

Talbot Rice Gallery

Until 30 September

Stephen Sutcliffe

Sex Symbols in Sandwich Signs

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In the **White Gallery**, the newly commissioned two part video 'Casting Through and Scenes from Radcliffe' (2017) weaves together director Lindsay Anderson's personal descriptions of sexual frustration, including details of how actor Richard Harris tormented him, with David Storey's novel *Radcliffe* (1963), a tale of unrequited homosexual desire cast across the class divide. Sutcliffe draws a subtle parallel between the two relationships, creating a document that hovers between fact and fiction. Newly commissioned for Talbot Rice, it also plays with the Gallery as a site for the re-enactment and reinterpretation. In the video we see Anderson with Harris, and then – in the second part – the effete, aristocratic Leonard Radcliffe and the source of his conflicted emotions, Victor Tolson, a brutal, possessive labourer.

Sex Symbols in Sandwich Signs takes its title from a damning review of *Radcliffe* that criticised its bleak, alienating narrative and garrulous characters. Sutcliffe, fascinated by the reviewer's thinly veiled homophobia and pomposity, revels in its negative appraisal of everything that he feels makes Storey a brilliant writer: 'Before Storey is through, he has confronted the reader with the alienation of the individual, the decline of the aristocratic tradition, the nastiness of the mass, the calamitous Christian duality of soul and body, and almost everything else that could be considered a factor in the decline of the West.' (Unknown author, TIME magazine, Vol.83 No.14, 1964). 'Sex Symbols in Sandwich Signs' was the tagline used in the review under a picture of Storey himself.

'Casting Through and Scenes from Radcliffe' was informed by materials from the University of Stirling's **Lindsay Anderson Archive**, particularly Anderson's diaries, written during the period in which he worked with Harris. Sutcliffe has also chosen to include additional letters, including a chart Anderson made of his relationship with Harris and a letter from Harris to Anderson. Reflecting anger and frustration, the diaries show that like many figures of that era, including those who fascinate Sutcliffe and appear in his other works, such as Dirk Bogarde and Kenneth Williams, Anderson led a double life, repressing his homosexuality in public. Storey, as one of his close friends, commented after he passed away in 1994 that 'the venom with which [Anderson] attacked society was an expression of his own inability to come to terms with himself...and that was a cause of great pain to him...it was a purely celibate existence.' This sense of hiding, self-doubt, being guarded and masquerading, is another key thread Sutcliffe's work brings to the surface. And at the 50th Anniversary of the partial legalisation of homosexuality, Anderson's story is particularly poignant.

Besides the diaries are drawings that Storey, who trained as an artist at Slade School of Fine Art, gifted to Anderson. The landscapes depict the industrial towns of the North of England where he (like Sutcliffe) grew up. Most of his later work would be set against the backdrop of a post-industrial Britain, his novels and plays dramatising the lives of working-class families torn apart by the social changes of the 1960s and 1970s¹. Whilst Director of the Royal Court Theatre from 1957 to 1975 (commemorated by a home-made collaged gift made by staff at the theatre) Anderson made nine plays with Storey, showing how much he valued his gritty depictions of everyday life. Storey's modernist-style print depicts himself as a rugby player and is based on the real experience that informed *This Sporting Life*, which became one of the most famous of Anderson's collaborations with Storey when adapted for cinema in 1963. Harris, of course, was cast as the violent and volatile rugby player Frank Machin. The black and white photographs capture Anderson's and Harris' on-set relationship at this time, the launch of the film in Cannes and some photographs that seem to capture unguarded moments. Whilst in the archive, Sutcliffe was intrigued by a number of slides documenting Anderson's holiday snaps that appear to have been accidentally double-exposed. Choosing to have them enlarged, they now form a backdrop for this part of the exhibition, becoming ghostly, cinematic and evocative symbols of lost, idle or innocent moments.

Upstairs, the **Screening Space** features a show reel of previous video works that exemplify Sutcliffe's more typical collagist practice. Unquantified, the source materials for several of these works are displayed in a series of vitrines containing some of his collection of VHS tapes recorded directly from TV, books from his library, magazines from his

¹ *In Celebration*, referenced in one of the drawings, was set in the mining town of Langwith and tells the story of three brothers returning home to celebrate their parents 40th Anniversary, only for the perceived damage caused by the parent's different social aspirations to cause a heated confrontation. Anderson directed it as a play in 1969 and adapted it for cinema in 1975.

collection of *Private Eye* and some of the posters and invites he produces for his own exhibitions and screenings. This archive of materials help to sustain Sutcliffe's understanding of the knotted and dense network of connections that underlie post-war British culture. The showreel, selected by Sutcliffe, demonstrates that short, pithy videos are his *métier* and offer a myriad of invisible, esoteric and illegitimate cross-references.

Two wall paintings in this space amalgamate personal, literary and visual appropriations. The first, 'Mimosa (after Halliwell and Orton)' (2017), combines motifs from a birthday card sent by a friend with a poetic structure borrowed from Francis Ponge and a sideways glance at the collages of Joe Orton and Kenneth Halliwell, particularly the defacements of library books for which they were arrested. The second, 'La Guerre' (2012) brings together an illustration from a beginner's guide to Marx with a text appearing in the Bertrand Tavernier film, *The Watchmaker of St. Paul*. The legend in French roughly translates as 'I do not like war because war happens in the countryside and the countryside annoys me'.

In the **Georgian Gallery**, consideration of Storey's work also motivated Sutcliffe's video 'Twixt Cup and Lip' (2016). *The Contractor* (1969) reworked material from *Radcliffe* and was made famous by a marquee constructed and taken down on stage during performances. Like *This Sporting Life* it also relates to one of Storey's prior jobs. In 'Twixt Cup and Lip' the marquee becomes a metaphor for cultural constructs and archival footage shows 'off air' moments where people are caught off-guard or seem awkwardly self-aware. If final productions try to create a coherent sense of a subject, a polished performance or a stable identity, Sutcliffe hones in on absent moments, moments of disconnect or diversion, posing questions about the instrumentalisation and purity of archive, work and creativity. The biscuit tin that features in 'Twixt Cup and Lip' was pulled from the shelves when it was discovered the artist had implanted lewd scenes into the otherwise genteel tea party – an allusion, like *The Contractor*, to what goes on when people should be working.

In the 1960s and 1970s Storey was duly lauded, winning the Booker Prize (1976) and three New York Drama Critics' Awards (1969, 1970 and 1972). But by the 1980s there was a sea change and his work was increasingly berated by critics. As James Campbell commented for the Guardian, 'Thatcher's insistence on class mobility, and the beginnings of a "classless society", helped to make Storey's work seem passé.' The same fate befell Anderson. In the early 1990s, whilst Storey entered something of a creative quiescence, Anderson wrote, 'I don't exist anymore as a British film-maker. I have never had a nomination, not that I give a damn, from the British Film Academy. That is perfectly OK because I know what I do is not to the English taste – fuck 'em.' Having been revered for his adaptation of Storey's *This Sporting Life* and now best remembered for the Mick Travis trilogy *If...* (1968), *O Lucky Man!* (1973) and *Britannia Hospital* (1982) it is clear that, like Storey, the director was becoming dislodged by the social shifts that were established with Thatcher's election in 1979. *Britannia Hospital* was his most vitriolic assault on British institutions and it effectively ended his career. Following its release Anderson pondered in one of his later diaries:

'So what price *Britannia Hospital*? Our limited Los Angeles experience (let alone Cannes and Britain) had made certain things clear to me – wit, satire, ambivalence: these must mitigate against popular success. Then further: those who take the cinema 'seriously' i.e. read and write criticism, run festivals and institutes, lecture on and pursue Film Studies – they must, almost by definition, be 'bourgeois'. That is, not primary producers, but living off other men's labour. They have a stake in the way things are.'

In our present climate of austerity, when – as writers like Owen Hatherley have made clear – the same post-war period examined by Sutcliffe is so often remade through the lens of nostalgia, *Sex Symbols in Sandwich Signs* has a vital relevance. It resuscitates voices from the past that reflect conflict, complexity and uncertainty to articulate a time that was populated by individuals that – like Storey's characters – were garrulous, caustic and troubled, constantly having to battle for their identity.

LIST OF WORKS

White Gallery

Stephen Sutcliffe, 'Casting Through and Scenes from Radcliffe', 2017, approximately 16 minutes.

Commissioned by Talbot Rice Gallery.

'Radcliffe' is referenced within the exhibition with the kind permission of the Estate of David Storey.

Scenes from Radcliffe is adapted from the novel 'Radcliffe' by David Storey with kind permission from the Storey family.

Casting Through is adapted from Anderson's letters and Diaries with kind permission of The Lindsay Anderson Archive at Stirling University.

Credits:

Richard Harris/ Victor Tolson	Ali Craig
Anderson/ Leonard Radcliffe	Paul Cunningham
Director/Producer/Writer	Stephen Sutcliffe
Director of Photography/Lights	George Geddes
Post production/Edit/SFX	Scott McCartney
Sound Recordist	Robert Anderson
Runner	Rosa Lewis
Wardrobe/Props/Makeup	Fiona Jardine
Sound Mix	Michael MacKinnon at Savalas

Lindsay Anderson Archive

Black and white photographs, include location photos for *This Sporting Life* (1963) and the launch in Cannes.

Unknown artist, c.1975 [mixed media collage]

Lindsay Anderson, 1963-1966 [diaries]

Lindsay Anderson, 1965 [double exposed photos of Italian holiday, large prints]

Lindsay Anderson's passports, 1946, 1956, 1970.

David Storey, 'Sight and Sound', undated, [sketch]

David Storey, 'David', undated, [print]

David Storey, 'In Celebration', 1969 [sketch]

David Storey, 'In Celebration', 1984 [sketch]

Courtesy of the Lindsay Anderson Archive, University of Stirling.

Screening Space and Archive (upstairs):

Stephen Sutcliffe's personal archive with addition of:

'Diary of a Madman', 1963 [framed Royal Court Theatre poster]

'Trials by Logue', 1960 [framed poster]

Both courtesy the Lindsay Anderson Archive, University of Stirling.

Showreel of films selected by Stephen Sutcliffe:

'Despair', 2009, 17 mins 22 secs

'The Herbivores', 2012, 3 mins 33 secs

'Brighton Beach', 2015, 51 secs

'AB...', 2015, 55 secs

'Scenes from the Life of an Impatient Man', 2015, 2 mins 11 secs

Paul's Case, 2015, 8 mins 27 secs

Georgian Gallery

Stephen Sutcliffe, 'Twixt Cup and Lip', 2016, duration 22 mins 41 secs

The Gallery and artist would like to thank:

Fiona Jardine, Karl Magee and Rosanna 'Rosie' Al-Mulla from University of Stirling, Helen Storey, Alexander Storey-Gordon, Graham Eatough, Duncan Campbell, Ariane Jackson at Savalas, Evi Tsiligaridou and Filmhouse, India Fullerton from The Photographic Unit Glasgow University, Fraser Muggeridge, Ilsa Colsel, Dan Fox, Michelle Cotton, Paul Brotherston and Rob Tufnell.