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Catherine Deneuve in *Repulsion* (Filmreference.com)

**MOD MURDER:
Death and Desire in Swinging London Film**

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“A man should pray to have right desires, before he prays that his desires may be fulfilled.”

-*Plato*

“I want it, I want it, I want it—you can’t have it!”

-*The Who*

It isn’t hard to figure what preoccupied Swinging London scenesters more in the spring of 1966: the trial and conviction of soon-to-be notorious English sex killers Ian Brady and Myra Hindley,ⁱ or the impending release of the murder mystery *Blow-Up*. One was horrifyingly real, the other pure fantasy. Quite naturally, the currency mod London trafficked in was of the latter variety. While the Moors Murders perpetrated by the gruesome pair garnered the morbid attention of nearly every other resident of the city (not to mention the rest of the nation) (Murphy 140), the beautiful people were busying themselves worrying that Michelangelo Antonioni’s first English-language film, a rumoured exposé on the vapidness of mod culture, would threaten the very ethos of their beloved scene—if it indeed had one to begin with. Either that, or it would just make them look bad—a far worse fate in a time and place when appearance meant everything. Full of newfound capitalist promise and the notion that anything could be commodified, the young desired beauty, affluence, and sex, but most of all they desired to be *looked at*. Cultivating the perfect fantasy image came before anything else.ⁱⁱ

Murderous desire seemed to be on everyone’s mind in ’60s London. Of the handful of British films that constitute the modernist cycle, homicide plays a key narrative role in at least four. In addition to *Blow-Up*, two—*Repulsion* and *Peeping Tom*—even go so far as to cast their murderers as ‘protagonists’.ⁱⁱⁱ These self-conscious portrayals of the commodification of sexuality to violent ends thrived in the mod era. More than anywhere else at that time, London in the early to mid-60s offered a crystallized view into the emerging sexual revolution while exploiting the very currency that cinema has furtively traded in since its inception: the appropriation of the female image for the pleasure of the male voyeur. This brief cycle of films self-consciously pointed to the perils of the mod love affair with image over content. Unfortunately for filmmaker Michael Powell, the transparency of this message proved to be too much for critics and audiences to handle at the beginning of the decade. British critics gleefully lambasted his self-consciously

modernist, ahead-of-its-time *Peeping Tom* (1959): “Sick minds will be highly stimulated,” proclaimed the *Daily Telegraph*; “It’s a long time since a film has disgusted me as much as *Peeping Tom*,” announced the reviewer for *The Observer* (Christie 55). The whole thing might have given Powell a chuckle, had he remembered the words uttered in the final scene of the picture itself: “It’s horrible, horrible. But it’s just a film, isn’t it?”

The Morbid Urge to Gaze

But it wasn’t just a film, not really. *Peeping Tom* perpetrated an all-out assault on cinematic voyeuristic convention—literally in the blink of an eye—and the implications didn’t go unnoticed (subconsciously, at least). From the very first shot, an extreme close-up of a young man’s eye opening unnaturally via a jarring jump cut, the process of confronting the viewer’s complicity in the action is called into question. Right away, it’s clear *Peeping Tom* is about *seeing* and being seen, or, even more luridly, seeing *without* being seen. This concept of voyeuristic separation, or ‘gap’ between viewer and viewed is generally regarded as a crucial function of the scopophilic pleasure of the cinema (Doane 760), with its emphasis of looking without being looked at (both in the case of the spectator and the males onscreen).

The voyeuristic elements of *Peeping Tom* inescapably bring to mind Laura Mulvey’s infamous coinage of the term “to-be-looked-at-ness”. In her canonical essay on filmic voyeurism, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” she takes the notion of filmic male spectatorship of the female one step further: “Going far beyond highlighting the woman’s to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself,” (Mulvey 756). *Peeping Tom* plays with this idea of cinematic voyeurism and the gaze, simultaneously turning it on its end and reinforcing the doom of any woman who makes herself the object of a man’s look.

In the opening few moments, which parody the sombre realism of the burgeoning Kitchen Sink movement^{iv}, a man approaches a prostitute on a deserted SoHo street (clearly meant to be seen for the studio set that it is, in anticipation of the reflexive treatment of the process of cinematic viewing to come). We don’t see him, just his point-of-view of the woman through the crosshairs of his camera’s viewfinder. And that’s the

perspective—the killer’s perspective—we continue to ‘enjoy’ as he claims his first victim, his omnipresent camera capturing the murder for his later sexual release. As Jean-Paul Török has observed, the term ‘peeping tom’ describes the film spectator as much as it does any onscreen character, or perhaps even more so: we are privileged enough to watch the characters watching as well (Török 61).

Aside from the style of dress and the movie camera, the film’s opening could be a scene from a Jack the Ripper film. But after this, Powell announces an abrupt shift to a modern, new-guard London. We see Mark Lewis (Carl Boehm), the young shutterbug himself, sidling up to the sidewalk in his cherry-red Vespa scooter, the ultimate symbol of mod mobility. He approaches a corner shop whose window displays are filled with brightly coloured signs and Technicolor photos, which on closer inspection are revealed to be shots of undressed women. It’s soon revealed that Mark takes these nudie shots for the store proprietor. Inside, sex and sin mingle ironically with innocence as a young girl wearing a red school uniform skips into the store and asks him for sweets. Even the name of the confection she requests, a “crunch,” sets the peculiar sadomasochistic tone of following scenes.

Putting on the Red Light

Upstairs in his photo studio, Mark’s subject, a voluptuous blonde named Millie, mockingly refers to Mark as Cecil Beaton, the celebrated English photographer and designer known for his keen eye for fashion. He was also famous for his stage production of *My Fair Lady*, and it’s quite possible Millie fancies herself as Mark’s Eliza Doolittle. “C’mon sonny, make us famous,” she cackles in a cockney slang while posing for him in a scarlet-red negligee—as William Johnson notes, it’s “an injunction he obeys near the end of the film by murdering her” (Johnson 8). Millie also asks Mark if he can “make it so the bruises don’t show” after hinting at a beating by her fiancé (who she has been two-timing). Now the sadomasochistic element of cinematic voyeurism (the investigation and punishment of the “guilty” female (Mulvey 51)), becomes more overt, exemplified by these very physical signs of trauma mingling with the sexual.

As a child, Mark’s biologist father (played in a cameo by Powell himself) subjected him to cruel psychological experiments involving the constant filming and audio taping

of his reaction to mental torture (a fact chillingly prescient of the Moor Murders—Brady and Hindley taped at least one victim). His father even gave Mark his first camera, a gift that coincided with the appearance of his new, sexually demonstrative stepmother (Wollen 21). Hence Mark's concept of the availability of women is inextricably linked with his gaze.

Aside from the prostitute from the opening scene and Millie, Mark's other victim, Viv (Moirá Shearer), is an aspiring actress who craves the attention of the camera. Mark even lures her to her demise with the promise of a part in his new production, which they shoot after-hours on the set of the studio film they are both working on—he as a focus puller, she as a stand-in. "We'll get caught," she cries. "Don't worry," he insists, "I've put the red light on." Unluckily for poor Viv, the only part she gets is the sharp edge of the blade that Mark hides in his phallic tripod leg. Her murder is timed to the thumping modern jazz of Wally Stott wailing on her reel-to-reel tape recorder, later echoed ironically by another reel-to-reel playing Mark's voice as a child as he shrieks in terror.

As Scott Salwolke notes, even though his killings are often looked upon by some critics as "cinematic rapes," the boyish, insecure Mark has yet to develop a sexual identity (Salwolke 223). Still, his scopophilic impulses mirror the unconscious desires of the (male) audience. The one romantically available woman in Mark's life whom he refuses to film is Helen (Anna Massey), the virginal girl who lives downstairs in his cavernous house, which was once the family home. Helen occupies what used to be Mark's mother's room, and the link between the two women is clear. Meanwhile, Helen's mother, blinded by a botched operation, represents the only real threat to Mark. With her omnipresent cane sharpened to a point finer than even her world-weary cynicism, she can be seen as a doppelgänger figure for him, representing an inversion of his desire to look, and a spectral nemesis that threatens his ability to do so.

Crucially, unlike the other women in Mark's life, Helen isn't interested in being filmed. When Mark tries to shoot her as she watches his childhood footage, she insists he stop. She is, however, interested in *looking*, a peculiar predilection for a horror movie heroine, and one that links her more closely to Mark. In fact, Helen is not as sexually innocent as she may seem—she has clearly been involved with another lodger in the house, who becomes jealous of her newfound attention to the photographer.

Like Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (released shortly after Powell's film), *Peeping Tom* takes the spectacle of desire as its text. Both *Psycho*'s Norman Bates and *Peeping Tom*'s Mark exhibit signs of Oedipal psychoses and a stunted, almost childlike sexual curiosity. And both Hitchcock and Powell play with the identifying hero formula, where "the spectator's fascination is turned against him" (Mulvey 755-756). But while Hitchcock makes his audience culpable in Bates's crimes through the use of point of view, Powell shows Mark's "investigated" women their *own* image at the moment of their deaths. Thus they are allowed to share in Mark's gaze, but this masochism of "over-identification"—as Mary Ann Doane puts it in "Film and the Masquerade" (756)—with the desirous male look proves to be their ultimate destruction.

Powell's film might have shaken up respectable British society during its initial release, but it was surprisingly light on overt sex and violence. Not so Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965). Conceived as a commercial venture to help finance what would become Polanski's next project, *Cul-de-Sac* (1966), *Repulsion* was produced by Compton Films. Like Anglo Amalgamated, the company that released *Peeping Tom*, Compton was dedicated to creating cheaply made, easily marketable exploitation cinema. Unlike the more 'respectable' Anglo, however, Compton was also known for its soft-core pornography. (Ironically, *Repulsion* was received favourably by the British press—issues of national identity and a previous 'respectability' that dogged Powell didn't seem to apply to the foreigner.)

As Robert Murphy writes, both *Peeping Tom* and *Repulsion* could be seen as combining "artistic prestige with an exploitable degree of sex and violence (Murphy 78)." But like Powell, Polanski refused to quickly knock off a mush-minded exploitation film. In the midst of all the prurient entertainment, he constructed a meticulously detailed portrait of a young woman suffering the effects of a psychotic breakdown. Mingling psychological realism with self-conscious expressionism and surrealism, the Polish wunderkind (who at the time spoke little English) managed to create a signature piece of highly British modernist film, starring a near-novice French actress, no less.

A Stranger in an Even Stranger Land

That actress, the frosty French beauty Catherine Deneuve, stars as Carol Ledoux, a sexually repressed, nearly infantile young Belgian woman. Here, Deneuve's fragile beauty is much more integral to the role than her still-green acting chops—while Carol is an angelic vision, an object of desire to all men who cross her path, she is incapable of dealing with their amorous attention. Like Mark Lewis, Carol is sexually stunted. Unlike Mark, who forcibly and intentionally exorcises his neuroses on the community of women around him, Carol retreats, first emotionally, then physically within the confines of the Kensington flat she shares with her sexually demonstrative sister, Helen (Yvonne Furneaux). Ultimately, Carol suffers a psychotic break, turning into a vicious killer of the opposite sex, but unlike Mark, her broken mind sees the murders she commits as acts of pure self-preservation, not aesthetic revenge.

Like *Peeping Tom*, the initial shot of *Repulsion* features the image of an opening eye. Tellingly, this time the eye is female, alluding to the credit sequence of another film about scopophilic fetishism (and another Hitchcock film), 1958's *Vertigo*. The title credits appear and disappear softly into the folds of the eye's lids, until the "Directed by Roman Polanski" credit announces itself, boldly slicing the eye horizontally. This is often cited as a direct reference to Luis Buñuel's surrealist masterpiece *Un Chien Andalou* (1929). As in Hitchcock's nearly identical homage, the reference can be seen as an exercise in sadism: the director's 'cutting' of the gaze of the audience or the male 'cutting' of the female gaze (Dooley). In fact, the eye also may have been a direct reference to *Peeping Tom*, which was reportedly one of Polanski's favourite films.^v

The camera then zooms out and we see a close-up of Carol's face, her blank beauty and empty stare resonating a resigned sadness. Clearly, this is a film about the voyeuristic impulse as well. We are invited to see the world through Carol's point-of view (Wexman 54). But Carol engages in the act of gazing in a much different way than does Mark Lewis, as do those of us watching her watch.

Carol could not be more of an alien in the context of modern London, literally and figuratively. Sex—in particular, female sexuality—is on display almost as literally as it was in the photos of the *Peeping Tom* storefront. As Deneuve walks the streets on her way to and from work, her spun-satin blonde hair billowing lightly, Polanski's camera tracking her as Chico Hamilton's dissonant jazz plays on the soundtrack, men respond to

her in an atavistic, almost feral way. “Hello darling, how ‘bout a bit of the other, then?,” retorts a leering construction worker as she walks by, seemingly oblivious. In her essay “Travel and Mobility,” Moya Luckett sees *Repulsion* as a sort of parody of the British film’s newfound “single-girl mythology”, where sexually and financially emancipated young women crave and seek new sensation (exemplified by Julie Christie in John Schlesinger’s *Darling* (1965)): “Crucially, the space that Carol shuns is precisely that of Swinging London, with its eligible men, urban pop culture and lack of moral constraints...” (Luckett 242)

Crazy/Beautiful

In her job as a manicurist at a busy salon (in reality one owned by mod hair guru and ultimate image maker Vidal Sassoon) Carol must tend to the needs of grotesquely made-up and worked-over older women while, ironically, she has no desire to project an image of beauty or glamour herself. The sadomasochistic elements of beauty are as much on display in the salon as the selection of nail polish (even the polish names, like ‘Fire and Ice,’ conjure ideas of extreme pleasure or pain). “You’re killing me,” a particularly decrepit looking woman cries as Carol’s coworker Bridget tries to sandblast some years off her face; Carol distractedly stabs another woman with tweezers when giving her a manicure, then falls to the floor while the woman screams. The low-level shot of Carol crouched in the corner while the polish bottle rotates violently in the foreground is almost an absurdist invitation for the viewer to engage her in a game of spin-the-bottle, something children play when first flirting with the idea of the sexual self.

While the women around Carol attempt to make themselves more sexually attractive to men, they constantly decry the depravity of the opposite sex. “Bloody men. Why are they so filthy?” Bridget asks Carol through her tears after a fight with her boyfriend. As Virginia Wright Wexman notes, “Women appear here as trapped by the fact that sexual acceptance by a male is the most available option that society can offer them for fulfillment” (52).

Ironically, Carol’s stunted sexuality could be seen, in another context, as a mode of emancipation—through her denial of a sexual self, she attempts to disavow the desiring male gaze and refuses to be made a commodity. But the social milieu is too much for her

fragile sexual ego. According to Wexman, as with Mark, Carol's insecurity about sex and male power likely stems from her relationship with her father. His preference for her sister Helen complicates the sisters' relationship further—Helen simultaneously acts as a mother figure and a sexual competitor for Carol, who harbors a subconscious desire for Helen's married lover Michael while ignoring the advances of the much more appropriate suitor, Colin (49). Helen could also be considered akin to Mark's hated stepmother, who wrestles away the affection of the already distant male role model.

While Colin inspires indifference in Carol (except at the point of sexual contact), Michael wracks her with a sense of sexual repulsion so strong, she literally wretches at the smell of him. In an attempt to stifle her feelings, she throws away Michael's 'contaminating' toiletries (save for his straight razor, which comes in handy later), and loses herself in the chaste, childlike games of the nuns outside her window (Wexman 50). She even misses a date with the handsome Colin—something any typical mod London girl would probably obsess over—after being mesmerized by a crack in the sidewalk pavement (clearly echoing the crack in her kitchen that “needs to get fixed”, like her increasingly disjointed mind).

In a curious echo of Mark's funhouse mirror, used to create ultimate fear in his victims, Carol is captivated by her distorted image in a teakettle. At the same time, the decrepit flesh of a skinned, “foetal” rabbit is left to rot in the living room as she plays dress up with Helen's things and eats sugar cubes like a child preoccupied with candy. Her penchant for childish indulgences mirrors the schoolgirl in *Peeping Tom* and, according to a salon customer, the sexual proclivities of men in general: They “all want to be smacked and then given sweets.”

By the time Carol claims her first victim (Colin, whom she spies through her peephole as he comes to her rescue in a white-knight parody), the film's realism contorts into manic expressionism. Walls turn to malleable clay (suggestive of the pleasures of the flesh), and hands literally punch through walls to grope Carol as she passes through her hallway.^{vi} Carol hallucinates her violent rape at the hands of the construction worker from the beginning of the film—he has apparently registered in her mind after all. Thus, Carol's passive gaze is revealed as truly active, even desirous, despite her best efforts to protect herself from desire. As Wexman notes, Carol watches as well, but desires to do so

without being seen (56), just as Mark Lewis does. But her attempts prove futile—despite trapping herself in what should be the protective shell of a secluded flat, her door is literally broken down so we can continue to subject her to our desiring look.

As in *Peeping Tom* and *Repulsion*, *Blow-Up*'s self-reflexive modernism is preoccupied with the voyeuristic gaze. But Antonioni's 1966 film, which has a far more 'respectable' pedigree, is less concerned with the psychological motivations of its protagonist. Its realism is one of externality, one that must be processed and analysed by Antonioni's 'hero,' a vague avatar for the director, fashion photographer Thomas (David Hemmings). Like Antonioni, Thomas sees the world through the lens of his camera. But unlike the director, Thomas is unable to cope adequately with what he discovers.

Thomas (whose name is actually never uttered in the film) is a peeping tom just like Mark, but he never seeks to turn his voyeuristic impulses into concrete action. He is simply an observer, and when anything else is asked of him—specifically, the call to solve a murder—he is constantly distracted by other stimuli. Antonioni's famously distractible camera has found its most symbiotic protagonist, one for whom the hypothetical action elsewhere is always more enticing than that in front of him.

“I've Gone off London This Week”

Like *Peeping Tom* and *Repulsion*, in a way *Blow-Up* could be seen as a horror film—one where the monster is the setting itself, or rather the hipsters that inhabit it. While the mod scene serves as a backdrop to what is essentially a moral fable about appearance versus reality and the illusory quality of the image, it's also integral to the narrative. Only in such a self-absorbed, sensation-obsessed world could a character like Thomas ever thrive. Tellingly, the film was originally to take place in Italy, but the peculiarities of London life offered a better context for the story, as Antonioni himself notes:

[Thomas] has chosen to take part in the revolution which has affected English life, customs and morality, at least among the young—the young artists, trend-setters, advertising executives, dress-designers or musicians who have been inspired by the Pop movement. He leads a life as regulated as a ceremony although he claims to know no other law but anarchy (in Sinclair 15-16). From the opening scene, Antonioni deftly weaves an intricate interplay between audience expectations and the 'reality' of what we

actually see. Polanski's and Powell's extreme close-up of the eye has been replaced by long tracking shots of Thomas, clothed in dirty rags and surrounded by other similarly clad men, trudging forlornly down the street after emerging from a doss house, where he has presumably spent the night. Like *Tom's* opening scene, Antonioni is parodying the Kitchen Sink movement, but in a more organic fashion.

Almost immediately, we are offered clues that something isn't quite right. As the camera surveys him walking the streets, Thomas picks up his pace. By the time he turns a corner and jumps into a Rolls Royce convertible, it's clear we have been tricked. Thomas is revealed as a disingenuous pretender. As he enters his spacious live-work studio, he is immediately surrounded by a bevy of candy-coloured, half-naked fashion models ready to please him. The entire first sequence of the film also becomes a parody of notions of social mobility in the mod era—surely no other film character's 'rise' to success has been quite so meteoric.^{vii}

Sex permeates every pore of Thomas's life, but he only covets it half-heartedly. While Mark confronts and Carol flees, Thomas sneers, treating his models with open disdain. It's clear that he can have his pick of women, but the mere concept of variety has become underwhelming. "I'm fed up with these bloody bitches," he confides to his agent. In the same conversation he tells him, "I've gone off London this week. Doesn't do anything for me"; suggesting, in his own eminently fickle way, that the situation might change in the next.

Even when Thomas appears to be sexually engaged, he has ulterior motives, reducing the act of seduction to a commercial exchange of goods and services. As Chris Wagstaffe writes in "Sexual Noise," during the infamous photo-shoot scene with real-life model Verushka (who writhes on the floor of Thomas's studio while he amorously nibbles her ear), the mood is genuinely an erotic one, but the sexual display is only done to "get a certain kind of photograph," Thomas's stock in trade and more important to him than any sexual dalliance (34). This reduces Thomas to a kind of soft-core prostitute, as much a sexual commodity as the model he entices.

— Again, the sexual world of *Blow-Up* is also a sadomasochistic one. Thomas' artist friend is implicitly engaged in an abusive relationship with his girlfriend (Sarah Miles), who shares a sexual attraction with Thomas. The photographer himself engages in subtler

forms of violence—like the surreptitious violence his camera witnesses in the park—as a kind of sexual foreplay. When two teenage aspiring models turn up at his studio, he aggressively pursues one—the more sexually open of the two—seemingly against her will. Clad only in her pastel tights, she chooses to fight back, biting him on the hand, which seems to arouse him even more. Of course, his eventual success is a foregone conclusion, and he knows it. The whole sexual escapade takes place on his film set, as if performed for Thomas’s camera, which the girls never actually get a chance to model for because he’s too spent from the *ménage à trois*. Instead, he discards them like his doss house clothes.

Similarly, when first confronted with the enigmatic Jane (Vanessa Redgrave) in the park as she tries to snatch his film (unbeknownst to Thomas, it has documented a murder she has been involved in), he doesn’t know how to react to a woman outside of his plastic world. But he’s clearly attracted to her for this reason. Jane bites him on the hand as well, in order to wrangle his camera away from him. But Thomas won’t give up the film. The impression is not so much that he’s enamored with what he thinks his camera has captured, but that by merely housing her image in his device he exercises a certain amount of control over her. As Wagstaffe notes, “The film constantly returns to photography’s (and cinematography’s) transformation of women into images” (35), and Jane, despite being a formidable conquest, is no exception.

Later, when Jane offers herself in exchange for the film, matter-of-factly removing her shirt in his studio, Thomas initially refuses her advances. Has her outsider status really earned her a modicum of his respect? Possibly he’s intimidated—this interaction could actually end up being consequential, and Thomas is not interested in the consequences of his actions. In “Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema,” Gaylyn Studlar argues that film conveys a “masochistic aesthetic” in counterpoint to Mulvey’s notions of sadistic fetishism (Studlar 775). Jane seems to be the one woman in Thomas’s environment who refuses to be fetishized—indeed, like Helen in *Peeping Tom*, she doesn’t even want her image committed to film. Jane holds an enigmatic power over Thomas, even though he supposedly has the upper hand in the exchange. As Studlar writes, “In the masochistic text, the female is not one of a countless number of discarded objects but an idealized, powerful figure, both dangerous and comforting.” Of course, this

would make Jane a direct counterpoint to the other interchangeable women in Thomas's life, whom he subjects to his sadistic control. Ultimately, though, he attempts to assert control over Jane as well by agreeing to sleep with her. Before they can consummate the transaction, a ringing doorbell offers yet another distraction (in a seemingly unending procession of them) producing a deliveryman with an airplane propeller Thomas had purchased earlier in the day (and already forgotten all about). Thus, Jane, although a mod example of the classic enigmatic *femme fatale*, defies investigation *and* punishment. She remains a mystery and fails to become objectified.

The Illusion of Reality

Like *Peeping Tom*'s Mark, Thomas wields his camera like a weapon (although in this case, not a literal one). He also uses it as a shield to keep distance between him and his subjects (really the whole world), which Mark does as well. As in *Peeping Tom*, the whole process of filmmaking—the shooting, the developing, the viewing—becomes fetishized. Thomas feverishly works in his darkroom with “the red light on” to the exclusion of all else, just as Mark does. His black-and-white photographs are enlarged to the point of almost total abstraction—flurries of grainy light and shadow—encouraging the audience to engage with the purely textural elements of the image (what Laura U. Marks refers to as “haptic looking”), the literal surface (162). Other objects become fetishistic obsessions for Thomas as well, but only briefly—they are all ultimately as disposable and worthless as the empty film box that Mark Lewis discards before claiming his victim. As Sam Rhodie points out, Thomas is “forever seizing on objects he ‘must have’” but once he acquires and views them anew, in another context, he loses interest (67). His desire to possess is perverted into ambivalence or even contempt, a gentler version of Carol's repulsion.

That desire for new and unusual experiences in a world where the new and unusual has become commonplace ultimately makes Thomas as tragic a figure in British modernism as both Carol Ledoux and Mark Lewis. While he can't be implicated in any death, Thomas's inattentiveness to meaning, his willingness, as Ned Rifkin writes in *Antonioni's Visual Language*, “to wear the blinders imposed upon him by his viewfinder,” (130) makes him morally culpable. As this trio of British modernist films

suggests, the Swinging London of the 1960s could be seen itself as a giant picture show, where looking, desiring, and consuming images became the very mechanism of 'real life.' Just as in the very films that encapsulate and define it, those plastic, illusory images of the mod era ultimately can't be trusted.

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ⁱ After a 15-day trial in April and May of 1966, Brady and Hindley were both given life sentences in connection with the brutal torture slayings of four British youths. Hindley, who died in prison in 2002, soon became referred to as "the most hated woman in Britain" by the nation's press.

ⁱⁱ Infinitely more so than the frenzied outcry over Brady, the visceral public response to Hindley was coloured as much by her image as her deeds: her infamous mug shot—complete with peroxided bouffant—looks like an outtake from a bad photo shoot by '60s uber-photographer David Bailey, and the pair were caught in part by the police discovery of a photo of the smiling Hindley and her dog posing near the burial site of one of the victims.

ⁱⁱⁱ Another later British modernist film dealing with desire and murder, *Performance* (Nicholas Roeg and Donald Cammell, 1970), focuses much more on the counter-cultural obsession with internal exploration, rather than the commodified images found in the early to mid-60s, and has thus been omitted from discussion here.

^{iv} Typified by films such as Karel Reisz's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), the Kitchen Sink Movement was preoccupied with the problem of class inequities and aesthetically committed to showing 'realistic' depictions of the everyday lives of Britain's working class. By the mid-60s, the movement had fizzled out, being replaced by a modernist preoccupation with consumption and upward mobility.

^v Whether or not Polanski's appreciation of the film changed when, as Barbara Leaming notes, his first wife divorced him in order to marry *Tom's* Boehm, remains unclear.

^{vi} It's worth noting, given the sexual nature of the image, that according to the short documentary "A British Horror Film," this effect was achieved by using latex from a local condom factory.

^{vii} Thomas's real-life counterpart was celebrated photog David Bailey, a mod icon and fixture of the scene (so much so that, according to Leaming, he even snapped the wedding photos of Polanski's London marriage to Sharon Tate). Emerging from the working-class London neighbourhood of East Ham to eventually conquer the fashion world, Bailey was also the ultimate symbol of new-guard ideas about English 'classlessness' and the unease that they created.