Milena walking into a building. He calls out to her. She turns around, with a blank expression of non-recognition on her face, and the long scar left by the surgeon's scalpel on her neck (Vampirism could be indicated here; he who devours women). She ignores Alex and disappears into the building. The final shot is of the flowing Danube, the boundary line of understanding that Alex has failed to cross.

After The Goldrush :Summary and Conclusion.

What this Thesis has attempted to do, is give some insight into the work and world of Nicolas Roeg. It would be impossible to cover all the elements that constitute the formidable body of work he has created. Critic John Pym said that 'it would in some ways be easier to write a book than an essay on 'Bad Timing'. (Bib;19). This could be said of all Roeg's films, such is the extent of the man's artistic scope.

Roeg's last film was 'Eureka' (1982). It is the story of a man who sets out to find gold. He finds it, becomes very wealthy and spends the remaining twenty years of his life on a Caribbean island. One night he is murdered. The question Roeg and scriptwriter Paul Mayersberg were asking in this film was about "... what people want in life. It is not money that most people want, it is that moment of discovery we have generically called Eureka. I've found it! I've got it! The film describes what happens to them when they get it, and what happens to them if they don't ... The gold in other words, has nothing to do with fortune in the sense of money; it has to do with destiny."

(Bib;17)

Roeg examines the life of gold prospector Jack McCann who finds his Eureka in the form of gold. After this moment of exhilaration the story moves forward twenty years. We see Jack McCann, the man who has every material need, yet is unhappy. He wanders about lacking any purpose. He should have died twenty years earlier when he discovered the gold which had been his soul obsession up to that point. McCann is murdered, and the destiny he has made for himself comes to pass. Roeg shows how twenty years earlier his murder has already been foretold by visually linking up the moment of his death with flashbacks to the moment he discovers the gold.

The overpowering image in the film is that of Gold. Gold is the symbol of wealth, but also of greed. The Alchemist hoped to transmute lead into gold with the use of the 'Philosopher's Stone'. As a base element it is a pure mineral. All these qualities are hinted at in the film. Roeg has continued to evolve his ideas in this film. In 'Bad Timing' he looked at the nature of selfishness and greed in a love relationship. In 'Eureka' he has used the story of Jack McCann to analyse the effect of greed and the realization of one's deepest desires, not

only in relation to one man but to the whole of humanity. Roeg has set difficult goals for himself in the subjects he deals with in his films. As Beckett puts it, 'To be an artist is to fail, but fail like no one has done before.'

His daring is admirable. It is people like Roeg who picture humanity's destiny; pioneers who show the way to a possible future. He is humanitarian in the sense that his films have dealt with how people cope with themselves and life. He has shown people stripped of social and moral values. The characters in his movies struggle through life and are thrown by the things all of us are felled by: love, hatred, violence, misunderstanding, envy, greed... Roeg has not solved any of these problems in his work. This is not his aim; but through his films aspects of our nature and of the world about us have been illuminated.

By his craft, Roeg has pointed towards new possibilities in narrative cinema. He is one of a few who are willing to experiment in this field. This reflects badly on the current generation of film directors. (most of them are twenty or thirty years Roeg's junior), who seem to regress with their ideas rather than progress. Are they to blame for pandering to mass audience expectations? Be that as it may, we must bear in mind that people can only change themselves. It is in that moment of self-realization that we too may find our 'Eureka'. If Nicolas Roeg helps us along the way then he will have succeeded through the courage of his art.

In 1960, Roeg was camera operator on 'Trials of Oscar Wilde'. Twenty five years later we shall use a Roegian ploy and reintroduce Mr Wilde:

"It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors. Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex and vital. When critics disagree the artist is in accord with himself. We can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he does not admire it. The only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely. All art is quite useless."

(Bib; 8)

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