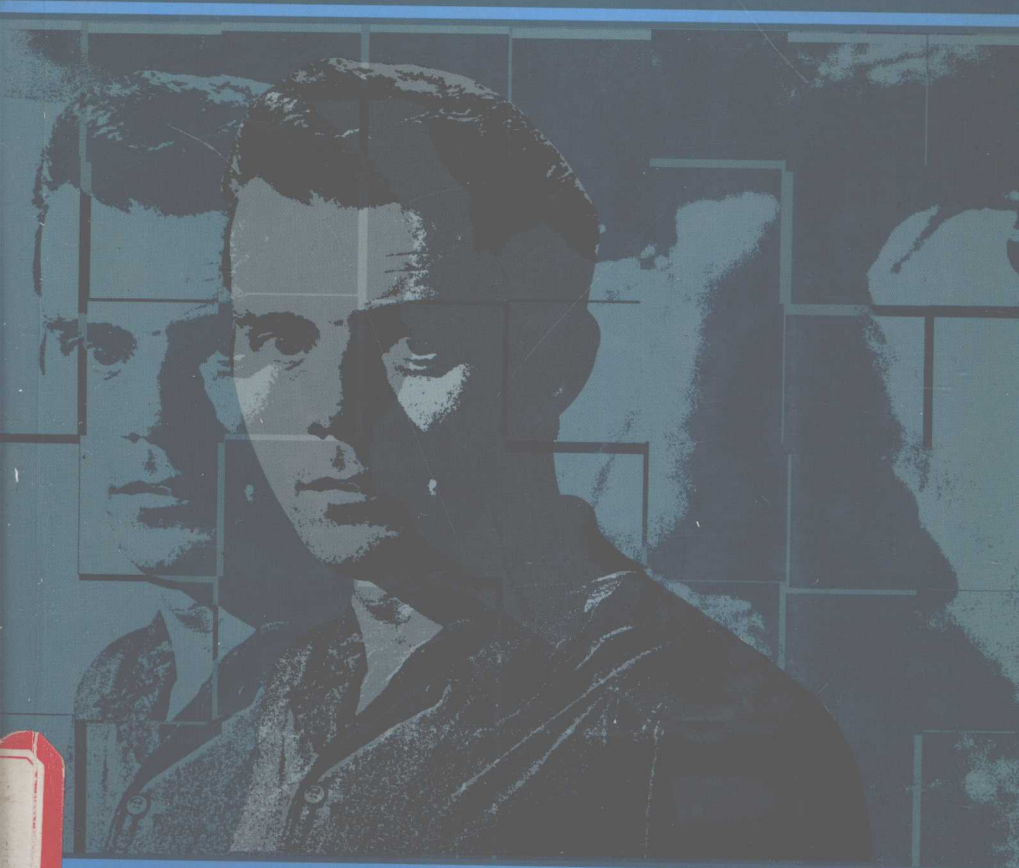


# 当代英国电影中男性主体的 切割与重建

TECHNOLOGISING THE MALE BODY:  
BRITISH CINEMA 1957—1987

毛思慧 著



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## Preface

One of the most significant legacies of feminist thinking is the renewal of interest in questions of masculinity. There are several distinct strands of research into masculinity at the present time: some are historical, tracing ways in which different images of masculinity have predominated at different moments in time; some are focussed on gender issues, in particular centering around notions of heterosexuality and homosexuality; some lines derive from research into theories of representation and still others examine issues of masculinity within a particular cultural context. This study skillfully combines several of these major lines of thought, and examines the representation of the male body in British cinema, in the significant three decades from the late 1950s to the late 1980s, that is, from the period marking the end of post-war austerity to the final years of the Thatcher government. During that thirty-year period profound changes took place in the fabric of daily life in Britain, changes that are mirrored in the cinema, for film provided a means of documenting the socio-cultural transformations of the nation and of the Englishman in particular.

Despite the enormous power of Hollywood, British cinema in this period carved out its own niche, producing a nucleus of actors and directors with special talents and skills and drawing upon a generation of writers whose material derived from very British concerns. The late 1950s have long been credited as the years of the renaissance of English theatre, when playwrights such as John Osborne,

Harold Pinter, Arnold Wesker and Shelagh Delaney, all of whom collaborated in film versions of their dramas, first rose to prominence. This artistic resurgence, which was followed soon after by the abolition of theatrical censorship, was paralleled by a series of radical changes in British social life. From the 1950s onwards, the advent of a new population of black and Asian Britons from the Commonwealth brought about a linguistic and cultural transformation that has changed the face of British culture forever, and the women's liberation and gay rights movements that emerged in the early 1970s similarly were to have a major impact on literature, theatre, cinema, fashion and the arts generally. In this book, Mao Sihui locates a number of important landmarks in British cinema in their socio-political context, and examines the multiple aspects of debates about masculinity and the representation of the male body in this period of immense, dynamic change.

The book examines the current debates, through an analysis of a wide range of significant British films. The author stresses the diversity of representations of the male body, noting that the cinema provides one of the few institutionalized spaces where an audience may gaze upon the bodies of others with cultural impunity. He shows how the British cinema has constructed and imagined a series of symbolic male bodies, some heterosexual, some homosexual, which have acquired a certain iconicity at different moments in the period under consideration.

The author skilfully divides the book into clearly focussed sections, each of which concentrates on specific films that are grouped together in terms of their thematic coherence. He begins his analysis with films such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *Room at the Top*, where complex questions of class combine with gender

issues in films that are basically an investigation of power relationships in 1950s English urban society. Combining discussion of contemporary gender theory and theory of representation, the author moves in his second section to an examination of the emergence of the homoerotic male body in the cinema, following the relaxation of the rigid antihomosexual laws in the 1960s. He considers the enigmatic and controversial figure of Oscar Wilde in the cinema, then examines the ground-breaking film by Basil Deardon, *Victim*, which starred the Hollywood box-office actor Dirk Bogarde. By 1987, when James Ivory's film version of E. M. Forster's *Maurice* appeared, the author suggests that British cinema was beginning to present a powerful ideological challenge to heterosexual hegemony.

Boldly, the book confronts the difficult question of femininity and the male body, referring to such films as Richardson's *A Taste of Honey* (1961) and Visconti's *Death in Venice* (1971), which also starred Dirk Bogarde. In this section, Mao Sihui argues that the effeminate male bodies in these films offer a challenge to conventional anti-feminine notions of masculinity. It needs to be borne in mind that the 1940s and 1950s, the period immediately prior to the one under consideration in this book, were characterized by a series of patriotic British films in which men were represented in terms of heroic idealizations of both masculinity and Englishness. Laurence Olivier's famous *Henry V* and the many films of John Mills and Alec Guinness playing soldiers and imperial heroes, characterized by their devotion to duty and their stiff upper-lips provided an alternative series of images, against which the new wave of film-makers were marshalling their skills.

The fifth section tackles the question of the display of the male body and ideas of sadomasochism. The author considers David

Lean's famous *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), in which Peter O'Toole portrayed the great English hero as a troubled man with doubts about his own sexuality and an inability to deal with heterosexual hegemony that led ultimately to his own destruction. This film is discussed together with the camp horror classic that parodies *Frankenstein*, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) and the aesthetically beautiful but highly contentious *Sebastiane*, by the brilliant homosexual director, the late Derek Jarman. In these films, the author argues, the spectacle of the male body finally comes into its own, becoming an object of pleasure and desire for audiences of both women and men. The eroticism that had once to be repressed and disavowed is now able to appear openly in a public forum in all its multifacetedness.

In terms of methodology this study boldly rejects a single partisan approach and draws upon the gamut of theoretical material available to the film scholar at the present time. In this respect, Mao Sihui's study is genuinely interdisciplinary, though probably the single most apparent debt is to the English cultural studies tradition of Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, made applicable to cinema by Richard Dyer and Laura Mulvey. By tracing lines of development in the cinematic presentation of the male body, this study sheds light not only on the history of British cinema in a crucial three decades, but also illuminates the whole history of changing patterns of life and thought in Britain at the same time. In this respect, this book can be seen as an important cultural history text, for through the films discussed we can read the story of transformations of British life in the latter part of the twentieth century.

One example will serve to illustrate the extent to which a study of the cinema and of the male body in the cinema in this period can



go straight to the heart of social transformation. In *A Taste of Honey*, made in 1961 following its stage success, the plot centres on the doomed relationship of a poor working-class girl who falls in love with a black sailor and becomes pregnant when he leaves. Abandoned and alone, with the double stigma of an illegitimate child who is also half-black, the man who comes forward to save her is a parodic Prince Charming, an equally lonely homosexual. This meeting between outsiders, two marginalized members of society united by a common bond of pure affection provides the pivot of the film.

Twenty-four years later, in 1985, Stephen Frears made *My Beautiful Laundrette*, written by Hanif Kureishi. In this film, the focus is on the love between two men, and both homosexuality and racial questions are foregrounded in a way that would have been completely impossible in 1961. These two films, in their different ways, show us not only how the eroticising of the male body has changed in a relatively short period of time, but also how British society has changed, and how far questions of race, class and gender have undergone revolutionary processes of rethinking and renegotiation.

This is an important book for anyone with an interest in cinema, in gender polemics or in contemporary British socio-cultural history. The author takes a balanced view of the complex material he covers, and in this way shows how a variety of very different, contentious and troubled opinions can find their way into art. Following Michel Foucault, the author invites us to believe that in British cinema there has been a veritable discursive explosion across a thirty year period. Given the strength of the evidence, it seems that we may be well advised to believe him and reflect on what the next thirty years



have already started to bring.

Susan Bassnett

University of Warwick

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	1
Acknowledgements .....	3
Introduction: The Male Body, Britishness and the	
Cinematic Apparatus .....	5
That Fragile and Fashionable Male Body .....	7
Britishness and the Male Body .....	18
1957 – 1987 .....	20
Opening the Cinematic Apparatus .....	36
Methodology .....	41
Structure .....	51
Selection .....	57
Chapter 1: Power, Homosocial Desire and the Closet .....	68
Power and the Male Body .....	70
Homosocial Desire .....	81
Beast in the Closet .....	100
Chapter 2: Hegemony, Repression and Transgression .....	120
Hegemony and Representation .....	124
The Body of Nicholas .....	133
Repression and Crusades .....	149
Transgression and Utopia .....	172

### Chapter 3: Class, Ethnicity and Subversive Pleasures of

Working-Class Heroes .....	202
A Matter of Class and Cultural Capital .....	203
Framing the English 'All-Rounder' .....	210
Technologising the Asian Male Body .....	234

### Chapter 4: Femininity in the Male Body .....

A Female Soul Enclosed in a Male Body .....	265
The Trouble with the King .....	277
A Ravaged Face with Raspberry Lips .....	293

### Chapter 5: Delicate Skin and Sadomasochism: The Male

Body as Spectacle .....	323
Desert, Deraa and Desire .....	330
Lips, Navels and Legs .....	348
Rocks, Rituals and Arrows .....	361

Conclusion .....	389
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Bibliography .....	394
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## Abstract

This book is a three-faceted examination of the subject; British cinema, the male body and its being crafted and technologised within the period from late 1950s to late 1980s. Because of the specific political, social, economic and cultural changes in Britain partially due to a process of 'Americanisation', there has been an increasing visibility and technologisation of the male body in post-war British cinema which, although fraught with difficulties and anxieties, parallels an increasing awareness of the body and homosexuality in Western culture in general.

Making use of different schools of thoughts and discourses such as Freudian psychoanalysis, classical/neo-Marxism, feminist theories, Foucauldian analysis of power, knowledge and sexuality, and recent studies on the gay subject and fashion, this study is an interdisciplinary critique of some of the representations of the male body in contemporary British cinema with a focus on cinematic images of male homosocial/sexual desires. Living for decades under the huge shadow of commercial Hollywood while constantly responding to the challenges of European art films, British cinema within this period created a significant space of its own where we can see slow and unusual changes and transformations in its representations of the male body from a subject of powerful gaze and control over 'Other' bodies to an uneasy, ever-shifting subject-object position. The male body in films such as Philip Leacock's *The Spanish Gardener* (1957), Basil Dearden's *Victim* (1961), Peter Glenville's *Becket* (1964), Douglas Hickox's *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* (1969), Jim

Sharman's *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), Derek Jarman's *Sebastiane* (1976), Stephen Frears's *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), and James Ivory's *Maurice* (1987) is often self-consciously presented as an object of desire, sexuality, surveillance and control.

While exploring how the male body has been perceived, fabricated and represented in relation to power, homosocial desire, homophobia, hegemony, repression, transgression, and sadomasochism, this book frequently refers to the homosexual male body in its reading of theoretical texts and cinematic works in an effort to understand how the male body has been subjected to contending political, social and cultural forces and how it has been imagined and constructed with a new set of discourses such as those of 'femininity' and of the AIDS epidemic. A major objective is to make fresh inquiries about what has happened to the human body, its feelings, emotions, desires, pleasures and pains. Images of male homosexuality as the object of scorn and ridicule, of madness and disease in the British 'celluloid closet' are mixed with and frequently superseded by new and very often controversial imagery charged with gay sensibility, camp mentality as well as homophobic self-policing, reiterating a need for a genuine understanding of the male body and its own sexual politics as a re-invented discourse for sexual, political and cultural progress.

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## **Introduction: The Male Body, Britishness and the Cinematic Apparatus**

The title of this study 'Technologising the Male Body: British Cinema 1957 – 1987' suggests a three-faceted examination of the subject; British cinema, the male body and its being crafted and technologised within the specific period from late 1950s (when the post-war affluence with a dramatic increase in people's spending power witnessed the powerful emergence of fashion shops, body shops, and particularly the construction of teenagers in blue jeans via James Dean<sup>1</sup>) to late 1980s (when AIDS and 'Clause 28' seemed to have pushed Britain back to a kind of 1950s 'Conservatism').

My thesis is that, because of the specific political, social, economic and cultural changes in Britain partially due to a comprehensive process of 'Americanisation' in relation to economy, trade, pop culture, military affairs and international politics, there has been an increasing visibility and technologisation of the male body in post-war British cinema which, although fraught with difficulties and anxieties, parallels an increasing awareness of the body in Western culture in general. British cinema within this period created, in spite of the hegemony of Hollywood, a space of its own where we can see slow and unusual changes and transformations in the representations of the male body from a relatively secure subject position of gazing at and controlling 'Other' (female or coloured) bodies to an uneasy, ever-shifting subject-object position. The male body is often self-consciously displayed as an erotic spectacle. In this study, when I talk about how the male body has been perceived, fabricated and represented in British cinema since the late 1950s, I shall be also referring to the homosexual male body since there is a close relation-

ship between the technologisation of the male body and how male homosexuality has been screened. An examination of this relationship through the reading of theoretical texts and cinematic works will not only enable us to better understand how the male body has been subjected to contending political, social and cultural forces and how it has been imagined and constructed with a new set of discourses such as those of 'femininity' and of the AIDS epidemic, but also help us to make inquiries about what has happened to the human body, its feelings, emotions, desires, pleasures and pains in this rapidly changing world.

Talking about the male body, we then need to address such questions as: Can the male body as a system of signification really be shown? How can it be shown? Whose body should be shown since the notion of 'body on display' entails power relations? For whom and for what is the male body shown? What corporal practices are 'normal' and therefore fit to be seen, and which are 'deviant' and must be kept off the scene? And who has got the power to decide what is proper or otherwise? Are notions like 'masculinity', 'femininity', 'heterosexuality', 'bisexuality', and 'homosexuality' adequate to describe the complexity of human sexuality? What is male sexuality? Indeed, what is 'sexuality' after all? In terms of the male body, what strategies, problems and possibilities do the film artists have in their negotiations with the dominant discourses and with themselves in their representations? What role does the social and cultural *mise-en-scène* play in the actual representations of the male body? Are 'heterosexual' film artists necessarily more 'homophobic' than 'queer' filmmakers are? How do issues like class, ethnicity, and politics relate themselves to the technologising of the male body? And does posing questions about patriarchal organisation