Scottish Cinema Now

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Edited by

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and Rod Stoneman

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EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

JONATHAN MURRAY

The past decade and a half was a period of unprecedented industrial expansion and creative achievement within Scottish film culture. Put in the simplest of terms, more films were made about and/or in Scotland, with more local and international production finance, involving and developing a wider range of indigenous creative talent, than at any previous point in cinema history. The essays in this volume, developed from the *New Scottish Cinema* symposium that took place in early November 2005 at the Huston School of Film & Digital Media, National University of Ireland, Galway, testify to and celebrate that fact. Yet as this introduction is written in early December 2008 the most recent public pronouncements on contemporary Scottish film culture's health are less than optimistic. See, for instance, various comments made by the actor Robert Carlyle around the time of the 2008 British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Scotland awards. Despite winning the Best Actor prize for his role in *Summer* (Glenaan, GB, 2008) Carlyle complained of Scotland that,

> We don't have a film industry here. I would argue that vehemently. An industry is something that feeds itself and grows. We make one film every 10 years that gets any kind of notice. You can't call that an industry. Over the past 12 to 15 years I have probably had about five or six scripts that have been Scots films shooting here. Not one of them has fucking happened. I don't know the answer to that. It's got to the stage now with my agent, if something Scottish comes in it has to be financed, otherwise I'm not going to read it because it depresses me. (Scott 2008)

Carlyle's comments go some way to indicating the true complexity of Scottish cinema's recent evolution. The decade or so since *Shallow Grave* (Boyle, GB, 1995) and *Trainspotting* (Boyle, GB, 1996) has delivered certain material and cultural advances while denying others, raising but also disappointing local expectations and aspirations at one and the same time. Carlyle's words of caution indicate the necessity of a critical approach that interrogates the aesthetic, industrial and ideological aspects of filmmaking in contemporary Scotland, rather than one content merely

to celebrate the bald fact that such activity takes place more frequently and visibly than ever before, in however precarious a form.

Although this volume is titled *Scottish Cinema Now*, many of its essays propose that new historical scholarship, or reconsideration of well- and lesser-known figures and films from the past, form a necessary precondition for understanding fully the challenges of the present. Consider again, for instance, Robert Carlyle's above-quoted comments. Without wishing to dismiss or downplay the anxieties and reservations he voices, one can construct a historical "daisy chain" of such utterances in the Scottish context. As early as 1938, the documentary film producer and critic John Grierson could be found complaining that, "there is hardly a picture of Scotland but comes by grace of the alien and is false" (Hardy 1945, 145). In 1946, the BBC broadcaster Joseph Macleod was appointed Managing Director of a semi-voluntary organisation styling itself as the Scottish National Film Studios. This initiative aimed to finance and build a film studio in the Highlands, so that, in the words of promotional literature associated with the scheme, "young talent will be trained in the technical aspects of filmmaking and equipped to take their place later as creative artists and good Scots" (Bruce 1990, 77). The failure of such ambitions beyond the production of a single instructional short on road safety etiquette meant that in 1958, D. M. Elliot could still bemoan the fact that, "among the smaller nations of the world Scotland is almost alone in having no domestic film industry" (Elliot 1958, 41). Another decade on, John Grierson's celebrity lecture at the 1968 Edinburgh International Film Festival argued that Scottish filmmakers' shared predicament was one of endless wandering in a film industrial desert, forever "denied access to the means of production" (Grierson 1968). In 1976, Steve Clark-Hall, one of the first wave of aspirant Scottish independent producers to emerge in the late 1960s and early '70s, observed that, "the Scottish film industry, in any meaningful sense has yet to swing into being" (Clark-Hall 1976, 11). In 1982, director Charlie Gormley's debut feature *Living Apart Together* (GB, 1983) formed part of a then unprecedented wave of five Scottish features funded largely by the recently established Channel 4. Despite the euphoria surrounding this brief efflorescence, Gormley nonetheless cautioned that, "you can't really call it an industry here… there are around half-a-dozen blokes who have been around for ten to fifteen years and who want to make features" (Vaines 1982, 11). In 1995, the *annus mirabilis* of the "New" Scottish cinema which forms this volume's primary object of study, Eddie Dick, Chief Officer of the Scottish Film Production Fund, argued for the need to "normalise filmmaking," still "an abnormal activity" (Macnab 1995, 24) in Scotland. In 2000, Paddy Higson, by then

the country's longest-standing and most experienced feature producer, grudgingly conceded that, "we've now got something which is almost a cottage industry… still not what you would call an industry" (Hamilton 2000, 15).

Thus, if the received critical view of the history of the British film industry is one of perpetual rebirth—artistic renaissance and economic crisis succeeding each other with metronomic regularity—Scotland's equivalent has always been understood by its constituents as stillborn or, at very best, in indefinite gestation: the late-'00s predicament bemoaned by Robert Carlyle is anything but new. What is also striking, however, about each of the comments quoted above—or at least those dating from the late '60s onwards—is that the contemporary circumstances each observer finds similarly unpropitious would have seemed unlikely and promising to their historical forebears. Revisiting the past offers a way of recontextualising and better understanding the nuances of the present.

A number of the essays in this volume demonstrate in different ways the extent to which this is so. Sarah Neely and Alan Riach's work on the mid-twentieth-century careers of pioneering amateur filmmakers Margaret Tait and Enrico Cocozza uncovers instructive precedents for the contemporary artists' film and video discussed by Neil Mulholland. Similarly, Marilyn Reizbaum forges new parallels between the creative and ideological uses to which Highland landscapes were put in certain seminal works of 1930s and '40s British cinema and the late-'90s/early-'00s Scottish films of Ken Loach. Colin McArthur revisits the early 1980s and Murray Grigor's hitherto underappreciated *Scotch Myths* (GB, 1983) not simply to reclaim a "lost classic," but also to highlight what he sees as the persistent marginalisation of non-classical feature filmmaking practices within more recent Scottish cinema. Conversely, Cairns Craig offers a provocative re-reading of a work widely acknowledged as seminal, Bill Douglas' *Childhood Trilogy* (GB, 1972-1978). Craig argues that what is typically seen as an aesthetic and ideological paradigm for new Scottish filmmakers is in fact a deeply problematic work, offering up an alienated representation of national culture and identity that, while formally accomplished, is culturally reductive and unproductive in equal measure. Christopher Meir compares and contrasts the early '80s and early '00s, discussing the international marketing campaigns for *Local Hero* (Forsyth, GB, 1983) and *Young Adam* (Mackenzie, GB/Fr, 2003). His juxtaposition of two apparently very different films aims to uncover a range of persistent external pressures and demands which Scottish filmmakers and financiers have had to negotiate over the last three decades, in their attempt to secure some kind of international critical and

commercial visibility and viability for new Scottish cinema. Jane Sillars reclaims one of the most reviled representational traditions in Scottish culture, filmic or otherwise: the Kailyard image of small-town, domestic life. She argues that a wide range of contemporary Scottish film work demonstrates the ongoing creative and national cultural potential of a tradition routinely and rabidly dismissed in most twentieth-century academic commentary on Scottish culture. Alastair Scott examines a vital but hitherto overlooked institutional history within the development of Scottish film culture: that of the ongoing relationship between the British National Film and Television School, established in 1971, and successive generations of new Scottish filmmakers.

Elsewhere in this volume, Robert Carlyle's contemporary identification of the daunting financial, institutional and industrial pressures facing new Scottish cinema finds numerous echoes. In addition to already-noted contributions from McArthur, Meir and Scott, Duncan Petrie reconsiders the extended, optimistic analysis of the late-'90s situation offered in his seminal *Screening Scotland* (Petrie 2000). He concludes that many of the hopes raised by Scottish cinema's rapid expansion in the last few years of the twentieth century have remained unrealised in the early ones of the twenty-first, and that the present moment is one in which filmmakers, policy makers and critics need urgently to work together to (re)define the value and importance of a small national cinema such as Scotland's. This chimes closely with the analysis offered by Robin MacPherson. He traces the evolution of "Creative Industries" rhetoric within the Scottish film and television production sectors since the mid 1980s, concluding that cultural and political justifications for a publicly-subsidised national cinema have been woefully neglected and increasingly marginalised over the last two decades. MacPherson sees this situation as one in need of urgent rectification.

Finally, the contemporary example this introduction began with, that of Robert Carlyle and the actor's latest film, *Summer*, indicates another major theme of this collection. *Summer*'s very inclusion in, let alone its success at, the 2008 Scottish BAFTAs might cause some to look askance. Yes, the film's director, Kenny Glenaan, is a Scot, as is Carlyle, and the project's production financing package included a substantial contribution from Scottish Screen, the publicly-funded agency for film and television in Scotland. In other important regards, however, *Summer* cannot be said to be "Scottish" in any obvious way. The majority of the film's funding is non-Scottish; it is set in the English Midlands; perhaps the closest contemporary reference point for its story of fraught teenage relationships unfolding over a single season is not another Scottish film, but a British

one (co-written and directed by a Pole), *My Summer of Love* (Pawlikowski, GB, 2004). Moreover, Kenny Glenaan's directorial career to date is not predominantly, let alone exclusively, Scottish by any stretch of the imagination. *Gas Attac*k (GB, 2001) is set in Glasgow, but the collective experience the film foregrounds is that of immigrant Kurdish refugees. *Yasmin* (Ger/GB, 2004) was made with a significant element of continental European finance, is set in the North of England, and focuses on British Muslim protagonists. The combined example of *Summer* and Glenaan indicates the extent to which, towards the end of the '00s, contemporary films and filmmakers can (indeed, *must*) be labelled "Scottish" without an automatic presumption that an extended or exclusive analysis of national history, society, culture and identity is what they will offer. Since the turn of the century, "Scottish" films have increasingly been financed on a pan-European basis, and the stories such movies narrate are, as in the case of *Summer*, often un- or only tangentially related to questions of national identity or specificity.

Recent or forthcoming work on Scottish cinema takes increasing notice of this fact. David Martin-Jones' *Scotland: Global Cinema* (Martin-Jones, forthcoming) posits an internationally inclusive rather than nationally exclusive remit, both in the films and filmmakers it singles out for discussion and in the critical conclusions it draws about these. My own *Discomfort and Joy: the Cinema of Bill Forsyth* (Murray, forthcoming) re-examines that filmmaker's early-'80s Scottish films in a manner foregrounding their non-nationally specific aesthetic and ideological characteristics, and examines at length Forsyth's late-'80s and early-'90s North American features, films almost totally ignored within the academic study of Scottish and British cinemas, largely, one suspects, because of their perceived deracination. Sarah Neely discerns "a recent trend in Scottish cinema, where issues of national identity are dealt with more tentatively" (Neely 2008, 161) than was the case as recently as ten years ago. She concludes that "the opening-up of modes of discourse within Scottish filmmaking should also be reflected in [Scottish] film criticism" (ibid., 162).

The "opening-up" Neely calls for is abundantly evident in this volume. Neil Mulholland reminds us of Scotland's established international reputation in the field of artist's film and video, a fact hitherto overlooked in the academic study of Scottish moving image cultures. Duncan Petrie's reconsideration of his arguments in *Screening Scotland* is explicitly informed by his subsequent time teaching in New Zealand and researching that country's cinema. Jane Sillars argues for Kailyard as an internationally legible and applicable, rather than nationally specific and

reprehensible, representational discourse. Colin McArthur draws lessons from Eastern European film critical discourse in setting out the broad brushstrokes of the approach to the international promotion of Scottish cinema he would like to see taking place in the present. David Stenhouse argues that representations of Scottish culture and identity constructed by diasporic Scots have yet to be engaged with substantively within Scottish film and cultural criticism. John Hill analyses Ken Loach's late-'90s and early-'00s Scottish films, indicating the extent to which their nationally specific setting is only one constituent part of the socio-political analysis Loach sets out. Sarah Street argues that significant '00s films such as *Morvern Callar* (Ramsay, GB, 2002) and *Young Adam* should be seen as paradigmatic examples of contemporary "trans-national" rather than specifically "Scottish" cinematic practice. David Martin-Jones explores the extent which the discourses of identity put into play in much new Scottish cinema are sub- rather than (or as well as) supra-national in scope.

The expansion of Scottish cinema over the last decade-and-a-half has resulted not just in many more films from and/or about Scotland, but in the emergence of an ever wider range of questions to be posed about the country's relationship to the moving image. The editors of this book hope that readers find some of those questions (and better still, some productive responses to them) present in the following pages.

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Jonathan Murray, Fidelma Farley & Rod Stoneman, December 17th 2008.

DEMONS IN THE MACHINE: EXPERIMENTAL FILM, POETRY AND MODERNISM IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY SCOTLAND[1]

SARAH NEELY AND ALAN RIACH

Avant-garde film practices in Scotland have often been overshadowed by the dominance of a strong documentary tradition, and discussions of Scottish filmmaking are generally concerned with debates around national identity. These tendencies work to obscure the achievements of a number of important local filmmakers linked to the international avant-garde. This chapter will explore the work of two such figures: Orcadian poet, painter and filmmaker Margaret Tait (1918-1999) and Scots-Italian writer, academic and amateur filmmaker Enrico Cocozza (1921-1997). Both attended Centro Sperimentale di Cinematographia in Rome in the early 1950s, Tait after serving in the Royal Army Medical Corps, Cocozza after working as an Army interpreter for Italian POWs. Tait and Cocozza's poetic approach to filmmaking was admired by artists, other filmmakers, writers and, unsurprisingly, poets. Hugh MacDiarmid, who served as a subject for one of Tait's film portraits, published some of her written poetry and wrote about her in his 1960 *Scottish Field* article, 'Intimate Filmmaking in Scotland' (MacDiarmid 1998a, 415-7). Edwin Morgan favourably reviewed Tait's poems and later wrote a poem in tribute to Cocozza. Both Tait and Cocozza, to varying extents, were influenced by poetry, occasionally adapting and referencing the work of well-known poets in their own films.

Such links between poetry and filmmaking are well-established throughout the history of avant-garde cinema beyond Scotland.

[1] This chapter developed from a day seminar on the relationships between film and poetry in Scotland organised by Rae Riach at the University of Paisley. The research on Margaret Tait was supported by a small research grant from the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland.

Filmmakers such as Maya Deren and Jonas Mekas looked to poetry as source material for their films and as a way to explore and describe cinematic form and practice. More generally, William Wees establishes key distinctions between two different types of practice-based approach to the relationship between film and poetry. The term "poetry-film" describes films based on or directly inspired by poetry, while "film poem" refers to works characterised by "impressionistic or semi-abstract imagery carefully edited for rhythmic effects, complex formal relationships, and metaphorical or symbolic significance" (Wees 1999). Examples of such creative interrelations generally have been overlooked in historical accounts of modern Scottish culture, however. The importance of the poet laureate or the makar has long been established, but the achievements of film-makar peers such as Cocozza and Tait has gone largely unnoticed. If Edwin Morgan is the presiding, encouraging and enabling spirit for a generation of writers emergent in the 1980s and 1990s, should we not also bring Margaret Tait and Enrico Cocozza more firmly into the light of visible currency? Might they not be more enabling than they have hitherto been allowed to be? Cocozza's inventiveness was recognised within amateur filmmaking circles and Tait was celebrated by critics and savants of the avant-garde, but neither was satisfied by the limited opportunities available in mid-to-late twentieth-century Scotland to develop feature-length work. Although Tait succeeded latterly with *Blue Black Permanent* (GB, 1992), several other attempts made by the two never came to fruition. For instance, Tait sought development finance in the mid '80s for *Scars of Battle*, a never-made spy thriller about an ex-agent mourning the tragic death of his wife in Sri Lanka. Likewise, Cocozza's archival papers include a lengthy script for an unrealised feature project, *The Young Ned*.

Tellingly, the Scottish experimental filmmakers who received most significant institutional support and critical acclaim in the mid-to-late twentieth century most often did so by working outwith Scotland. Accordingly, their work is usually discussed outside a specifically national context. Most famously, Norman McLaren developed his approach to filmmaking at Glasgow School of Art, where he was a student, and set up the School's Kinecraft Society in 1933. Work produced by members of the Society was characterised by an avant-garde approach, but a few films are also notable for their social and political commitment. In 1936, McLaren and Helen Biggar, a fellow student and Kinecraft member, produced *Hell Unltd*, an anti-war film employing an innovative mix of animation and found footage. Many of the films produced by the Society's members were also submitted to the Scottish Amateur Film Festival, an annual event held at the Cosmo cinema (now the Glasgow Film Theatre). In 1935,

McLaren's film *Colour Cocktail* (GB, 1934) caught the attention of John Grierson. Grierson's interest in McLaren would inform the rest of the latter's career. Grierson invited McLaren first to join the GPO Film Unit, and later, the National Film Board of Canada. Cocozza and Tait's work was also seen by Grierson in later runs of the Scottish Amateur Film Festival. In 1951, Cocozza won the Victor Saville Trophy for most outstanding film for *Chick's Day* (GB, 1950). However, neither Cocozza nor Tait received the kind of offer Grierson made to McLaren. Both worked in Scotland for most of their intermittent careers as a result. Vitally, therefore, Cocozza and Tait were consistently influenced by and engaged with other streams of Scottish culture, even as they were compelled to assimilate and participate within the European and international filmmaking avant-gardes from a distance. McLaren has been lauded as internationalist "because he eliminated national and regional markers" (Dobson 1999) in nearly all of his work; in sharp contrast, Cocozza and Tait developed, through a combination of ingenuity and necessity, an obviously localised form of modernist practice. It is precisely in such terms that this essay documents and celebrates their achievements.

Neither Cocozza nor Tait chose to work outside international mainstreams, whether commercial or avant-garde, through active preference. Yet to a significant degree both turned necessity into virtue. They capitalised on freedom from the restrictions of working within an industrial framework and embraced an eclectic range of media, genres, forms and practices, both mainstream and avant-garde. Each displayed a serious commitment to experimentation with the material possibilities of film form. Like the modernist film which Jill Forbes and Sarah Street distinguish for its use of the camera more like a diary than a machine (Forbes and Street 2000, 20), Tait and Cocozza's work presents a fluid treatment of space and place. Although the oversight of their work and the general lack of support given to developing their skills is lamentable, their shared fate as truly independent filmmakers meant that their work was influenced uniquely by contemporaneous experimentations within other areas of Scottish culture, specifically, developments in modernist literature. Their respective oeuvres represent a remarkably vivid, intensely detailed local portrait of Scottish society and creativity in the middle of the twentieth century and beyond.

Margaret Tait

Soon after returning to Scotland from her studies in Rome, Margaret Tait established Ancona Films with fellow student Peter Hollander.

Offices were listed in New York, Rome and Edinburgh, where Tait relocated in 1954, setting up her studio above a shop on Rose Street. There she held an annual 'Rose Street Film Festival', running parallel to the Edinburgh International Film Festival and intended to showcase the work of students from Centro Sperimentale. Later, after she returned to her native Orkney, she established her studio in an old Kirk and would screen films in local theatres, village halls, or occasionally her own home. For most of her career she used a Bolex camera that she had purchased on a side street when she was a student in Rome.

Given the fecund relationship between cinema and poetry that developed through her experimental film work, it is significant that Tait was committed to writing poetry as well as producing moving image work, and that key Scottish literary figures took an interest in both areas of her creative output. Of especial importance for this essay is the close relationship that developed between Tait and perhaps the most important of all twentieth-century Scottish poets, Hugh MacDiarmid. Tait published three books of poetry: *origins and elements* (1959), *The Hen and the Bees: Legends and Lyrics* (1960) and *Subjects and Sequences* (1960). She also wrote short stories and children's fiction. MacDiarmid published a number of Tait's poems in the magazine he was editing in the 1950s, *The Voice of Scotland*. From the 1930s on, MacDiarmid's poetry turned towards extended experimental forms of writing, predominantly in English but drawing in phrases and quotations from other languages and cultures. In this period the linguistic diversity of his work was matched by its wide-ranging reference to different disciplines such as science, biology, genetics, music and film. But throughout his writing career, MacDiarmid produced any number of poems dealing specifically with Scotland and Scottish subject-matter, and he repeatedly returned to composition in the language we call Scots. Intellectual enquiry, national disposition and formal experimentalism characterised MacDiarmid's writing at the time he encountered comparable qualities in Tait's literary work. Her 1959 collection *origins and elements* is characterised by free verse forms, openness of structure, line-breaks depending on syntax and conversational emphasis rather than repetitive rhythmic pattern, scientific subject-matter, love of paradox, wide-ranging literary reference (poems about Rimbaud, Emily Dickinson, allusions to D.H. Lawrence), analytic austerity rubbing shoulders with wry humour.

Edwin Morgan reviewed *origins and elements* in the autumn 1961 issue of *New Saltire*, in an essay entitled 'Who Will Publish Scottish Poetry?' Morgan was concerned to point out that Scottish publishers should take closer interest in what was happening with work produced in

ephemeral, small-press or pamphlet editions. The poets he reviewed—Alan Jackson, Tom Scott, Alan Riddell, Ian Hamilton Finlay—achieved varying degrees of recognition, most notably Finlay, not only as a poet but as an internationally recognised artist. Alan Riddell, along with Finlay and Morgan, produced concrete poetry in an international movement that overlapped literary and visual forms. Morgan draws attention to Tait's "curious and interesting, though sometimes prosaic and wilful, poems on a great variety of subjects" (Morgan 1961, 51). He notes MacDiarmid's influence in scientific poems like 'Water' and 'Carbon' and in Tait's attack on the Calvinist disposition. Morgan concludes that Tait "gives the reader's mind something to work on" (ibid.) and praises her engagement with mental activity as opposed to rhapsodic entrancement. There is certainly an affinity between Morgan's own work and what he praises in Tait's.

Poems in Tait's 1960 collection *The Hen and the Bees* are more playful with sound patterns and vocabulary, focusing on animals ('Hen', 'Dog'), archetypal figures (Queen, King, Princess) and mythical gods (Thor, Loki and Baldar). The poems in her third collection, *Subjects and Sequences* (1960), are more varied and ambitious, collected under different section headings. 'Book I' is entitled 'Places, People and Events', and 'Book II', 'Sequences', includes poems on elemental sensations of sunlight, the role of the poet, Mary Queen of Scots, and children. The book has a larger physical format and the poems take advantage of this, with longer lines extending across the page then being brought back abruptly in one-, two-, or three-word lines, so that the conversational diction is formally arranged in a self-evidently self-conscious way. The poems show clearly the extent of their own artifice, while they are normally straightforward in their syntax, grammar and conversational tone. The range of poems and the consistency of their achievement are impressive. It is regrettable that Tait has been overlooked in modern anthologies, both of Scottish poetry and of poetry by women. She is more formally daring and in subject-matter much more radical than most of her contemporaries, "a remarkable critical forerunner in her poetry of what's now a recognisable Scottish literary voice" (Smith 2004, 9). No wonder MacDiarmid published her.

There were affinities between MacDiarmid and Tait, qualities of language and visualisation both artists share, representations of visual depiction (external scenes) and internal, abstract ideas, best summarised by the lines from MacDiarmid's 'On a Raised Beach':

> What the scene shows is never anything to what it's designed to hide.
> The red blood that makes the beauty of a maiden's cheek

> Is as red under a gorilla's pigmented and hairy face.
> (MacDiarmid 2004, 148)

Such an emphasis on immediacy and appreciation perhaps lay behind Tait making an intimate and expressive film-portrait of MacDiarmid. Tait's *MacDiarmid* (GB, 1964) combines poetry, film, music and song. The musical setting of MacDiarmid's 'The Eemis Stane' by the composer F. G. Scott provides the soundtrack while the words of MacDiarmid's 'Somersault' and 'Krang' are playfully interpreted through image, resulting in a memorable depiction of MacDiarmid teetering along an Edinburgh kerb. The film's subject is often decentred or out of focus and occasionally the camera shifts its attention to what might ordinarily seem subordinate objects of study: images of radios, clocks, books and newspapers, traffic and the sea, city and country. This amounts to a self-conscious occupation of time implicitly opposed to the exploitation of the viewer's time which is a commonplace of commercial cinema. In that cinema, time is consumable, waste-filled. In Tait's cinema, as in MacDiarmid's poetry, time is valuably lived, edged with movement and perception, unpredicted and unpredictable.

MacDiarmid's experimentation might be read as a strategy to move beyond established poetic expressions of Scottish life. Analogously, Tait's grappling with realism and representation can also be seen as a response to the dominance of documentary modes in mid-twentieth-century Scottish moving image culture. Although Tait subscribed to Grierson's idea of the "creative treatment of actuality," filming what was around her, she was wary of traditional documentary modes. She wrote:

> The contradictory or paradoxical thing is that in a documentary the real things depicted are liable to lose their reality by being photographed and presented in that 'documentary' way, and there's no poetry in that. In poetry, something else happens. Hard to say what it is. Presence, let's say, soul or spirit, an empathy with whatever it is that's dwelt upon, feeling for it—to the point of identification. (Tait 2004, 132)

Attention paid in *MacDiarmid* to the class- and culturally-coded linguistic registers so often associated with traditional documentary modes shows Tait's alternative approach to documentary in action. In 1964, BBC radio and television was generally sustained by voices whose received-pronunciation English was at the far end of the spectrum from the sounds of vernacular Scots voices. The musical settings of MacDiarmid's poems by F. G. Scott used by Tait bring the Scots tones and their velar fricatives into a high art medium, a fact which must have affronted certain

contemporary arbiters of taste. By quoting such material, Tait's *MacDiarmid* evokes large questions about authority, the dissemination of information, how it is sanctioned or disapproved, and therefore how people are empowered or disenfranchised—all questions equally central to the poetic work of her film's human subject.

This question of language is crucial. The first MacDiarmid poem Tait uses in her film is 'You know not who I am'—a Scots version of a poem by the German Stefan George. It's worth pausing on this and looking at it in MacDiarmid's Scots and in an English translation (MacDiarmid 1993, 22). The poem catches the sense of the relation between spirit and form, an inherent quality in language itself, brilliantly. It seems to be about something you can't grasp or understand or comprehend, yet at the end, MacDiarmid identifies this quality as the thing that gives you courage, the wild and eager kiss that is always burning into your soul, something painful yet inspiring and vital:

'You Know Not Who I Am'	***'You Know Not Who I Am'***
After the German of Stefan George	*After the German of Stefan George*
Ye kenna wha I am – but this is fac'.	You know not who I am – but this is fact
I ha'ena yet by ony word or ac'	I have not yet by any word or act
Made mysel' human…an' sune I maun tak'	Made myself human…and soon I must take
Anither guise to ony I've yet ta'en.	Another guise to any I've yet taken.
I'll cheenge: an' yet my ain true sel' I'll hain,	I'll change: and yet my own true self I'll keep,
Tine only what ye ken as me. I' vain,	Losing only what you know as me. In vain
Ye'll seek to haud me, an' ye needna murn,	You'll try to hold me, and you need not mourn,
For to a form ye canna ken I'll turn	For to a form you cannot know I'll turn
'Twixt ae braith an' the neist: an whan I'm gane	Between one breath and the next: and when I'm gone
Ye'll ha'e o' me what ye ha'e haen o' a'	You'll have of me what you have had of all
My kindred since licht on earth 'good da'–	My kindred since light on earth began to dawn –
The braith that gi'es ye courage, an' the fain	*The breath that gives you courage, and the eager*
Wild kiss that aye into yer saul maun burn.	*Wild kiss that always into your soul must burn.*

The poem works in the Scots version in a different way, with a different kind of authenticity. The English is more like a black-and-white photograph where everything is in place and in focus. There's nothing ungraspable. But the Scots is both present and somehow elusive, hard and real but also fast-moving and emotionally quick.

Using the poem to bookend *MacDiarmid* was something Tait felt provided "a comment on the film and what it's about and on the partiality fully to be expected of a portrait" (Tait 2004, 133). Likewise, the images and audio fragments of MacDiarmid which Tait presents focus on the detail without trying to make any overarching generalisations. As with her other portraits, what she presents is a familiarity, something instantly recognisable but otherwise ineffable, unsayable, and utterly resistant to commercial imperatives. Tait's film brings out these elemental questions about energy, restlessness, time, growth and the creation of valuable things, both in nature and by human intervention.

Tait did experiment with the possibility of funding her filmmaking activities through established documentary routes. Her films briefly attracted the attention of Grierson, who commented on them admiringly after one of her 'Rose Street Festival' screenings. Yet nothing ever came of it. Her film *The Drift Back* (GB, 1956), about repopulation and the return of people from the Scottish mainland to Orkney, and from the Orkney mainland to its surrounding islands, follows traditional Griersonian lines most closely. One of her only fully-funded films, it was made with the support of the Orkney Education Committee and was intended to be the first of a series of films focusing on Orcadian subjects (Neely 2008b; Neely, forthcoming).

In many ways the budgetary and technological constraints Tait confronted often served a positive function in the development of her distinctive poetic style, in a way comparable to written poetry enlivened by its need for verbal economy. One of Tait's earlier experiments, *Calypso* (GB, 1955), was made with 35 mm film stock that she found while in Rome. Taking the stock's existing Calypso music soundtrack as her film's starting point, Tait handpainted a series of colourful figures to accompany the former. The quick succession of images and the inevitable slight variations in the painted figure reproduced over and over again cause the latter to tremble into life and reverberate with the energetic soundtrack. With many films, Tait would draw up an ideal plan, detailing what stock was necessary, what stock she had already and what she would be likely to obtain. This sometimes meant films were made over a number of years, as Tait accumulated the necessary footage. She would also consider the possibility of incorporating previously shot material into new films. These limitations demanded a degree of resourcefulness which often led to experimentation and innovation. Although Tait never had any involvement with the Free Cinema movement, its rhetoric expressing feelings of liberation from commercial restrictions have some resonance in her

working methods. Many of Tait's films, her portraits in particular, make no effort to conceal the interaction between filmmaker and subject.

When Tait established the uncertain nature of garnering external funding and the difficulty of selling her short films to television, she decided to abandon hope of commercial prospects and allow herself to experiment fully with the poetic. Sometimes her films take the text of poems as a starting point of exploration. Tait's 1955 filmic interpretation of Gerard Manley Hopkins' 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo' is one clear example. On other occasions Tait's development process reflects her own background as a poet. Films often began life in the pages of her notebooks. Lists of places, images or scenes carve out the rough, sculptural forms. Her film *Where I Am is Here* (GB, 1964) Tait describes as:

> Starting with a six-line script which just noted down a *kind* of event to occur, and recur, my aim was to construct a film with its own logic, its own correspondences within itself, its own echoes and rhymes and comparisons, all through close exploration of the everyday, the commonplace, in the city, Edinburgh, where I stayed at the time. (Tait 2004, 161)

The repetition and variation of images develop into a visual form of rhyming. A shot of birds sliding across the ice is juxtaposed against one of children doing the same. The impersonal and the personal, the general and the specific, the celebrated and the discarded, are each addressed with a shared observational intensity. The approach breaks with the authoritative and summative tendencies of documentary, but also challenges conventional articulations of Scottish culture. For Tait, there was an important distinction to be made between filming the "landscape" and filming the "scenery," particularly in Scotland where Tait felt scenery was too often shot out of convenience. Her landscapes aren't empty but are peopled. Her films often eschew grand scenic establishing shots and instead focus on the detail. Tait explains *Where I Am is Here* as a film "minutely examining the landscape of Edinburgh, or the townscape" (Tait 2004, 81). Tait's film poetry shares much in common with other avant-garde filmmakers, such as Maya Deren. For Deren, the poetic film inscribed a certain 'attitude'. She wrote: "If philosophy is concerned with understanding the meaning of reality, then poetry—and art in general—is a celebration, a singing of values and meanings" (Deren 1979, 123). Tait, in her short piece 'Film-poem or poem-film', points to the challenge for filmmakers in attaining the ideal Deren describes. Tait's fondness for Lorca's poetic notion of "stalking the image" (Tait 2004, 89) reflects her belief in the innate, lyrical qualities of everyday life. Her commitment to

filming what was around her engaged with Lorca's idea that all things, regardless of their emotional or physical scale, must be given equal attention. In 'Now', a poem from *origins and elements*, the description of Tait's laboured attempts to register satisfactorily the movement of a flower opening its petals, and the disappointment felt when she concludes it is impossible to do so, illustrates her devotion to understanding a reality eluding cursory glances. It is the concern with empathy and identification, a decelerated manner of looking, which distinguishes Tait's films from more objective, documentary modes, but also from a tradition of subjective diary films (Neely 2008a).

Enrico Cocozza

Like Tait, Enrico Cocozza harboured professional aspirations for much of his filmmaking career. The Scottish amateur filmmaking network provided a supportive structure for his activities. Although Cocozza was already actively involved in this network before studying in Italy, the years following his return to Scotland were particularly prolific. He established a film unit and built a small studio in Wishaw, producing 63 films between 1952 and 1960, including some for The Italian Consulate in Glasgow, The Scottish Film Council, and Star Informational films of New Jersey (Scottish Screen Archive ref. no. 3/7/3:2). He was also an active member of the Wishaw Film Society and served as honorary Treasurer and Secretary of The Connoisseur Film Circle, a club that eventually turned an old auction house behind Cocozza's mother's café into a cinema. Jean Cocteau, on whom Cocozza would later complete a PhD thesis, was listed as one of the society's patrons. Screenings were held three nights a week and members could borrow from a library of film books. Lectures also formed part of the Circle's activities: the brochure for its inaugural season of 1950-51 highlights the possibility of Forsyth Hardy delivering a lecture on Swedish cinema (Scottish Screen Archive ref. no. 3/7/20). Although the cinema's initial screenings largely consisted of European avant-garde films, eventually Cocozza would show his own work there. That Cocozza was equipped to both produce and distribute his own work meant he was able to operate relatively independently, restricted only by his ability to fund his productions.

Like Tait, Cocozza's creativity also took literary form. He was a writer of short stories, and his novel *Assunta: The Story of Mrs. Joe's Café*, named after his mother who owned the Belhaven Café in Wishaw, was published in 1987. That said, however, Cocozza's links with the 'film poem' are not as strong as Tait's. *Porphyria* (1836), Robert Browning's

poem about a jealous man who murders his lover, was the basis for his 1960 film of the same name. Other projects, such as *Invocation* (GB, 1951), which Cocozza described as "a visual interpretation of a poem," (Scottish Screen Archive ref. no. 3/7/4) evoke Tait's slow, meditative pacing. A poetic montage gives up-close attention to a wide variety of trees and wildlife in the changing seasons. Shots are long in duration, pausing on the texture of the bark of a silver birch, the movement of a stream, the sky, budding flowers, building intrigue and suspense through the repetition and variation of images and visual rhyming. The ending is delivered with a comic edge, a hand popping out from the earth, wriggling out into the free air. It breaks the serious tone and departs in similarity from Tait's work, but is indicative of Cocozza's general playfulness and irreverence towards avant-garde conventions. While Tait occasionally expressed uneasiness with the term 'avant-garde' used to describe her work, Cocozza humorously interrogates avant-garde forms, presumably to challenge some of the established traditions in the amateur filmmaking circuit. Cocozza explains *Invocation* in his catalogue of work as "quite beyond the Cosmo audience at the Scottish Film Festival" (Scottish Screen Archive ref. no. 3/7/4). Similarly, he refers to his film *The Living Ghost* (GB, 1959-60), which like *Chick's Day* won the major award at the amateur festival, as his "last serious film—as pretentious as the rest" (Scottish Screen Archive ref. no. 3/7/4). Another film, *In the Shadow* (GB, 1957), he describes as "another of these heavy symbolic efforts that are merely an excuse for some good low-key photography that does not cover the dreadful acting" (Scottish Screen Archive ref. no. 3/7/4).

This sense of a challenge to canonical filmmaking conventions as strong as Tait's but more ludic in tone is captured in Edwin Morgan's poem 'Enricco Cocozza', in his 2002 collection *Cathures*. That poem marries Cocozza's sense of playfulness with Morgan's own. Morgan evokes and writes in the voice of Cocozza as persona, poking fun at Griersonian documentary: "*Drifters* was shown to the Herring Board: Even the herring were bored. Sorry John!" (Morgan 2002, 27) and later in the same piece declaims, "See worthiness? That is Scotland's shame" (ibid.). For Morgan, as for his Cocozza, Glasgow "is not worthy"—Glasgow "is Gotham City" (ibid.) and problems have to be lived, if you want to shoot them. Cocozza and Morgan shared the experience of growing up homosexual in the west of Scotland during the early twentieth century, and if Morgan's Cocozza recognises and realises his own sexual disposition alongside Eisenstein's—"He cruised the Berlin clubs…" (ibid.)—Morgan recognises how both these filmmakers used their own imagination to break through the restrictions of social contexts by means

of their art. Morgan evokes Cocozza's film *Bongo Erotico* (GB, 1959) as "quite gallus, banging it out" (ibid.) and,

> Staring sultry at my favourite dancer
> As he sways in his sloppy satin knickers.
> Well it's not *Braveheart*… (ibid.)

It is rather, "flesh and heat / Fleshed out of Fifties forbiddenness" (ibid.). Morgan conjures up the cinemas he knew in Glasgow:

> The picture-palaces were glittering –
> Green's Playho se ('We want "u" in'),
> Grand Central, Classic, Curzon—
> Glittering but filled with shadows,
> Community of shadows on the screen,
> Community of shadows in the stalls,
> Great coming and going—
> (Morgan 2002, 29)

Morgan's poem is a celebration of creativity in a specific time and place, working against social oppression and difficult personal circumstance, but it connects the specific character of Cocozza to a wider Scottish cultural history in which both social oppressiveness and personal creative resistance is seen in a context of paradoxically shared isolation, recognition of which is consolation and social and creative empowerment. The poem ends:

> Whatever the shame, whatever the stain,
> Dante would sigh to see
> Those lost ones sitting in the smoky dark
> With their *mal protesi nervi*, and above them
> The pitiless projector's beam, behind them
> The pitiless projector's whirr, before them,
> The film, the film,
> The one they watched, the one I watch them in.
> To be free, you must show it, oh you must let it run!
> (Morgan 2002, 30)

Morgan's insistence on the value of Cocozza's film-making is taken to a further level of abstraction and affirmation in the poem-sequence entitled 'Demon' published at the end of *Cathures*. For Morgan, the Demon is a figure who intervenes in individual lives to remind us of the mischievous or perverse, the necessary energies in the dynamics of life. Whenever serenity threatens to turn into complacency, the Demon appears to upset

what seems like stability. In ‘A Little Catechism from the Demon’ there is a reference to film which seems to fix an idea of what the medium can do:

> What is the film? It rolls, it tells.
> What is the film? *Under the Falls*.
> Where is the theatre? Under the hill.
> Where is the demon? Walking the hills.
> Where is the victory? On the high tops.
> Where is the fire? Far in the deep.
> Where is the deep? Study the demon.
> Where is the mountain? Set out now.
> (Morgan 2002, 113)

This configuration of images suggests specific relations between aspiration and research, the work of watching, reading, studying, learning from film, rolling and telling in the theatre under the hill.

Biographically, Morgan’s interest in cinema is suggestive. Born in 1920, his middle-class childhood and young manhood in Glasgow before and after his service with the Royal Army Medical Corps in the Middle East in the 1940s, saw increasing self-awareness of his homosexuality. In a city where public behaviour was closely observed and decorum insistently required, especially in certain professions, particular cinemas were well-established locations where such sexuality might be tacitly acknowledged. So Morgan’s interest in cinema auditoria as well as films has an unconventional aspect that cuts across the accepted conventions of cinema’s commercial or normative social priorities. When he writes at the end of ‘The Second Life,’ the title poem of his breakthrough volume of 1968, “Slip out of darkness, it is time” (Morgan 1968, 54), he is talking not only of Glasgow rebuilding itself, the snake shedding its old skin (as a boy Morgan’s nickname was Kaa, the rock-python from Kipling’s *Jungle Book*), or himself gaining a new confidence at the age of forty, but also implicitly of the moment when you emerge from a darkened cinema into the lighted city streets.

Similarly, perhaps Cocozza’s reluctance to conform within a culturally and socially conservative climate informed his ability to experiment in other areas of his life, filming in the busy streets and parks of Wishaw and producing films that broke the established boundaries of the amateur circuit. At the Scottish Amateur Film Festival in 1949, his film *Fantasmagoria* was declared “the problem picture of the festival” (Scottish Screen Archive ref. no. 3/7/26:2). Filmed on Coltness Estate in Wishaw, the film is difficult to categorise. Essentially a horror movie, Cocozza himself plays ‘the evil one’ upsetting the estate. The film begins

with a big orchestral score accompanied by an eerie but poetic voice-over, one part stylised montage and one part presentiment of *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (Wood Jr., USA, 1959). The festival adjudicator, Stephen Watts, a London film critic, described *Fantasmagoria* as "an experiment which quite clearly required courage", but noted the uneasy coexistence of "moments of drama and imagination" with "moments of profound obscurity" where one character could either be read as "Olivier playing Lear, or Santa Claus in a Glasgow store" (Scottish Screen Archive ref. no. 3/7/26:2). Watts surmised, "If the film were shown in London in a specialised cinema the reactions of the film critics would range from people walking out in the middle of it to people who would say it was a new art" (ibid.). Whether intentional or just a consequence of a limited budget and amateur actors, this conflict of meaning and intention is what makes Cocozza's work reverberate so powerfully. Even a decade later, when the Scottish Amateur Film Festival's adjudicator encouraged amateurs to "be bold—experiment with new ideas—avoid the conventional—don't ape the professionals," Cocozza's *Porphyria* was offered the suggestion that "the accent should not have been so localised" (Scottish Screen Archive ref. no. 3/7/26:4).

Cocozza's parodic engagement with a range of cultural texts informed his most innovative work, but also marked him out for some as 'unprofessional'. The demon in the fringes of Scottish filmmaking, he satirised the avant-garde, calling into question the strengths and weaknesses of amateur practices, but also the limitations of the preconceptions around Scottish filmmaking methods. His passionate engagement with, and inspired reinterpretations of, a wide range of film styles and genres share Morgan's sense of humour, but also his ability to re-imagine familiar settings in new contexts. In *Ad Infernum Buddy?* (GB, 1952) he parodies *Quo Vadis* (LeRoy, USA, 1951); *Robot Three* (GB, 1951) is a film about a mad scientist, reminiscent of Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde; Bongo Erotico* explores the genre of erotic film, shooting in negative and capturing the movements of sparsely clad dancers in his bedroom. *Chick's Day*, about a teen from Wishaw who commits a robbery, takes the gangster genre as its starting point. As with many of Cocozza's films, genre is not a sentence to creative confinement, but rather a site for artistic invention. The local dialect of the central character Chick forms the soundtrack's prominent voiceover. Rather than conform to generic conventions Cocozza retains local specificity, confidently appropriating various elements from a variety of genres. There are odd shifts in tone and Cocozza's approach is a playful one. In one scene involving the protagonist and his mother, the voiceover takes complete control of the