

Between the Map and the Painted Landscape: Kevin Brownlow's Historical Films

By John C. Tibbetts

“There is no point whatever in making a historical film,” says Kevin Brownlow, “unless you are going to show what happened.”¹ This eminently sensible attitude fueled the making of his two feature-length historical dramas, It Happened Here (1965) and Winstanley (1975). Yet, as will be seen here, not even Brownlow, who has devoted his life to the history and preservation of the film medium (and whose fierce integrity toward the historical record is legendary), can always live up to his proposition.

Although both films seem at first glance to be strikingly dissimilar—It Happened Here (1965) is a “counterfactual” history of “what might have happened” had the Nazis won the Battle of Britain and invaded England; and Winstanley is a scrupulously researched and mounted chronicle of the adventures of Gerrard Winstanley and his “Diggers” in the turbulent times of 17th century Cromwellian England—both find commonality in their challenges to the conventional historical film. Both are driven by distinctly “presentist” concerns, i.e., both consciously regard their subjects from the perspectives of present-day social, artistic, and autobiographical contexts. And both succeed ultimately in painting imaginative landscapes of their own devising onto the maps of history.

Absent from circulation since their initial release, It Happened Here and Winstanley will be a surprise to viewers who know Brownlow only from his passion for silent film history, as documented in internationally acclaimed books (The Parade's Gone By, The War, the West, and the Wilderness, Behind the Mask of Innocence), television documentaries made in association with the late David Gill (Hollywood: The Pioneers,

The Unknown Chaplin, Cinema Europe), and classic film restorations (Napoleon, The Wedding March). Unlike these works, however, It Happened Here and Winstanley encountered obstacles at the outset in finding popular audiences. It Happened Here outraged and baffled many viewers with its controversial subject matter and idiosyncratic, pseudo-documentary cinematic techniques. It was censored and, eventually, withdrawn altogether. And Winstanley's arcane subject matter, not to mention its catalogue of "inside" cinematic references, made so few concessions to the formulas of mainstream entertainment that it quietly faded from public view. Now, thirty years later, both have resurfaced, vindicating Brownlow's original visions and testifying to their own ability to survive the vicissitudes of history. Available through Milestone Films in New York City, It Happened Here has seven minutes of its most controversial footage restored; and Winstanley's meditative, smouldering beauty has been restored and polished to a new luster.²

A GENERATION OF "ANGRY YOUNG MEN"

Brownlow and his friend and co-director, Andrew Mollo, were just teenagers when they first conceived It Happened Here in May 1956. Brownlow was a trainee in the cutting rooms of World Wide Pictures, a Soho-based documentary film company, and Mollo was an art student who in his spare time pursued a passion for collecting World War II artifacts. Of the two, only Brownlow had any filmmaking experience, having just completed an amateur project, The Capture (1952-1955), an adaptation of a story by Guy de Maupassant.³

Brownlow and Mollo belonged to an emerging generation of would-be filmmakers determined to rejuvenate what they regarded as a moribund British film industry. Beginning with the so-called Free Cinema movement of the mid-1950s, and fostered by publications like Sequence and Sight and Sound, writers, directors, television producers, and critics like Tony Richardson, Karel Reisz, Lindsay Anderson, Penelope Huston, and Gavin Lambert sounded an alarm and a prophecy.⁴ Writing in 1956, at precisely the moment Brownlow and Mollo were planning It Happened Here, Anderson charged that the current “irresponsible commerce” of distribution and exhibition in the commercial cinemas has caused too many filmmakers to abandon the treatment of contemporary life in their films. A year later, in a seminal essay in Sight and Sound, Gavin Lambert took up the cry, declaring, “Our cinema has suffered intermittently since birth from. . . [a] lack of concern with vital contemporary issues and a consequent isolation from many important factors of national life.”⁵ And Tony Richardson, one of Free Cinema’s most vocal partisans, deplored the industry’s “resistance to new ideas, new subjects, new attitudes.” Richardson concluded that alternatives to the British commercial system had to be found: “If we are to have the right sort of freedom to experiment, which is the only way any art can be kept alive, we have got to be able to try to do things more cheaply. So long as there are the extremes of profit and loss, so long will there be this constant urge to play safe. . . . Only then can the economic blackmail be reduced and imagination really freed.”⁶ Within the next three years, with the release of Jack Clayton’s Room at the Top (1959), Penelope Houston acknowledged that “something, however tenuously and uncertainly, seems to be stirring in the British cinema. What happens next will depend on the talent and persuasiveness of half a dozen

writers and directors, on the imponderables of public response, and on whatever weight the critics are prepared to throw into the scale.”⁷ Indeed, in the next five years Richardson’s Look Back in Anger, Karel Reisz’ Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, and Lindsay Anderson’s This Sporting Life spearheaded an internationally-acclaimed British “New Wave” of working-class dramas and satires that took an unvarnished, street-level view of British contemporary life.

Not as well known or experienced as these filmmakers, and working far more economically, Brownlow pursued in his own modest way the ideal of a direct, personalized, and economical cinema that stayed close to the realities of the British experience.⁸ “I’m too eccentric a filmmaker to work within the system,” he confessed in a 1980 interview as he looked back upon his early experiences. “While I admire so much of Hollywood as a historian, I reject it as a filmmaker. I go out into the field with the smallest crew possible and make pictures which are extremely documentary in their style, extremely non-commercial. . . .”⁹

But frugality and commitment exact their own price. It would take Brownlow and co-director Mollo eight years to make It Happened Here—eight years working outside of the industry, in his spare time, on a miniscule budget (ultimately just \$21,000), depending upon the kindness of friends and strangers (including assistance at the eleventh hour from Tony Richardson and Stanley Kubrick).¹⁰ And it would take another eight years, from initial planning to actual production, to make Winstanley under similarly straitened conditions. Over that span of almost two decades, as these projects grew and grew—from 16mm to 35mm, from scribbled notes to tentative scripts, from hastily-wrought vignettes to carefully planned mass rallies and battle scenes—the boys themselves grew

up. And the films inevitably reflected the process of their maturation. “God knows one would not wish anyone the privations of the first six years of It Happened Here,” wrote David Robinson; “yet the film may owe not a little of its rigorous quality to the disciplines that poverty imposed. . . . Perhaps it was the very fact that the ethical bases of the film were worked out like this, empirically, on the spot, as part of the real-life development of moral and political discernment in the film-makers, that makes their picture, if not a specially profound examination of a human predicament, at least a soundly human one.”¹¹

IT HAPPENED HERE AND THE COUNTERFACTUAL VIEW OF HISTORY

It Happened Here begins with this startling soundtrack narration: “The German invasion of England took place in July 1940 after the British retreat from Dunkirk. Strongly resisted at first, the German army took many months to restore order. But the resistance movement, lacking outside support, was finally crushed.”

It Happened Here is a “rewrite” of history, an alternative time track, a paraphrase, as it were, of recent historical events: What would have happened if “Operation Sea Lion”—the Nazis’ plan to invade England in 1940— had succeeded? The film begins with a series of animated maps illustrating the Nazi takeover of Britain. By 1943, inhabitants of small towns have been evacuated to a demilitarized London, where they are impressed into service in the cause of forging a “New Europe” against the common enemies of Communists and Jewish Capitalists. This is a London where German troops ride the subways and flirt with the girls, where barbed wire separates a “Jewish

Residential Quarter” from the rest of the city, and where detachments of English SS work side by side with their German counterparts (the English uniform arm patch displays the Cross of St. George placed directly beneath the traditional eagle and swastika).¹²

One of the evacuees, Pauline (Pauline Murray), is a trained nurse who arrives in London after narrowly escaping a deadly skirmish between the Nazis and English Partisans in Salisbury. In London, she decides the best thing for her is to accept England’s defeat and to cooperate with the occupation forces. After a highly regimented indoctrination, she goes to work as a nurse in the Fascist-controlled “Immediate Action Organization” (IA). An old friend, Dr. Richard Fletcher (Sebastian Shaw), a physician who has refused to cooperate with the IA, is shocked by her decision. Suspected of collaborating with Fletcher, Pauline is taken into custody by the SS and dispatched to work at a country hospital. To her horror, she discovers that this stately mansion, staffed by kindly doctors and nurses, is actually an extermination center for Slavic men, women, and children. Placed under arrest by the SS for refusing to cooperate, Pauline is handcuffed and shipped out. Soon after, her train is ambushed by Partisans, and she is ordered to a field dressing station in a forward area, where the English Army of Liberation is staging an offensive. While she tends to the wounded, Pauline listens numbly to radio accounts of Partisan successes while outside the English slaughter a captured SS unit with machine guns.

Pauline’s fate is emblematic. She is neither heroine nor villain, merely a woman whose instinct to survive has turned her into a passive pawn—and, ultimately, the victim—of both oppressors and oppressed. As Nazis and English Partisans slaughter each other, their respective propaganda campaigns and acts of violence have become

indistinguishable. Even the ideological lines separating them seem to have disappeared. Dr. Fletcher's words to Pauline echo in our ears: "The most appalling thing about Fascism is that it takes Fascist methods to get rid of it."

Remarkably, It Happened Here's newsreels and documentary-style narrative techniques contained not one foot of period or stock footage. Every shot was original. For the ersatz World War I newsreel, for example, Brownlow used a 1922 hand-cranked 16mm Kodak camera to recreate the "look" of hand-held, grainy images. Andrew Mollo provided his own collection of original military uniforms and equipment, and collectors contributed a variety of trucks, taxis, private cars, and buses (according to Brownlow, wartime London buses are about the rarest vehicles on wheels). The radio broadcasts heard throughout were recorded by veterans of the BBC wartime staff, Alvar Lidell, Frank Phillips, and John Snagge. It is Snagge's voice that is heard at the very beginning of the film—which is singularly appropriate, considering it was he who in real life had announced on the BBC the declaration of war. Exteriors were shot in and around London (including Parliament Square for a Nazi marching sequence and the former home of opera librettist W.S. Gilbert for the country hospital scenes). Most of the cast were non-professionals, including the lead actress, Pauline Murray, a doctor's wife from Wales.

The source of much of the controversy surrounding the film is the implication that Fascist tendencies may lie just beneath the surface of any democratic society. The readiness with which Pauline joins the Fascist IA, while shocking in itself, is nonetheless understandable. Ideological allegiances take second place to immediate needs for survival.

Brownlow had begun making a film that was located in the past; but soon he found himself documenting events very much a part of the present. After attending meetings of the British National Socialist Movement, Brownlow became convinced that “the germ of a Nazi revival had taken root” in England: “It provided an expected and alarming topicality for our film,” he later wrote in his account of the film’s production, How It Happened Here (1968).¹³ Not surprisingly, singled out for particular attack and ultimately censored before the film’s initial release were not scenes of battlefield slaughter and street riots, but an unscripted, spontaneous discussion among members of Sir Oswald Mosley’s Union of British Fascists, including their leading spokesman, Frank Bennett. The topics in this unscripted, unrehearsed six-minute scene included a defense of euthanasia, Aryan superiority, and the harsh treatment of the “Jewish Problem.” “Every race is superior to the Jew,” proclaims one of the Fascists. “the Jew has no home. The Jew is a parasite race. The Jew waits for a civilization to be established and then establishes himself on it. A flea on a dog.” Regarding euthansia, this same person declares: “It’s a surgical operation, getting rid of useless matter, useless tissue. Any doctor does it ten times a day. If it’s necessary.” These speakers were not ranting “foreigners,” despots and thugs, but ordinary people looking for all the world like what they really were, properly tweedy Englishmen in their club recounting the daily news over brandy and cigars.

“No film since the end of the war had given National Socialists carte blanche to express their opinions,” said Brownlow, “with the result that few people had a clear idea of what they stood for, or of the insidious threat they represented.”¹⁴

It Happened Here began making the rounds at distributors' screenings and festivals in August 1964. Five months later, United Artists agreed to pick it up for world-wide distribution. However, protests from Jewish organizations, angered by what the Jewish Chronicle considered a "credo against the Jews," resulted in United Artists' threat to withdraw the film from circulation unless Brownlow and Mollo cut the offending scene. Critic Kenneth Tynan was among many critics and commentators who protested the excision:

We learn with concern that [United Artists] is contemplating the deletion of a vital sequence from the film in case its anti-semitic content causes offense. In our view the function of such a sequence emerges quite clearly: the nature of the views is a most effective form of self-indictment and one that will come as a salutary shock to people who are unaware, or do not wish to be persuaded, that views of such monstrous intensity are still rife in certain quarters in Britain.¹⁵

Stanley Reed, Director of the British Film Institute, agreed: "The total argument of the film is so overwhelmingly anti-fascist that . . . to cut this particular sequence, which is among the most telling in the film, would not only seriously damage the film artistically, but would reduce the propagandistic effect, which in my view can only be beneficial."¹⁶

A more balanced assessment came from David Robinson in Sight and Sound:

"In a way, the filmmakers themselves are seduced. They communicate their own delight in the uniforms and military show, in the spectacle of an admirably staged Nazi torchlight funeral. This sort of thing is as insidious as dry rot; history has shown that. This admirably achieved, admirably intentioned film could be hot stuff for an audience with the wrong preconditioning. It is an

important factor: to an extent the success or failure of the propaganda is tied with the success of the film. It does not, however, diminish the importance of the discovery of two new film-makers of undoubted talent.”¹⁷

Ten years later, in Cineaste, Lenny Rubenstein was still on the defensive, noting that the film “succeeds in revealing fascism as an evil mass movement rather than the expression of several cruelly gifted psychotics.” Moreover, it “carries a degree of shock, since it is not often that one hears fascist statements uttered with English accents by people not recognizable as actors.”¹⁸

But the damage was done. Although the censored version of It Happened Here played for a very successful run for six weeks at the London Pavilion, its boxoffice take of 23,000 pounds was absorbed by distribution and advertising costs; thereafter, the film received only limited distribution before being withdrawn entirely in 1968. Brownlow’s career as a director suffered a setback. “Our eight years of production netted us not one penny,” he wrote at the time. “On the official returns, promotion costs swallowed up our profits.” Fortunately, he continued philosophically, “we did not make It Happened Here for money. We made it because we had to. It gave us an apprentice course in the problems of film production. Whatever its financial and artistic shortcomings, the experience has been endlessly rewarding.”¹⁹

Now, after thirty years, the scene is restored and audiences, as Brownlow had intended all along, can see and hear for themselves how the Nazis “condemn themselves out of their own mouths.”²⁰ The film’s presentist view of history that so struck viewers in 1965 is, if anything, even more disturbing today. Historian Linda Holt reports that when the film was presented in Berlin in May 1996, German audiences were purportedly

disturbed, because, among other reasons, it was an unwelcome reminder of the persistence of the Nazi ideology at home and abroad.²¹

Many of Brownlow's colleagues went on to exemplary screen careers on their own—including cinematographer Peter Suschitzky (The Empire Strikes Back, 1980) and producer Andrew Mollo (production designer on Pascali's Island and Dance with a Stranger). None were more directly influenced by the experience, however, than Production Assistant Peter Watkins. His The War Game, released in 1968, is not a “what-if” so much as a “what might be” speculation on the devastation of nuclear holocaust. Utilizing the techniques employed in It Happened Here—maps, hand-held cameras, narration, and simulated newsreels—Watkins creates an entirely plausible fiction that looks and sounds real. “It is based on conjecture,” acknowledged Watkins. “You have to be convinced that what you do, even without an historical record, rings true. . . . You constantly say to yourself—‘You are in a newsreel situation. What is the sort of thing that you would have taken if you were there’. . . .”²² Watkins would carry this newsreel agenda to extremes, says Brownlow, ultimately abandoning entirely the “look” of a feature film in this and subsequent work.²³

The very title, It Happened Here, is significant. It could be a variant of Sinclair Lewis' It Can't Happen Here, published in 1935, a cautionary fable (later adapted for the stage) envisioning the rise of a dictatorship in America. Or it could allude to J.C. Squire's If It Had Happened Otherwise (1932), a curious anthology of alternative history essays—what if Booth had not assassinated Lincoln; if Napoleon had escaped to America; if Lee had won at Gettysburg?—by writers as various as G.K. Chesterton and Winston Churchill. However, Brownlow denies any knowledge of these sources. “The

title was inspired by the British wartime cliché, ‘It couldn’t happen here!’” he explains. “By the way, my original title was a more emphatic “It Did Happen Here.”²⁴

Traditionalist historians have tended to regard counterfactual propositions about history more as dubious exercises in whimsy than works of responsible historiography, even though examples may be seen in the work of historians reaching back to Thucydides. The “what-if” approach to history is, nonetheless, intriguing: In his book, If It Had Happened Otherwise, J.C. Squire declared, “There is no action or event, great or small (leaving predestination out of account) which might not have happened differently, and, happening differently, have perhaps modified the world’s history for all time.”²⁵ Recent examples of literary counterfactuals include Ward Moore’s Bring the Jubilee (1953), which was set in 1938 in the aftermath of the South’s victory in the Civil War; and William Gibson and Bruce Sterling’s The Difference Engine (1990), which postulates how history would have changed had a steam-based computer technology been developed in 1855.²⁶

In particular, speculations about the implications of a German victory over the Allies in World War II have generated many books, plays, anthologies, and at least one other film in addition to It Happened Here (Cavalcanti’s Went the Day Well?).²⁷ Books in the war years included Douglas Brown and Christopher Serpell’s If Hitler Comes (1940), Anthony Armstrong and Bruce Graeme’s When the Bells Rang (1943), and Martin Hawkins’ When Adolf Came (1943). In 1948 Noel Coward’s play, Peace in Our Time, created a minor stir—the first act begins with a radio broadcast from the BBC Home Service describing the re-opening of Parliament by Adolf Hitler, Air Chief Marshal Goering, and Dr. Goebbels.²⁸ Among more recent books are Philip K. Dick’s

classic The Man in the High Castle (1962), which dealt with the Axis victory in World War II, leading to the partitioning of America into zones controlled by Germany and Japan; C.S. Forester's If Hitler Had Invaded England (1971); Frederic Mullally's Hitler Has Won (1975); the Gregory Benford and Martin Greenberg anthology, Hitler Victorious: Eleven Stories of the German Victory in World War II (1988), Robert Harris' Fatherland (1992), and Peter Tsouras' Disaster at D-Day: The Germans Defeat the Allies, June 1944 (1994).

The young British historian Niall Ferguson defends this form of speculative history in his recent anthology, Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals (1997). He declares that “the business of imagining such counterfactuals is a vital part of the way in which we learn.”²⁹ The approach is acceptable inasmuch as it presents the historian with the methods of a scientist, i.e., providing a means of testing hypotheses. Citing historian Sir Isaiah Berlin's critique of determinism, Ferguson says counterfactuals go wrong only when they provide implausible answers to implausible questions. “In short,” says Ferguson, “by narrowing down the historical alternatives we consider to those which are plausible—and hence by replacing the enigma of ‘chance’ with the calculation of probabilities—we solve the dilemma of choosing between a single deterministic past and an unmanageably infinite number of possible pasts. The counterfactuals we need to construct are not mere fantasy: they are simulations based on calculations about the relative probability of plausible outcomes in a chaotic world (hence ‘virtual history’).”³⁰

Although the word “counterfactual” has only recently achieved currency in theories of historiography, the concept has always been operative in all dramatizations of historical events and peoples. More than forty years ago historian Hayden White began

proposing that there is no such thing as “objective” history, that historiography is subject to the same assumptions and narrative techniques that shape dramas, novels, and films. “What-if” questions demand to be addressed the instant that a biography or historical event is chosen and isolated. Upon the presumed familiarity of the past is layered a set of speculations, alternatives, and contingencies that evoke a sense of strangeness and mystery: It did happen that way. . . didn't it??? The historical film, writes Robert A. Rosenstone in Revisioning History, “must be taken on its terms as a portrait of the past that has less to do with fact than with intensity and insight, perception and feeling. . . . To express the meaning of the past, film creates proximate, appropriate characters, situations, images, and metaphor.”³¹

It Happened Here occupies a unique position in cinema history in that it is one of the first commercial feature films to thus challenge the conventions of history on film with the device of the counterfactual. Aside from its scrupulously observed surface textures, its counterfactual concerns are equally compelling. In one of the essays in Virtual History, Andrew Roberts’ “What If Germany Had Invaded Britain in May 1940?,” several of Brownlow’s key themes find support—for example, that before the war there was a strong presumption in England among many citizens that there was a racial and political affinity of long standing between the Anglo-Saxons and the Germans; that “Operation Sea Lion” could very well have succeeded had it been better prepared; and that had the Germans arrived in May, after Dunkirk, they likely would have encountered poorly armed defenses.³² As for the issue of British accommodation, Roberts cites the activities of the British Union of Fascists under Sir Oswald Mosley, declaring,

“there was no shortage of people in 1930s Britain who would have viewed a British accommodation with Hitler positively.”³³

Unresolved in It Happened Here, however, is yet another negotiation of history, one that is hinted at but never fully realized. That would have to wait for their next film, Winstanley. Although Brownlow and Mollo would again explore the implications of counterfactual historicization and presentist issues, they would realize a more personal and immediate goal—the history film as personal autobiography.

WINSTANLEY AND A “COLLECTIVE” VIEW OF HISTORY

Winstanley, was released in 1975. Like It Happened Here, its gestation was long and complicated. David Caute’s historical novel, Comrade Jacob, was brought to Brownlow’s attention sometime around 1965 by Miles Halliwell, a schoolmaster who had appeared in a small role in It Happened Here (and who was later selected to portray Winstanley). Screen tests were filmed as early as 1966, barely a year after the completion of It Happened Here. Although the budgetary restrictions were daunting, finances were not quite so straitened as they had been for their first project. Woodfall Films financed the script, and the British Film Institute Production Board, under the sympathetic eye of Mamoun Hassan, invested seed money to the tune of 17,000 pounds, under the condition that the lion’s share of the work be given to crew members just breaking into the business.³⁴ Since 35mm color was deemed too expensive, and 16mm color judged unsatisfactory, it was decided to shoot the picture in black-and-white—16mm for the battle scenes and 35mm for the rest. The bulk of the final shooting

schedule lasted almost a year, from the late summer of 1974 to the winter of 1975, with the majority of filming transpiring on weekends.³⁵

For many viewers, especially American audiences, the story of a seventeenth-century Englishman who led a small band of farmers and ex-soldiers called “Diggers” in a failed attempt to establish a collective on common ground might seem a mere footnote in history. Yet, Gerrard Winstanley played a crucial role in a popular revolt in the middle decades of the seventeenth century that saw seven years of civil war—a period of the greatest social, political, and religious upheaval in the course of English history. The eminent British historian and authority on Winstanley, Christopher Hill, has described the period as one of “glorious flux and excitement,” of “a great overturning, questioning, revaluing, of everything in England.”³⁶ The struggle pitted the propertied classes of town and country against the established power of the Monarchy. There was a religious contention, too, as Parliament pushed for a more thorough reformation of the Church. In the resulting conflict, the New Model Army, under Oliver Cromwell, ousted Charles I in 1646. Two years later, in a second Civil War, Cromwell defeated an insurrection led by the King (who was beheaded in 1649) and dealt harshly with other “troublemakers” like the Levellers, an activist group that had tried to secure equal voting rights for all (save servants and beggars). In 1649 Gerrard Winstanley, formerly a bankrupted London cloth merchant, turned polemicist and pamphleteer and inspired with his writings a group of “True Levellers” (“Diggers,” as they were also called) whose politics were even more radical than the Levellers—to defy the laws of Cromwell’s England and establish communes to till the soil of the “common” grounds.

An original and passionate thinker and visionary, Winstanley asserted that the real split in English life lay not between King and Parliament, but between classes of men—between those who worked the land and those who owned it. Being part of the nation, he asserted, the common people should have equal rights to ownership with the gentry and the clergy. In his The Law of Freedom in a Platform (1652), Winstanley envisioned the constitution of a communistic society in which all land was held in common, all buying and selling was abolished, all citizens were educated by the state, and all people were eligible for the rotating offices of magistracy. He promised his followers: “And for all such as will come in and work with them, they shall have meat, drink, and clothes, which is all that is necessary to the life of man.”³⁷ Thus, his collectivist theories and practices strikingly anticipate nineteenth-and-twentieth-century socialism. His commune at St. George’s Hill, although dispersed in 1649 by neighboring landlords and the soldiers of General Fairfax, was a first step in a reclamation by common people of English lands.

Winstanley’s story, as historian Thomas Prasch has demonstrated, was virtually forgotten until the late nineteenth century. It was only in the 1890s, Prasch writes, “in the context of the proliferation of socialist groups and writings that characterized the last decades of the nineteenth century, and with the need of English socialists to find domestic progenitors for their movement, that Winstanley’s works were dug up again.”³⁸ Later, in the 1940s, a complete edition of Winstanley’s writings, edited by George Sabine, was published for the first time. More recently, in the 1960s and 1970s, on the heels of the New Left, hippie communes in Berkeley and Paris, emerging Third World nations, and the elevation of counter-culture radicals to cult status, that historians, novelists, and filmmakers like Christopher Hill, David Caute, and Kevin Brownlow,

respectively, have portrayed him not so much as a proto-Marxist, but a radical, Christian communist fighting for the rights of the under-dog.

For Brownlow, the experience was a crash-course in the history of the English Civil Wars. “Knowing nothing about the seventeenth century,” Brownlow admits, “I didn’t really respond at first to the story.” However, after further reading and reflection, he became more and more fascinated with this “extraordinarily forgotten episode of English history.”³⁹ Moreover, it is clear that Brownlow came to admire greatly the ideas and example of Winstanley. Like many historians, dating back to Eduard Bernstein, who had stressed Winstanley’s materialism and liberal politics (and de-emphasized his rather mystical theology), Brownlow saw him as a precursor to modern secular radicalism and scientific socialist ideas.⁴⁰ Accordingly, his script foregrounds Winstanley’s personal, day-to-day struggles in keeping his Diggers together, his fight with the Establishment for individual rights, and, in the end, his disillusionment and defeat. As will be seen at the end of this paper, Brownlow perhaps also saw in his Diggers an inspiration and example for the kind of collective enterprise he himself was endeavoring to undertake as a filmmaker.

The title of David Caute’s novel has a dual significance. “Comrade Jacob” literally alludes to Jacob Boehme, whose writings in the early seventeenth century affirmed the Doctrine of the Everlasting Gospel, which, among other things, rejected doctrines of an institutionalized church and placed the spirit of man above the letter of Scripture.⁴¹ Secondly, in a metaphoric sense, the title also refers to the Biblical story of Jacob and Esau, sons of Isaac. The struggle between Jacob, the thoughtful visionary, and

Esau, the hunter, over control of the lands of their father is compared to the struggle between the Diggers and the landowners, with Winstanley personifying the visionary Jacob.

Caute tells his story through several viewpoints. Lord General Fairfax, Commander in Chief of the Army, member of the Council of State and Member of Parliament for Cirencester, is weary after seven years of civil war against the Royalists. At thirty-seven years of age, he is plagued by arthritis and yearns for the peace and quiet that imminent retirement may grant him. He is also suffering a crisis in his political and social commitments: Once he had “seen the world in black and white, devoting himself without hesitation to honour, obedience, religion.” But lately he is unable to “trace the process by which the straight white road of truth had rutted away in his mind into an endless maze of doubts and fears.” He can’t make up his mind what to do about Gerrard Winstanley and his “impertinent ranting peasants who claim a monopoly of the world’s storehouse of truth.”⁴² He regards the Digger revolutionary as “that rare phenomenon, a man with his feet on the ground and his head in the clouds. Undoubtedly this frail, pale man was shrewd, yet somehow existing in the hinterlands of sanity.”⁴³

And then there is Winstanley himself, an idealist and pacifist who is all too capable of arrogance, jealousy, and hatred toward his enemies. He is also sexually frustrated as a result of his six-year celibacy since the death of his wife. His involvement with two women—Margaret, the wife of his enemy, Parson Platt, and Judith, the wife of one of his commune members—will have disastrous consequences on his plans for his flock. In the end, after his collective is dispersed by Fairfax’ soldiers, he adopts a bitter view toward life in general: “Man must fend for himself, and the poor perhaps have

centuries to go before they are strong enough to rise as one man and destroy their oppressors.”⁴⁴

Among the secondary characters whose viewpoints colors the action are Fairfax’s subordinate, Captain Gladman, an ambitious opportunist who is impatient with Fairfax’s sympathy for the Diggers and who would drive them off immediately and appropriate the lands for himself; and Parson Platt’s wife, Margaret, whose interests in Winstanley’s commune are bound up with her sexual desire for him.

While retaining key scenes and some dialogue from Caute’s novel, Brownlow’s screenplay turned to additional sources, notably Winstanley’s own pamphlets, which survive in the British Museum and which constitute a veritable diary for the year the Diggers spent on the Hill. “I have no doubt that a direct transposition from the novel might, superficially, have made a more exciting film,” admitted Brownlow in a 1980 interview, “but so much of the novel depended on [David] Caute’s imagination. . . . We wanted to [make a film] that depends on the facts.”⁴⁵ Retained from the novel are incidents such as the execution of a mutineer by Cromwell’s soldiers after the suppression of the Ware mutiny; Fairfax’s “inspection” of the Diggers commune; Fairfax’s dialogue at Hounslow with Winstanley and William Everard (the notorious “hat” interview); the argument between Winstanley and the Court of Record over a debt; and Winstanley’s plea to Tom Haydon to observe nonviolence rather than seize food in the village by force.

On the other hand, Brownlow considerably modifies and softens Caute’s interpretation of Winstanley. Here, he is depicted more as a failed socialist prophet than a man caught up in mystical millennialist visions, violent temper outbursts, and sexual

frustrations (indeed, the circumstances of Margaret Platt's madness and the alleged rape of Judith Coster are omitted entirely).⁴⁶ And instead of the final image of a humiliated and incarcerated Winstanley, as in Cauter's novel, we are left with only the gentle echo of his words on the soundtrack as falling snow softly covers the bleak landscape.

The film begins with a prologue entitled "1646: The King Against Parliament." In a few minutes of screen time, executed in the manner of a silent film, accompanied by explanatory intertitles, Brownlow rapidly covers the time period between the two Civil Wars to the execution of the King and the disbanding of the army. The frenetic editing rhythms and violent battle scenes yield to a more sedate tone as the action proper begins on 1 April 1649. Disappointed at the lack of land reforms by Cromwell, Winstanley (Miles Halliwell) and his "Diggers" build their huts on the "common ground" of St. George's Hill, Weybridge, in Surrey. In reality these were lands legally owned by Sir Francis Drake and protected by Lord General Fairfax (Jerome Willis), the Commander in Chief of the New Model Army. But Winstanley's pamphlet, "The New Law of Righteousness," defiantly declares, "The Earth is a common treasury of livelihood, for the whole of mankind. . . where men work by the sweat of their brow."

The Parson of West Horsley, John Platt (David Bramley), is particularly displeased at the incursions of the Diggers. As they have spread into the areas of Aylesbury, Shrewsbury, Lancastershire, and Buckinghamshire, some of his parishioners, including his own wife, have joined the movement. Platt complains to Fairfax (who, on the whole is disposed to be sympathetic toward Winstanley) about the "self-styled

prophet” who is spreading dissent across the land. “The fire has spread. . .” says Winstanley (ironic words, considering that it is fire that will eventually destroy their commune). However, because of his own idealism, which fails to cope with the hardships of everyday life, Winstanley loses the faith of his practical-minded members. “Your piety is fine and good,” says his stalwart follower, Tom Hayden, “but it does nothing for my son who is sick and hungry. . . . You have no wife, you have no son; you cannot understand.”

In the end, after several skirmishes between the Diggers and the local authorities (including a desperate attempt by the hungry Diggers to pillage food from the village), Platt leads Fairfax’s troops in a final attack against the commune and burns it to the ground. As the smoke clears, the charred stakes of the decimated houses rear up like burnt crosses. The words of one of Winstanley’s last pamphlets conclude the film: “Here I am, having put my arm as far as my strength will go, to advance righteousness. I have writ, I have acted, I have peace. Now I must wait to see the spirit do its own work in the hearts of others. . . [and learn if] England shall be the first land or some other wherein Truth shall sit down in triumph.”

As they did in It Happened Here, Brownlow and Mollo painstakingly recreated the surface textures and details of the past. They borrowed authentic armor from the Tower of London (the first time this was ever permitted); researched the collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Museum of English Rural Life, and The Sealed Knot, Ltd.; and recruited as extras members of the Roundhead Association (a society that recreates the Civil War on weekends). Mollo provided an endless array of props,

costumes, and armaments—including footwear modeled after originals obtained in Northampton, 150 fifteen-foot pike staffs, and agricultural equipment and original armor on loan from various collections. Locations included Churt, Surrey, on the same strata of heathland as the original site of St. George's Hill. (The Hill itself could not be used, since it lies in the stockbroker belt, home of some of the wealthiest people in England.) The interiors of Fairfax's estate were shot at Chastleton House, a 17th century structure which contains original furniture and tapestries, near Moreton-in-the Marsh, Gloucestershire. The court scenes were shot at Malmesbury, Wilts, perhaps the oldest active country house in the nation. Even the breeds of livestock were authentic, including rare Sussex longhorn cattle and Black Spot pigs. Finally, while still in the rough cut stage, the film was shown to Christopher Hill, Master of Bailliol College, Oxford, an authority on the subject. After recommending a few changes, he heartily endorsed it.

The viewer is immediately struck by a certain ambiguity hovering over the film. The insistence on using only Winstanley's own words to set scene and context, the employment of a mostly non-professional cast, the use of authentic exteriors and settings, the accumulation of a bewildering clutter of props, exotic livestock, and rough-hewn and hand-sewn costumes—not to mention an occasionally nonlinear story continuity—results in a film that marks a significant departure from the conventions of the standard Hollywood history lesson. Absent are the expected sumptuous array of studio-crafted props and finery, professionally-accented players and crystal-clear sound recording. There is no sense here that history has already happened and now lies open to the view and analysis of hindsight. No, Winstanley doesn't seem to have happened at all; rather, it

seems to be happening now. It accumulates historical detail and incident, telling its story from the bottom to the top, as it were.

As a result, there is a strangeness to the whole thing, an unfamiliarity. This is not just because its story is not well known to the general viewer. There are other reasons. The occasional explanatory intertitles are reduced to frustratingly brief captions to the action, affording but little information beyond the immediacy of the scene. The acting, particularly from the non-professional actors, seems tentative and uncertain; as a result, characters themselves seem unaccountably unaware of their Historical Significance. Some of the characters, particularly Will Everard and Captain Gladman, come and go, appearing and disappearing, abruptly and unexpectedly, their contextual significance unremarked. Winstanley himself is a cipher, a genial but baffling torrent of high-flown rhetoric, prayer, and common sense. Finally, to put a rather whimsical point to it, the storyline at times doesn't seem aware of where it's going or what kind of narrative shape it's assuming. At times it just drifts, blithely unaware of its own portentousness, refusing to explain itself, frequently denying our demand for quick and easy meanings.

While freely admitting that some of these qualities stem directly from budgetary constraints and inexperience on the part of the crew, Brownlow defends this admittedly rough-hewn quality, particularly with regard to the use of non-professional actors. "Any conviction is killed as soon as most professional actors start 'acting,'" he says, "and this is the trouble with the kind of film Andrew and I like to make. They are supposed to show events that are happening [italics mine] while you watch them, as opposed to enacted historical pageants. If you don't feel these people are real and convincing, . . .

then we have failed.” It is the very absence of calculation and professional polish, adds Brownlow, that is to be desired.⁴⁷

Winstanley thus belongs to a select company of history films that is rare in the cinema. While it reconstructs a vanished world that displays what historian Simon Schama describes as “an unruly completeness,” it also “challenges the truisms of linear history, where the order of events is progressive in both a temporal and a moral sense.” In sum, continues Schama:

These are the films that have respected the strangeness of the past, and have accepted that the historical illumination of the human condition is not necessarily going to be an edifying exercise. . . . These are also films that embrace history for its power to complicate, rather than clarify, and warn the time traveler that he is entering a place where he may well lose the thread rather than get the gist.⁴⁸

In addition, Winstanley, like It Happened Here, is a presentist view of history. Brownlow and Mollo project contemporary concerns and considerations onto the screen of a meticulously constructed past. In other words, what Brownlow has called a “trip in a time machine back to the seventeenth century” gradually emerges as more of a commentary on our immediate present. In the first place, at the time of the film’s conception, hippie communards calling themselves Squatters and New Diggers and Ranters had recently sprung up in England and the United States, including Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco. So many of the characteristics presumed to be part of the

original Diggers' life style—dropping out, pacifism, even free love (at one point Platt's wife complains to her husband, “Communal wives, communal living, the children bastards; shameless, godless, they live like animals”)—were finding new currency in the Era of the Flower Child. Thus, Brownlow found a group of New Diggers, led by one Sid Rawle, a leader in the Squatter Movement in Camden, and promptly impressed them into service as the Ranters who invade the commune and rebuke Winstanley for his impractical ideals. In these scenes it is difficult to separate Art from Life. As Rawle explained, “In so many ways the modern-day freak, hippie—call them what you will—are very much the counterpart of the old Ranters. . . . So by acting ourselves we had the effect of getting out of them the reaction that the Ranters got out of the real Diggers.”⁴⁹

“The fact that Winstanley was a couple of hundred years ahead of his time in his political thinking gives [our film] political relevance,” adds Brownlow. “He was a true communist, but his compassion and his humanity made him a pacifist. . . . The film has resonances for today, but we tried not to make the obvious parallels. . . . Winstanley's own words—and his actions—are eloquent enough.”⁵⁰

In the second place, Winstanley also presented Brownlow the opportunity to delve into a different kind of historical archive, the archive of the cinema. This is history as a construction of the film medium itself. Brownlow has acknowledged that Winstanley's visual schemas were inspired by the achievements of his favorite filmmakers, most of whom had themselves made historical films. There are allusions to Fescourt and de Baroncelli, for example, “who went back to the actual places in which the stories they were telling occurred and made films that were regional documentaries, albeit very dramatic ones.”⁵¹ The carefully-composed historical tableaux hark back to the style of

D.W. Griffith's America (1924). The frenetic editing of the battle scenes of the film's opening sequence recall Abel Gance's Napoleon (1927) and Orson Welles' The Chimes at Midnight (1966). The use of "typage," i.e., the reliance upon facial types rather than acting abilities to convey character, is reminiscent of the Russians Pudovkin, Eisenstein, and Dovzhenko. And the extraordinary beauty of the landscapes—especially images of the farmers silhouetted starkly against the wind-blown skies and meadows—and the naturalistic lighting of the interiors, captured by cinematographer Ernest Vincze (in his theatrical feature film debut), owe much to the Swedish cinema of Mauritz Stiller and Victor Sjöström (The Treasure of Arne, 1921 and The Outlaw and His Wife, respectively), the films of Carl Dreyer (particularly The Parson's Widow, 1920), and the work of Arthur Von Gerlach (The Chronicles of the Gray House, 1925).⁵² If Winstanley ultimately seems a graceful relic of the silent era, says Brownlow, that's only as it should be: "If Andrew and I had been courageous enough, we should have made Winstanley as a silent film with a full orchestral track."⁵³

Thus, in this homage to the films and the filmmakers who had so influenced Brownlow's own life, career, and sensibilities, Winstanley assumes its ultimate role as yet another kind of history—autobiography. To a great extent it is the chronicle of Brownlow's own lifelong preoccupation with film history, especially the silent film. "I have been studying the silent era longer than it lasted," he wryly recalled in a recent article.⁵⁴ In a larger sense, it is also a "self portrait" of Brownlow's own brave band of filmmakers whose identification with the Diggers borders on identity. Like them, they were "outsiders," amateurs mostly, dispossessed of their rightful place in the commercial film industry. Like the Diggers, they camped out on the "common ground" of the

industry and formed their own collective, wherein everyone worked for the common good, and claimed for themselves what producers and financiers had withheld from them. And they, too, found themselves awkwardly poised between the ideals of their vision and the practicalities of financing, producing, marketing, and exhibiting their product. Like Winstanley, Brownlow demanded nothing less than total dedication from his associates to the project at hand: “We made no concessions to the fact that everyone was working for nothing. When someone came on a session, we expected him to give his heart and soul to the picture, regardless of personal comfort.”⁵⁵

Although, as a result of the commercial failure of the film, neither Brownlow nor Mollo withdrew from commercial filmmaking, they nonetheless bowed to the exigencies of the situation and to this day have made no more independent theatrical features. “I don’t think we’ll resurrect the British film industry by making films this way,” Brownlow says wryly, “although it’s surprising how many remarkable independent films are being made in this fashion. . . . But the experience is extraordinary. The people one works with are extraordinary.”⁵⁶

Boxes within boxes. Small wonder that Stuart Klawans has hailed Winstanley as “among the rigorously modernist films of the seventies,” where all events are visual texts, “offered in place of a reality that could not be directly apprehended.”⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

In the final analysis It Happened Here and Winstanley confirm the indeterminate, mysterious nature of the past. They remind us that all history is a negotiation between familiarity and strangeness, between what Thomas Babington Macaulay characterized as

the “map” of factual data and the “painted landscape” of personal memory and public speculation. Not for Macaulay, notes historian Simon Schama, was there the slightest anxiety that the record of the past might be distorted in the service of the present. For Macaulay the fate of history is “conditional on its self-appointed masters being prepared to reacquaint themselves with the imaginative skills of the storyteller.”⁵⁸

It is to be expected that in our postmodernist world, fraught with theories about multiple/ alternative universes and nets of infinitely diverging, converging, and parallel timelines that we should increasingly regard the past and the present as tangles of unexplained riddles, intertwined alternatives and options, subjective views and objective data—a set of might-have-been’s, could-be’s, and might-yet-be’s. In a career devoted to cinema as history and to history as cinema—not to mention a lifetime that is a concatenation of both—Brownlow deserves a place of honor in that “labyrinth of time” that Jorge Luis Borges called “The Garden of Forking Paths.” It is here, says Borges, that Time and History converge in an infinite series of possibilities. And it is here, he concludes, that “Time forks perpetually toward innumerable futures.”⁵⁹

John C. Tibbetts

BROWNLOW INTERVIEW

On 15 January 1999, in the offices of his London company, Photoplay Productions, Kevin Brownlow discussed with the author his experiences making It Happened Here and Winstanley. The following are excerpts from his remarks:

BROWNLOW: “In the late 1950s and early 1960s I had an aversion to making a strictly commercial film. For me the film medium was a religion. It still is, it’s a religion. The purer the statement the better. I made pictures which were extremely documentary in their style, extremely non-commercial. It was something desperately hard to do, and I know in the past I probably took it far too seriously. You can see why I haven’t made very many feature films.

“It Happened Here could just as well have been located in America. Having done a lot of research on the American scene in the teens, twenties and thirties, I’m convinced the rise of fascism could happen anywhere. In fact, I’m surprised that the Third Reich actually didn’t take place first in the United States. In the midst of the Depression there were demagogues like Huey Long and Father Coughlin. Racism was everywhere—the Ku Klux Klan had four million members. Chain gangs and prison camps were run like concentration camps.

“I remember an incident just after I had joined the film industry as an office boy. I was walking up the street making a delivery to the laboratory when a black Citroen screeched to a halt beside me. Two men jumped out and ran into a delicatessen, shouting all the while to each other in German. It seemed to me like a scene out of an old World War II movie—only it was happening here, now, in London. It came back to me later when Andrew [Mollo] and I first thought about making It Happened Here. We had collected a lot of Nazi materials, and some people came to us asking to borrow a swastika flag. We asked, ‘What do you want it for?’ They said they were giving a party. Well, of course, it turned out to be a Nazi Party Party! They were celebrating Hitler’s birthday.

We went along out of curiosity, and found all these advocates of the Third Reich, people wearing the insigniae of Sir Oswald Mosley's Union Movement and the Hungarian Arrow Organization. They told us things that staggered us. We realized we could never write that sort of dialogue, that the best way was to get them into uniform and into the film. Here they were, respectable English types, and it was chilling to hear them. I think they condemned themselves out of their own mouths much more efficiently than if somebody in the context of the story jumped up to oppose them."

"That was the scene that got us into a lot of trouble. People were upset not only by that particular sequence but by the whole idea that the English could be capable of collaborating with the Nazis. I think that now, when we see 'storm troopers' on the football terraces and we see black men kicked to death at bus stops—I think we now realize it is possible that Fascism could flourish anytime, anywhere. But it has taken thirty years for people to get that message.

"People felt that we were supporting these Nazis! They thought we were Nazis! It is incredible how simple-minded people are when you show them political films. They think that if the sentiment is expressed on the screen, it must be the sentiment of the person who made the film! But I don't regret the controversy. I still think that, by and large, *It Happened Here* is the only feature film which has tried to explain what National Socialism is. Think of all those films made during the Second World War, and not a one of them bothered to explain just what the hell we were fighting against.

"Yes, Peter Watkins worked on the picture. He came to many of our sessions as assistant and actor and undoubtedly used this experience in his later work, although he was already making short war films on his own. It was he who did the ghastly makeup

on the officer who gets shot in the face during the Partisan attack. I was shaken when I saw it—I didn't think he would go that far. This was 1958, after all. He was expressing his nature very early on. We never did agree about how to shoot the fake newsreels. He objected to the number of cuts I included in my footage. He said, 'You can't have reverse angles. You don't have reverse angles in newsreel work!' He's quite right, of course, but I didn't really want to go that far. I was more concerned with maintaining a 'cinematic' quality to the footage.

“For *Winstanley* I wanted to make a very English film set in the seventeenth century, which I didn't think had ever been properly done. All the English films we know seem to have been about monarchs or Robin Hood—and none of them were about the ordinary people. Winstanley's story struck me as a fascinating one, and when I read David Caute's historical novel, it was the atmosphere that got me. The book was a clever piece of work, which I'm ashamed to say we completely abandoned. We discovered that Winstanley's original pamphlets were in the British Museum, and when we got those out and read them, the beauty of the language was overwhelming. Andrew and I thought, we'll do this properly, absolutely as Winstanley describes it, word for word as he wrote it. It's true that it would have been a much more commercial film if we had stuck to the historical novel. You could still do that, but it would have very little to do with our film. We wanted to see what would happen if we made an austere, correct, accurate historical film. Well, we now know—nobody would go see it!

“People did like the opening battle scenes. They thought they were inspired by Eisenstein. Not really. They think that way because we used elements in the music score borrowed from Eisenstein's Alexander Nevsky. We were very embarrassed about using

it, by the way, because it's hardly English music! But it has that medieval quality, an almost religious intensity that I desperately needed. Anyway, our real inspiration was Orson Welles. I think that *Chimes at Midnight* has the best battle scenes I have ever seen. It taught us how to get something really effective out of a real economy of means. So we established a mass of soldiers in one shot, and then for the rest of the scene worked with just six soldiers. That's all we needed, just six men in the field seen through a lot of extreme closeups. It took me three weeks to edit that sequence, which is outrageously long. It was very difficult to do.

"I put everything I had into *Winstanley*. But now, twenty-five years later, it's difficult for me to look at it. Abel Gance once said that looking back a film you've made was like looking at triple-screen Polyvision. It's like that with me and *Winstanley*. In the middle screen is the film itself, and on the other two screens I see all the missed intentions, the disasters and miseries that I had actually making it. It's toe-curling embarrassing now for me to watch that picture—partly because of that and partly because of what my ideas were and how I had so often to settle for second best. I get much more of a kick seeing films by other people, like Clarence Brown, who I admire, where I now know nothing but the headlines of how the picture was made; and where I can just revel in its tremendous technical and artistic skill. I can't do that with my own films. And I'm sure that must be one of the reasons I ended up as a film historian and not as a film director.

"At the time I made *It Happened Here* and *Winstanley* I thought that I'd continue in feature filmmaking. Certainly I never expected to make my living at film preservation.

However, I wouldn't be the film historian I am without having had the experience of making these pictures.

“By the way, did you realize that the year 1999 marks the 350th anniversary of the Diggers? St. George's Hill was peacefully occupied again so a memorial stone to Winstanley could be set up. A summons for trespass was issued—in the name of Gerrard Winstanley, believe it or not—and the Diggers appeared in the High Court. It was all very civilized, until too many Diggers tried to speak, and the magistrate began intoning lines which could have come from my film ('I will not allow you to talk. . . !'). Naturally, they were given an eviction order. I just wonder what happened to the memorial. St. George's Hill is now the richest part of the stockbroker belt, you know. It's where all the pop singers live. It'll be interesting to see how they'll react. The new Parson Platt might turn out to be George Harrison, or Elton John!”

John C. Tibbetts and James M. Welsh

ENDNOTES

¹Quoted in Rubenstein, Lenny, “Winstanley and the Historical Film.” Cineaste X:4 (Fall 1980): 22.

² It Happened Here and Winstanley may be rented or purchased from Milestone Films, 275 West 96th Street, Suite 28C, New York NY 10025. Phone: (800) 603-1104.

³Although unseen today, The Capture was an important first step in Brownlow's filmmaking aspirations. It was shot over a three-year period, from 1952-1955. Brownlow updated de Maupassant's short story from the Franco-Prussian War to wartime France in 1940. It told the story of how a German patrol was captured by a forester's daughter and taken into custody by the local National Guard. Ironically, they, not the girl, are given credit for the capture. "After The Capture, I knew I was capable of making films," says Brownlow. See his How It Happened Here (Garden City NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968), 25-26.

⁴Important contemporary essays on the Free Cinema movement include Lindsay Anderson, "Free Cinema," written in 1957 and anthologized in Barsam, Richard Meran, Ed. Nonfiction Film Theory and Criticism (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1976): 70-74; and Lambert, Gavin. "Free Cinema." Sight and Sound 25 (Spring 1956): 173-177. For a book-length overview, see Walker, Alexander. Hollywood U.K.: The British Film Industry in the 1960s (New York: Stein and Day, 1974).

⁵Lambert, Gavin, "Free Cinema," 177.

⁶Richardson, Tony, "A Free Hand." Sight and Sound 28:2 (Spring 1956): 174.

⁷Houston, Penelope, "Room at the Top." Sight and Sound 28:2 (Spring 1959): 58.

⁸“For what it’s worth,” declares Brownlow, “in the beginning Andrew Mollo and I had nothing to do with Free Cinema and Sight and Sound—we were light years away from all that. Amateurs in the UK have no contact whatever with even semi-professionals, as they were.” Letter to author, 28 April 1999. Nonetheless, Brownlow would eventually establish many contacts with the Free Cinema filmmakers in later years, including Karel Reisz, Lindsay Anderson (for whom he edited The White Bus) and Tony Richardson (for whom he worked as an editor on Charge of the Light Brigade in 1968). For Brownlow’s own account of these associations, see Welsh, James M. and John C. Tibbetts, Eds. The Cinema of Tony Richardson (State University of New York Press, 1999): 31-37.

⁹Quoted in “Gilbert Adair from London.” Film Comment 16:3 (May-June 1980): 6.

¹⁰For Brownlow’s own account of the making of the film, see How It Happened Here.

¹¹Robinson, David, “It Happened Here,” Sight and Sound 34:1 (Winter 1964-1965): 39.

¹²According to Brownlow, modern-day Fascists in England have adopted the Cross of St. George as their symbol after an unsuccessful attempt to requisition the Union Jack.
(Letter to author, 28 April 1999)

¹³Brownlow, Kevin, How It Happened Here, 70.

¹⁴Brownlow, Kevin, How It Happened Here, 138.

¹⁵Quoted in Dean, Brian, "Film Critics Protest Over Cuts in Nazi Scene." Daily Mail (26 February 1966): n.p.

¹⁶Reed, Stanley, "It Happened Here." The Times (3 March 1966): n.p.

¹⁷Robinson, David, "It Happened Here": 39.

¹⁸Rubenstein. "It Happened Here: A Second Look." Film Comment VI:4 (1975): 36.

¹⁹Brownlow, Kevin. How It Happened Here: 177.

²⁰Brownlow, Kevin. How It Happened Here: 138.

²¹Quoted in Walker, Sophie. "British Nazis' Film to Be Shown Uncut After 30-Year Ban." The Independent (29 September 1996): 2.

²²Quoted in Blue, James and Michael Gill. "Peter Watkins Discusses His Suppressed Nuclear Film." Film Comment 3:4 (Fall 1965): 16-17.

²³Letter to author, 28 April 1999.

²⁴Letter to author, 6 November 1998.

²⁵Squire, J.C. Ed. If It Had Happened Otherwise: Lapses into Imaginary History (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1932): v.

²⁶Essays on Bring the Jubilee, The Man in the High Castle, and The Difference Engine may be found in the four-volume Magill's Guide to Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Salem Press, Inc., 1996).

²⁷In 1942 Alberto Cavalcanti made Went the Day Well? (U.S. title: Forty-Eight Hours), in which German paratroopers, disguised as members of the British army, take over the village of Bramley End, in Gloucestershire. They are ultimately defeated by the villagers. The scenario was based on a story by Graham Greene. Writing in The Nation, James Agee praised its “melodramatically plausible actions” and concluded that the film has “the sinister, freezing beauty of an Auden prophecy come true.” See Agee on Film: Reviews and Comments (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968): 104.

²⁸Coward's play, like Brownlow's It Happened Here, centers around a number of English characters caught up in the Nazi invasion of Britain. They debate the issue of whether or not British citizens should accommodate themselves to Nazi domination. One character parades his patriotic fervor: “But don't give in—don't ever let them win you round with their careful words and their ‘good-behaviour’ policies. They are our enemies—now and forever. If other people find it expedient to be nice to them—do remember that they don't count, those thinking, broken reeds—they're only in the minority in this country

and they'll never be anything else." (49) Another character argues the opposite position: "I prefer to see life as it is rather than as it should be. Being a realist I have adapted myself to the circumstances around me. . . . The world is changing swiftly. . . and to cope with its changes you need better equipment than a confused jumble of high-school heroics." (151-152). See Coward, Noel. Peace in Our Time: A Play in Two Acts and Eight Scenes (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1948). According to Brownlow, the play was revived in 1997. "I was struck by its similarity in tone to our script," he writes (letter to author, 28 April 1999).

²⁹Ferguson, Niall, Ed. Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals (London: Macmillan, 1997): 2.

³⁰Ferguson, Niall, Ed. Virtual History: 83-85.

³¹Rosenstone, Robert, Ed. Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995): 19. See also a collection of essays pertinent to this subject by writers like Hayden White, Robert Brent Toplin, and John E. O'Connor in The American Historical Review 93:5 (December 1988).

³²See Roberts, Andrew. "What If Germany Had Invaded Britain in May 1940?" in Ferguson, Niall, Virtual History: 296-302.

³³Roberts, Andrew, and Niall Ferguson. “What If Germany Had Invaded Britain in May 1840?” in Ferguson, Niall, Virtual History: 291.

³⁴Historian Roy Armes reports that from 1952 onwards, the British Film Institute, through the Experimental Film Fund (restructured in the mid-1960s as the B.F.I. Production Board), “took over the role once occupied by [John] Grierson’s documentary movement and began to play a more central part in independent film production.” See Armes, Roy. A Critical History of British Cinema (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978): 325.

³⁵See Tibbetts, John C. and James M. Welsh, “Kevin Brownlow and Winstanley.” Films in Review 30:7 (September 1979): 432-433. Milestone Films has published in its pressbook extensive program notes on Winstanley and It Happened Here.

³⁶Hill, Christopher. The World Turned Upside Down (New York: Penguin Books, 1980): 14

³⁷Quoted in Prash, Thomas. “The Making of an English Working Past.” The Wordsworth Circle XXV:3 (Summer 1994): 166.

³⁸Prash, Thomas. “The Making of an English Working Past”: 166.

³⁹Quoted in the 1975 documentary film, It Happened Here Again.

⁴⁰In summarizing historiography on Gerrard Winstanley, Christopher Hill divided scholars into two camps—those who stress his modernity at the expense of his mysticism, and those who ignore his politics in favor of his religious ideas. See Hill, Christopher. The Religion of Gerrard Winstanley, Past and Present Supplement Five (1978): 1-2.

⁴¹See a brief discussion of Boehme's Six Theosophic Points (1620) in Hill, Christopher. The World Turned Upside Down: 148, 176.

⁴²Caute, David. Comrade Jacob (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962): 8.

⁴³Caute, David. Comrade Jacob: 21.

⁴⁴Caute, David. Comrade Jacob: 221.

⁴⁵Quoted in Rubenstein, Lenny. "Winstanley and the Historical Film": 22.

⁴⁶Brownlow notes that recent research has revealed that Winstanley was married during the time of the events of 1649. His wife, Susan, died in the 1660s, after which he remarried (letter to author, 18 April 1999).

⁴⁷Interview in It Happened Here Again.

⁴⁸Schama, Simon. "Clio at the Multiplex." The New Yorker (19 January 1998): 41.

⁴⁹Interview in It Happened Here Again. In the film, Rawle's character warns the Diggers of Winstanley's impracticality and arrogance: "'Action is the life of all things, and not to act is to do nothing.' The holiness and righteousness of Gerrard Winstanley will not fill your bellies tonight. He loves himself above all others. And would have you do the same—even if you starve. There is a vainglory nursed in his heart by which his name would be great among the poor of the nation."

⁵⁰Quoted in Rubenstein. "Winstanley and the Historical Film," Cineaste X:4 (Fall 1980), 25.

⁵¹Quoted in "Gilbert Adair from London": 10.

⁵²Least known among these films is Arthur von Gerlach's Die Chronik von Grieshaus (The Chronicles of the Gray House), a film Brownlow greatly admires and which historian Siegfried Kracauer says "breathes the atmosphere of a sinister medieval saga." See Kracauer, Siegfried. From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film (Princeton University Press, 1974): 106. Commentator Lotte H. Eisner regards it as a landmark in German silent cinema. It was adapted by Thea von Harbou from a tale by the German writer, Theodor Storm. Here, writes, Eisner, "Gerlach succeeded in creating one of the few German films to capture the feeling of fresh air and nostalgic poetry characteristic of the Swedish cinema. . . . The Luneberger Heide in northern Germany

lends its natural setting of bleak open country to this grim tale of unhappy love, fratricide and expiation. Across the plains dotted with blackish storm-rent shrubs horsemen gallop in vast billowing cloaks, huge equestrian frescoes sculpted against a pale sky. . . The storm of the heart and Nature become one. In the interiors, darkness, light, and superimposed apparitions weave their dense veil of atmosphere” (63). See Eisner, Lotte H. The Haunted Screen (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969).

⁵³Quoted in “Gilbert Adair from London”: 10.

⁵⁴Brownlow’s accounts of his early, formative encounters with movies assume a poignant, almost religious tone. As a seven-year old boy in a prep school in Crowborough, Sussex, for example, he watched his first films in a cinema that had been converted from a chapel—“which seems appropriate in retrospect.” Although the screenings featured old silent movies, he instantly fell in love with the experience. “I knew the cinema was a place for powerful emotions,” he recalls. “The darkened room symbolized blissful escape from the miseries of school, and the shaft of light promised anything—Felix the cat; the Citroen expedition to Asia; Charlie Chaplin and his lovely Edna Purviance, who looked so like my mother, the British Army fighting the fuzzy-wuzzies in India; even kindly old characters named after me [“Mr. Brownlow” in Oliver Twist].” See Brownlow, Kevin. “In the First Place,” Literature/Film Quarterly 23:2 (1995): 84.

⁵⁵Brownlow, Kevin. It Happened Here: 125.

⁵⁶Interview in It Happened Here Again.

⁵⁷Klawans, Stuart. "It Happened Here." The Nation 268:3 (25 January 1999): 43.

⁵⁸Schama, Simon. "Clio at the Multiplex": 40.

⁵⁹In Borges' short story, "The Garden of Forking Paths," the character of Stephen Albert describes this mysterious "garden": "The Garden of Forking Paths is an enormous riddle, or parable, whose theme is time. . . . [It constitutes] an infinite series of times, in a growing, dizzying net of divergent, convergent and parallel times. This network of times which approached one another, forked, broke off, or were unaware of one another for centuries, embraces all possibilities of time. We do not exist in the majority of these times; in some you exist, and not I; in others I, and not you; in others, both of us. In the present one, which a favorable fate has granted me, you have arrived at my house; in another, while crossing the garden, you found me dead; in still another, I utter these same words, but I am a mistake, a ghost." See Borges, Jorge Luis. Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings (New York: New Directions Books, 1964): 28.