

Bacon and popular culture



Introduction

This presentation is intended to give a background setting to the Bacon exhibition. The events shown try to give an understanding of contemporary culture within which Francis Bacon was working, although they are not intended to give an impression of any direct influence. In addition the film clips give an idea of the predominant male emotions of repression and 'doing the right thing'. These demonstrations of supposed appropriate behaviour contrast against the world in which Bacon was living and the work he was producing.

In general terms, British cinema depicted traditional values of social order and class structure being replaced by a realistic depiction of problematic issues. Rather than reflecting back to past glories, British cinema ended the decade by focussing on contentious and contemporary issues such as class struggle, abortion and homosexuality.

This change was indicative of the nation's differing cultural mood and taste.

Events and culture (Late Forties)



Francis Bacon (1944)



Launch of NHS
(July 1948)



State of Israel formed (May 1948)



Patrick Heron.
Boats at Night. (1947)



Ghandi
Assassinated
(Jan 1948)

THE BLUE LAMP (Basil Dearden, 1950)

- Police Docu-drama
- Controversial content – shooting of a policeman
- Methods of police investigation
- Male bonding and emotional reserve
- Factual treatment without sensationalism
- Post war background – bombed out houses etc.
- Restraint, understatement and lack of naturalism characterised by acting style, camerawork and storyline.



The image features a large, dark blue rectangular area that occupies most of the frame. On the left side of this rectangle, there is a vertical blue bar. At the bottom of this bar, there is a horizontal blue segment that extends to the right, forming an L-shape. The text "This film clip lasts for 7 minutes" is positioned at the bottom right of the image, within the dark blue area.

This film clip lasts for 7 minutes

Events and Culture

(Early fifties)



Coronation of Elizabeth II (June 1953)



End of petrol rationing (May 1950)



Ben Nicholson,
Feb 28-53
(*Vertical Seconds*)
(1953)



Festival of Britain street party
(May 1951)

THE DAM BUSTERS (Michael Anderson, 1955)

- Stoicism and sacrifice as typically British traits
- Suppression of emotion as appropriate
- Nostalgia, unity and pride in glories of the past, escape from contemporary issues
- Documentary and fictional traditions 'old fashioned'?
- Socially conservative
- Popular film genre, recognisable actors and storyline
- Lack of female content
- Irresponsible attitude to warfare?





This film clip last for just under 12 minutes

Events and Culture (Mid fifties)



Soho coffee bar (1955)



Mary Quant opens
Boutique 'Bazaar'
in Kings Road
(1955)



Francis Bacon (1954)



Suez crisis (1956)



Graham
Sutherland,
*Winston
Churchill*
(1955)

I'M ALRIGHT JACK (John Boulting, 1959)

- Questioning the 'British way of life'
- Satirical view of industrial affairs and issues of class
- Establishment seen as inept and self-effacing
- Working class depicted as destructive and having a desire for an 'easy life'
- Diplomacy is seen as secondary to the real world of conflict and self interest
- Film attacks management and unions alike





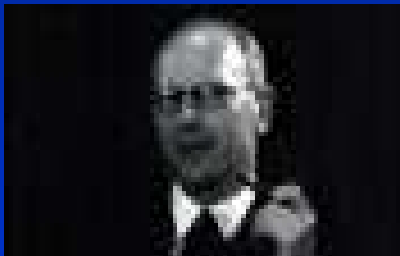
This film clip lasts for just under 10 minutes

Events and Culture

(Late fifties)



Alex Issigonis designs
first Mini (1959)



Wolfenden Report
recommends
decriminalisation

Report into
legalisation of
homosexuality
(Sept 1957)



Henry Moore,
*Mother and
Child* (1958)



Tommy Steele
(1959)



Britain's first
motorway
opens
-Preston bypass
(Dec 1958)

SATURDAY NIGHT AND SUNDAY MORNING (Karel Reisz, 1960)

- Northern Realist Film
- 'What I'm out for is a good time. All the rest is propaganda' (Arthur Seaton)
- Depiction of contentious and contemporary themes (eg abortion)
- Generational conflicts
- Realistic depiction of themes, characters and language
- Accurate representation of working class



This film clip lasts for 6 minutes

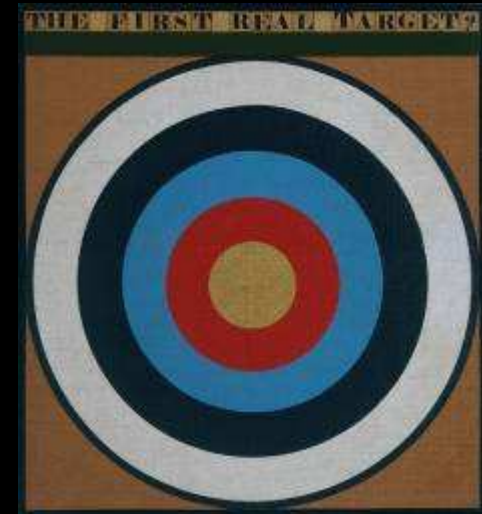
Events and Culture (Early sixties)



Henry Cooper (1961)



Francis Bacon (1963)



Peter Blake. *The First Real Target*. (1961)



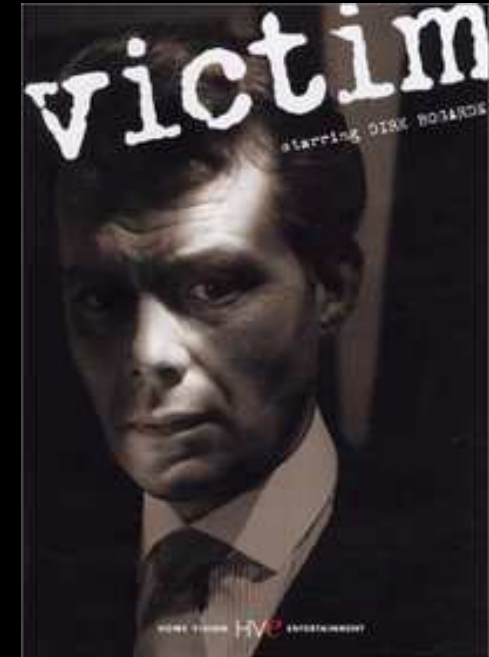
Live televised
presidential
election debate
(1960)

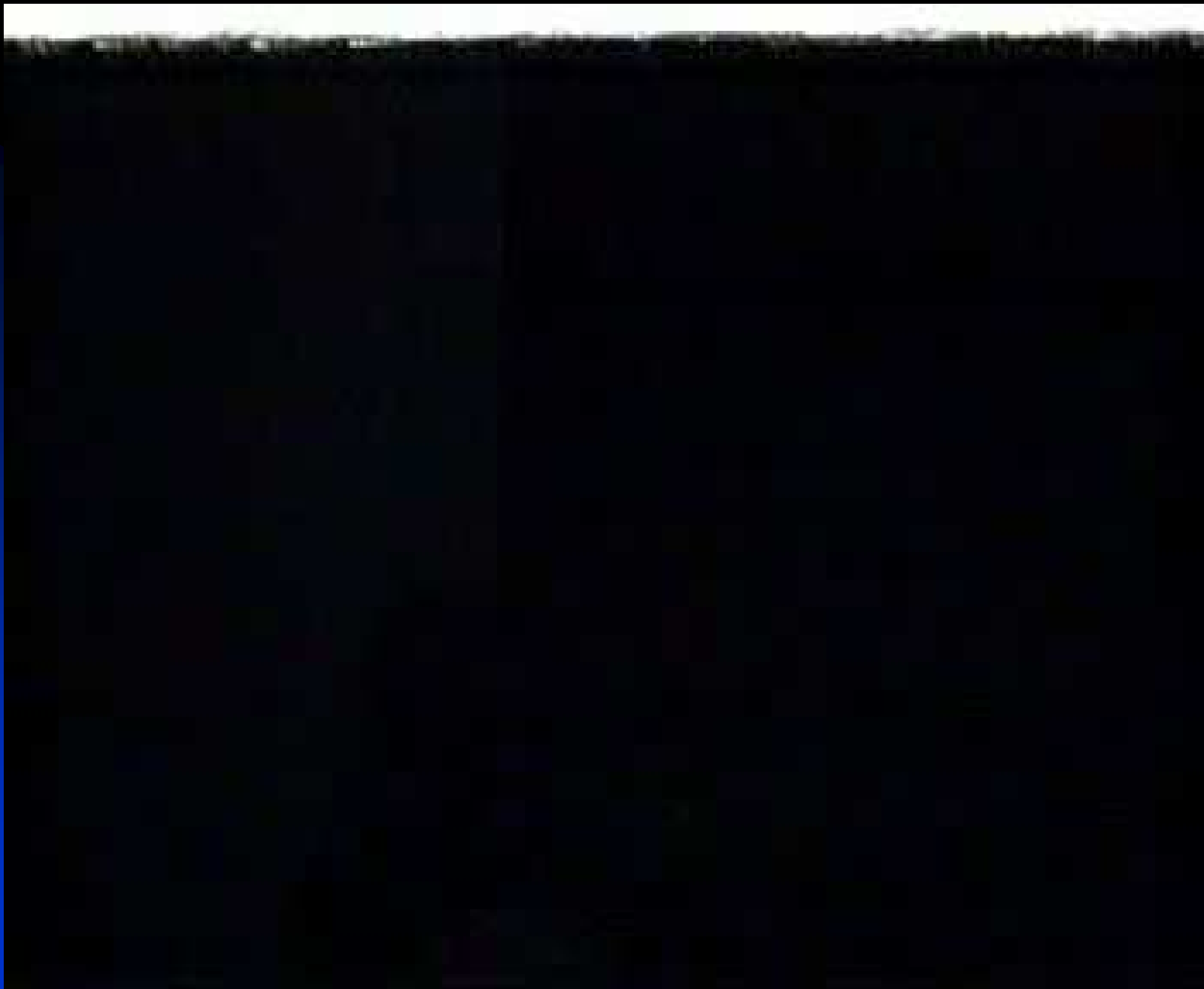


The Beatles (1962)

VICTIM (Basil Dearden, 1961)

- Approached the contemporary issue of homosexuality as the unseen subculture of British public life
- Controversial content – homosexual blackmail
- Male desire is the centre stage
- The central character is fighting his own urges rather than a physical enemy
- 'A world peopled with practically no one but queers' (comment by British Board of Film Censors)
- Dynamic and dramatic in style





This film clip lasts for just under 6 minutes

References

- *The Blue Lamp*. Directed by Basil Dearden and produced by Michael Balcon. Ealing Studios, 1950. Starring Dirk Bogarde and Jack Warner.
- *The Dam Busters*. Directed by Michael Anderson and produced by Robert Clark. Associated British Picture Corporation, 1955. Starring Michael Redgrave and Richard Todd.
- *I,m Alright Jack*. Directed by John Boulting and produced by Roy Boulting. Charter Films, 1959. Starring Peter Sellers and Ian Carmichael.
- *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. Directed by Karel Reisz and produced by Tony Richardson and Harry Saltzman. Woodfall Films, 1960. Starring Albert Finney and Sally Ann Field.
- *Victim*. Directed by Basil Dearden and produced by Michael Relph. Allied Film Makers, 1961. Starring Dirk Bogarde and Sylvia Syms.
- Harper, S. and Porter, V. *British Cinema of the 1950's: The Decline of Deference*. 2003. New York.
- Aldgate, T et al. *British Cinema*. 2002. Bath.