



MARK JENKIN'S THE CINEMATIC DNA OF ENYS MEN

Walkabout

When it comes to Nic Roeg's influence upon my own work, there are probably more obvious choices: the red coat of *Don't Look Now*, the fractured identities of *Performance*, the time slip of *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. However, this is where it all started for me. *Walkabout* is a visceral, sensual and overwhelming experience that arrived at a formative time.

Mark Jenkin

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

One of the best slogans I ever saw was painted on a ruined gable-end in Paddington. It read: 'More Anthropology Less Revolution'. It came to mind during Nicolas Roeg's *Walkabout*. One searches first for comparisons with other films about the Australian outback. There haven't been so many, and the fact that Ted Kotcheff's *Outback* appeared in England in the same month is a strange coincidence. But Roeg's film is not really concerned with Australia itself; as Kotcheff's is. Rather he has chosen it, it seems, as a vivid example of two opposed cultures living side by side: the Europeanised, metropolitan Aussie and the Aboriginal. The real comparison is with his and Donald Cammell's earlier film, *Performance*. Even there the cultures – principally 'straight' and criminal, with all the questions that begs – were symbiotic: they preyed on one another, they lived on one another. *Walkabout* in a sense goes further, since the cultures are mutually exclusive. They derive no comfort from one another, achieve no understanding. Their meeting leads to inevitable tragedy and disintegration. The first, the modern and metropolitan, is irredeemably dismissive of the second, the Aboriginal, and that in turn is too primitive to be flexible.

The word 'primitive' of course begs all questions, and it might be fair to say that the film is an attempt to define it anew. The story is simple enough. A middle-aged Sydney businessman, oppressed by city life, drives his two children, a 14-year-old daughter (Jenny Agutter) and a 6-year-old son (Lucien John) out into the desert, apparently for a picnic. Once there, however, he tries but fails to shoot them before successfully committing suicide. They wander off aimlessly and are fortunate to find a water hole and a few berries. When this source is exhausted they encounter an Aboriginal boy (David Gumpilil) on his 'walkabout' – an extended manhood trial involving months of single-handed survival in the outback. He takes them under his protection, steering them away from contact with whites, providing for them, instructing them in the arts of survival...

There are obvious dangers in turning such an outline into a credulous fable which would accommodately digest all manner of fashionable preoccupations: pollution, population, angst, alienation. The gamut of pundits, from Levi-Strauss through Lorenz to McLuhan, one might feel, has been well run; and indeed the film doesn't altogether escape, at two viewings, from the suspicion that at least some of the charges might stick in an unsympathetic court. The rather pointed radio programmes discussing *pâté de foie gras*, etiquette for the housewife, maths by radio, the absurd elocution lessons the girl has in school, smack heavily of the scriptwriter Edward Bond's obsessive

hand. Never one to poke you with his sword when he can use a battleaxe, he may be the one who labours the comparison between killing and eating meat on the hoof and its refined city equivalent.

What makes the film triumph over this literalness is another kind of intensity which one feels, since it's a filmmaker's, is all Roeg's. Metaphors which might otherwise be lumpish take wing by the grace of his eye and ear. Whoever devised it – and I may be doing Bond a great injustice – the moment when the little boy's tongue flicks out to pick up salt from the palm of a hand says all that need be said about our animal links, and it is convincing that the boy, being closer to the natural by virtue of his age, is more easily able than his sister to adapt to Aboriginal life. He communicates unaffectedly by signs with the Aborigine, while she is unable to devise a better way of instructing him in English than to bark commands at him.

Similarly, a rich soundtrack, built up partly from the babel of the electronic village, partly from animal cries, partly from Stockhausen's *Hymnen*, appropriately deepens the references Roeg is making with the camera. The little boy slides down a sandhill and the sand closes over his path, leaving no trace. He and his sister sleeping exhausted under a flower-embroidered net, seem to sink into the desert, to become, in sleep, a part of nature, borrowing some of the rock's immobility, breathing into it a little of their own life. Reptiles, photographed in close-up, tower like friendly dinosaurs while the boy's war-toys shrink into pettiness, taking the idea of man's wars with them. The sun, gorgeous, orange and massive, swims above the rim of the world, menacingly explosive. It's beautiful all right, and we are almost swept up by the Housman quotation which accompanies the city-pent epilogue:

'That is the land of lost content,
I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again.'

But only almost. Such an idyll cannot be taken neat. From anthropology Rung and Bone descend to mere revolution. That pleasurable complexity is betrayed by this simple conservationist message. If the film suddenly slumps into setting social problems and answering them, then we must ask other questions too. What innocence is lost? Is survival of the fittest an agreeable social plan? How else control disease, promote hygiene, comfort; the arts or culture as distinct from survival? The questions don't belong to the best parts of *Walkabout* and neither do the answers. The savage is no noble, the sophisticate not corrupt. Trying to prove it, one way or another, in the face of the camera's evidence, would be a betrayal of the film's real vision.

Gavin Millar, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1971/2

Oss Oss Wee Oss

I grew up over the water from Padstow and the sounds of the drums coming across the estuary on May morning would terrify and entice me in equal measure. There is nothing quite like Padstow on Mayday and this specific celebration of the coming of spring belongs to Padstownians everywhere. This is playful, inventive, evocative and, most importantly, respectful filmmaking.

Mark Jenkin

OSS OSS WEE OSS

Direction: Alan Lomax
Production Company: Folk Films
Presented by: Folk Films
In co-operation with: The English Folk Dance and Song Society
Production: Peter Kennedy
Script: Alan Lomax
Photography: George Pickow
Sound Editing and Re-recording: Crawley Films
Narrated by: Charlie Bate of Padstow, Charlie Chilton of London
With:
The Hobby Horses of Padstow in Cornwall
The People of Padstow in Cornwall
UK 1953
18 mins

WALKABOUT

Directed by: Nicolas Roeg
©: Max L. Raab-Si Litvinoff Films (P.T.Y.) Ltd.
A Max L. Raab – Si Litvinoff production
Executive Producer: Max L. Raab
Produced by: Si Litvinoff
Associate Producer: Anthony J. Hope
Associate: Irving Zeiger
Production Manager: Grahame Jennings
Assistant Director: Kevin Kavanagh
Continuity: Annabel Davis-Goff
Screenplay by: Edward Bond
From the novel by: James Vance Marshall
Photographed by: Nicolas Roeg
Special Photography: Tony Richmond
Photographed in: Eastman Color
Camera Operator: Mike Molloy

Focus: Peter Hannan
Stills: Dean Goodhill
Film Editors: Antony Gibbs, Alan Pattillo
Assistant Film Editor: Brian Mann
Production Designer: Brian Eatwell
Art Director: Terry Gough
Make-up: Linda Richmond
Music Composed and Conducted by: John Barry
Music Produced by: Phil Ramone
Location Sound Mixer: Barry Brown
Boom Operator: Kevin Kearney
Dubbing Mixer: Gerry Humphreys

Cast

Jenny Agutter (*girl*)
Lucien John (*white boy*)
David Gumpilil (*black boy*)
John Meillon (*father*)
Robert McDara (*man*)
Pete Carver (*no hoper*)
John Illingsworth (*husband*)
Hilary Bamberger (*wife*)
Barry Donnelly (*Australian scientist*)
Noelene Brown (*German scientist*)
Carlo Manchini (*Italian scientist*)
George Roubicek (*voice of radio announcer*)*

Australia 1970©
100 mins

* Uncredited

MARK JENKIN'S THE CINEMATIC DNA OF ENYS MEN**Walkabout + Oss Oss Wee Oss**

Sun 1 Jan 13:10; Mon 9 Jan 20:30

The Stone Tape + Journey to Avebury

Mon 2 Jan 15:40

Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles

Wed 4 Jan 18:30; Sat 28 Jan 16:15

Symptoms + Stigma

Fri 6 Jan 18:10; Sun 15 Jan 15:30

Lost Highway + Jaunt

Fri 6 Jan 20:15; Sun 22 Jan 18:10

Haunters of the Deep**+ The Living and the Dead Episode 2**

Sun 8 Jan 13:20; Sat 14 Jan 20:40

Long Weekend + Between the Tides

Tue 10 Jan 18:20; Mon 23 Jan 20:30

Penda's Fen + A Warning to the Curious

Wed 11 Jan 17:50

Two Years at Sea + A Portrait of Ga

Sat 14 Jan 18:00 (+ intro and Q&A with Mark Jenkin and Ben Rivers);

Tue 24 Jan 20:45

Daguerréotypes + World of Glory

Sun 15 Jan 12:00 (+ intro by Mark Jenkin); Thu 26 Jan 20:50

Bait

Sun 15 Jan 18:00; Mon 30 Jan 20:50

Requiem for a Village + The Signalman

Fri 27 Jan 18:20; Tue 31 Jan 20:40

Berberian Sound Studio + Wind

Sun 29 Jan 15:30 (+ intro by Mark Jenkin and Peter Strickland);

Tue 31 Jan 18:10

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