‘Demons in the Machine: Experimental Film, Poetry and Modernism in Twentieth-Century Scotland’

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Sarah Neely & Alan Riach, 'Demons in the Machine: experimental film, poetry and modernism in twentieth-century Scotland'[1]

Avant-garde practices in Scotland have often been overshadowed by the dominance of a strong documentary tradition, and discussions of Scottish filmmaking are generally concerned with debates around national identity. These tendencies work to obscure the achievements of a number of important local filmmakers linked to the international avant-garde. This chapter will explore the work of two such figures: Orcadian poet, painter and filmmaker, Margaret Tait (1918-1999) and Scots-Italian writer, academic and amateur filmmaker Enrico Cocozza (1921-1997). Both attended Centro Sperimentale di Cinematographia in Rome in the early 1950s, Tait after serving in the Royal Army Medical Corps, Cocozza after serving as an interpreter for Italian prisoners in the Army. Their poetic approach to filmmaking was admired by artists, other filmmakers, writers and, unsurprisingly, poets. Hugh MacDiarmid, who served as a subject for one of Tait's film portraits, published some of her written poetry and wrote about her in his article, 'Intimate Filmmaking in Scotland' (1960). Edwin Morgan favourably reviewed Tait's poems and later wrote a poem in tribute to Cocozza. Both Tait and Cocozza, to varying extents, were influenced by poetry, occasionally adapting and referencing the work of well-known poets in their own films.

Such links between poetry and filmmaking are well-established throughout the history of avant-garde cinema, in Scotland and beyond. Filmmakers such as Maya Deren and Jonas Mekas looked to poetry for source material for their films and as a way to explore and describe form and practice. More generally, William Wees establishes key distinctions between two different types of approaches to the relationship between film and poetry in practice. The term 'poetry-film' describes films based on or directly inspired by poetry, while the 'film poem' refers to works characterised by 'impressionistic or semi-abstract imagery carefully edited for rhythmic effects, complex formal relationships, and metaphorical or symbolic significance'(1999:1). However, examples of such creative interrelations have been largely overlooked in historical accounts of modern Scottish culture. The importance of the poet laureate or the makar has long been established but the achievements of their film-makar peers such as Cocozza and Tait has gone largely unnoticed. If Edwin Morgan is the presiding, encouraging and enabling spirit for a generation of writers emergent in the 1980s and 1990s, should we not also bring Margaret Tait and Enrico Cocozza more firmly into the light of visible currency? Might they not be more enabling than they have been allowed to be? Cocozza's inventiveness was rewarded within amateur filmmaking circles and Tait was celebrated by critics and savants of the avant-garde, but neither was satisfied by the limited opportunities available in Scotland to develop feature-length work. Although Tait succeeded latterly with *Blue Black Permanent* (1992), several other attempts made by the two never came to fruition. For instance, Tait sought development finance in the mid '80s for *Scars of Battle*, a never-made spy thriller about an ex-agent mourning the tragic death of his wife in Sri Lanka.

[1] This chapter developed from a day seminar on the relationships between film and poetry in Scotland organised by Rae Riach at the University of Paisley. The research on Margaret Tait was supported by small research grant from the Carnegie trust for the Universities of Scotland.

Likewise, Cocozza's archival papers include a lengthy script for *The Young Ned*, a film whose central protagonist Danny protests: 'I'm a hard man. It took two World Wars and the threat of a Third to produce me.' (3/7/5).

Tellingly, the Scottish experimental filmmakers who received most significant support and critical acclaim in the mid-to-late twentieth century most often did so by working outwith Scotland. Accordingly, their work is most often discussed outside a specifically national context. Most famously, Norman McLaren developed his experimental approach to filmmaking at Glasgow School of Art, where he was a student and set up the School's Kinecraft Society in 1933. Work produced by members of the Society was generally characterised by an experimental, avant-garde approach, but a few films are also notable for their social and political commitment. In 1936, McLaren and Helen Biggar, a fellow student and Kinecraft member, produced *Hell Unltd*, an anti-war film employing an innovative approach mixing animation and found footage. Many of the films produced by the Society's members were also submitted to the Scottish Amateur Film Festival, an annual event held at the nearby Cosmo cinema (now the Glasgow Film Theatre). In 1935, McLaren's film *Colour Cocktail* caught the attention of John Grierson. Grierson's interest in McLaren would inform the rest of the latter's career, inviting him first to join the GPO film unit, and later, the National Film Board of Canada. Cocozza and Tait's work was also seen by Grierson in later runs of the Scottish Amateur Film Festival. In 1951, Cocozza won the Victor Saville Trophy for most outstanding film for *Chick's Day* (1950). However, neither filmmaker received the kind of offer Grierson made to McLaren. Both worked in Scotland for most of their intermittent careers as a result. Vitally, therefore, Cocozza and Tait were consistently influenced by and engaged with other streams of Scottish culture, even as they were compelled to assimilate and participate within the European and international filmmaking avant-gardes from a distance. McLaren has been lauded as internationalist 'because he eliminated national and regional markers' (Dobson 1999) in nearly all of his work; in sharp contrast, Cocozza and Tait developed, through a combination of ingenuity and necessity, an obviously localised form of modernist practice.

It is precisely in such terms that this essay documents and celebrates their achievements. Neither Cocozza nor Tait chose to work outside international mainstreams (whether commercial or avant-garde) by preference. Yet to a significant degree both turned necessity into virtue. They capitalised on freedom from the restrictions of working within an industrial framework, embracing a range of media, genres, forms and practices, both mainstream and avant-garde. Each displayed a serious commitment to experimentation with the material possibilities of the film form. Like the modernist film which Forbes and Street distinguish for its use of the camera more like a diary than a machine (2000: 20), Tait and Cocozza's work presents a fluid treatment of space and place. Athough the oversight of their work and the general lack of support given to developing their skills is lamentable, their fate as truly independent filmmakers meant that their work was influenced uniquely by contemporaneous experimentations within other areas of Scottish culture, specifically, developments in modernist literature. Their respective oeuvres represent a remarkably vivid, intensely detailed local portrait of Scottish society and creativity in the middle of the twentieth century and beyond.

Margaret Tait

Soon after returning to Scotland from her studies in Rome Margaret Tait established Ancona Films with fellow student Peter Hollander. Offices were listed in New York, Rome and Edinburgh, where Tait relocated in 1954, setting up her studio above a shop on Rose Street. There she held an annual 'Rose Street Film Festival', running parallel to the Edinburgh Festival and intended to showcase the work of students from Centro Sperimentale. Later, after she returned to her native Orkney, she established her studio in an old kirk and would screen films in local theatres, village halls, or occasionally in her own home. For most of her career she used a Bolex camera that she had purchased from a side street when she was a student in Rome.

Given the fecund relationship between cinema and poetry that developed through her experimental film work, it is significant that Tait was committed to writing poetry as well as producing moving image work, and that key Scottish literary figures took interest in both areas of her creative output. Of especial importance for this essay is the close relationship that developed between Tait and perhaps the most important of all twentieth-century Scottish poets, Hugh MacDiarmid. Tait published three books of poetry, *origins and elements* (1959), *The Hen and the Bees: Legends and Lyrics* (1960) and *Subjects and Sequences* (1960). She also wrote short stories and children's fiction. MacDiarmid published a number of her poems in the magazine he was editing in the 1950s, *The Voice of Scotland*. From the 1930s MacDiarmid's poetry turned towards extended experimental forms of writing predominantly in English but drawing in phrases and quotations from other languages and cultures. In this period the linguistic diversity of his work was matched by its range of reference to different disciplines such as science, biology, genetics, music and film abound. But throughout his writing career, MacDiarmid produced any number of poems specifically dealing with Scotland and Scottish subject-matter, and he repeatedly returned to composition in the language we call Scots. Intellectual enquiry, national disposition and formal experimentalism characterised MacDiarmid's writing at the time he encountered comparable qualities in Tait's 1959 collection *origins and elements* (1959): free verse forms, openness of structure, line-breaks depending on syntax and conversational emphasis rather than repetitive rhythmic pattern, scientific subject-matter, love of paradox (the first poem is called 'Elastic' and observes that 'steel is the most elastic of all metals…..so elastic you can't budge it.'), wide-ranging literary reference (poems about Rimbaud, Emily Dickinson, allusions to D.H. Lawrence), analytic austerity rubbing shoulders with wry humour.

Edwin Morgan reviewed *origins and elements* in the Autumn 1961 issue of *New Saltire*, in an essay entitled 'Who will Publish Scottish Poetry?' Morgan was concerned to point out that Scottish publishers should take closer interest in what was happening with work produced in ephemeral, small-press or pamphlet editions. The poets he reviewed – Alan Jackson, Tom Scott, Alan Riddell, Ian Hamilton Finlay – achieved varying degrees of recognition, most notably Finlay, not only as a poet but as an internationally-recognised artist. Alan Riddell, along with Finlay and Morgan, produced concrete poetry in an international movement that overlapped literary and visual forms. Morgan draws attention to Tait's 'curious and interesting, though sometimes prosaic and wilful, poems on a great variety of subjects' (51). He notes MacDiarmid's influence in scientific poems like 'Water' and 'Carbon' and in Tait's

attack on the Calvinist disposition. Morgan concludes that Tait 'gives the reader's mind something to work on' and praises her engagement with mental activity as opposed to rhapsodic entrancement. There is certainly an affinity with Morgan's own work in what he praises in Tait's.

Poems in Tait's 1960 collection *The Hen and the Bees*, subtitled 'Legends and Lyrics', are more playful with sound-patterns and vocabulary, focusing on animals ('Hen', 'Dog'), archetypal figures (Queen, King, Princess) and mythical gods (such as Thor, Loki and Baldar). The poems in her third, *Subjects and Sequences* (1960), are more varied and ambitious, collected under different section headings. 'Book I' is entitled 'Places, People and Events' and 'Book II', 'Sequences', includes poems on elemental sensations of sunlight, the role of the poet, Mary Queen of Scots, and children. The book has a larger format and the poems take advantage of this, with longer lines extending across the page then being brought back abruptly in one-, two-, or three-word lines, so that the conversational diction is formally arranged in a self-evidently self-conscious way. The poems show forth clearly the extent of their own artifice, while they are normally straightforward in their syntax and grammar and conversational in tone. The range of poems and the consistency of their achievement is impressive. It is regrettable that Tait has been overlooked in modern anthologies, both of Scottish poetry and of poetry by women. She is more formally daring and in subject-matter much more radical than most of her contemporaries, 'a remarkable critical forerunner in her poetry of what's now a recognisable Scottish literary voice' (Smith 2004:9): no wonder MacDiarmid published her.

There were affinities between MacDiarmid and Tait: qualities of language and visualisation both artists share, representations of visual depiction (external scenes) and internal, abstract ideas, best summarised by the lines from the former's 'On a Raised Beach':

> What the scene shows is never anything to what it's designed to hide.
> The red blood that makes the beauty of a maiden's cheek
> Is as red under a gorilla's pigmented and hairy face.
>
> (2004: 148)

Such an emphasis on immediacy and appreciation perhaps lay behind Tait making an intimate and expressive film-portrait of MacDiarmid in 1964. Tait's *MacDiarmid* combines poetry, film, music and song. The musical setting of MacDiarmid's 'The Eemis Stane' b F.G. Scott provides the musical soundtrack while the words of MacDiarmid's 'Somersault' and 'Krang' are playfully interpreted through image, resulting in a memorable depiction of MacDiarmid teetering along an Edinburgh kerb. The film's subject is often decentred or out of focus and occasionally the camera shifts its attention to what might ordinarily seem subordinate objects of study: images of radios, clocks, books and newspapers, traffic and the sea, city and country. This amounts to a self-conscious occupation of time implicitly opposed to the exploitation of the viewers' time which is a commonplace of commercial cinema. In commercial cinema, time is consumable, waste-filled. In Tait's cinema, as in MacDiarmid's poetry, time is valuably lived, edged with movement and perception, unpredicted.

MacDiarmid's experimentation might be read as a strategy to move beyond established poetic expressions of Scottish life. Analagously, Tait's grappling with

realism and representation can also be seen as a response to the dominance of documentary modes in mid-twentieth-century Scottish moving image culture. Although Tait subscribed to Grierson's idea of the 'creative treatment of actuality', filming what was around her, she was wary of traditional documentary modes. She wrote:

> The contradictory or paradoxical thing is that in a documentary the real things depicted are liable to lose their reality by being photographed and presented in that 'documentary' way, and there's no poetry in that. IN poetry, something else happens. Hard to say what it is. Presence, let's say, soul or spirit, an empathy with whatever it is that's dwelt upon, feeling for it – to the point of identification. (2004: 132)

Attention paid in *MacDiarmid* to the class and culturally coded linguistic registers so often associated with traditional documentary modes shows Tait's alternative approach to documentary in action. In 1964, BBC radio and television was generally sustained by voices whose received-pronunciation English was at the far end of the spectrum from the sounds of vernacular Scots voices. The musical settings of MacDiarmid's poems by the composer F.G. Scott, which Tait uses in her film, bring the Scots tones and their velar fricatives into a high-art medium which must have affronted certain arbiters of taste of that era. By quoting such material, Tait's *MacDiarmid* evokes large questions about authority, the dissemination of information, how it is sanctioned or disapproved, and therefore how people are empowered or disenfranchised – all questions equally central to the poetic work of the film's human subject.

This question of language is crucial. The first MacDiarmid poem Tait uses in her film is 'You know not who I am' – a Scots version of a poem by the German Stefan George. It's worth pausing on this and looking at it in MacDiarmid's Scots and in an English translation. The poem catches the sense of the relation between spirit and form, an inherent quality in language itself, brilliantly. The poem seems to be about something you can't grasp or understand or comprehend, yet at the end, MacDiarmid identifies this quality as the thing that gives you courage and the wild and eager kiss that is always burning into your soul, something painful and yet inspiring and vital:

'You Know Not Who I Am'

After the German of Stefan George

Ye kenna wha I am – but this is fac'.
I ha'ena yet by ony word or ac'
Made mysel' human…an' sune I maun tak'
Anither guise to ony I've yet ta'en.
I'll cheenge: an' yet my ain true sel' I'll hain,
Tine only what ye ken as me. I' vain,
Ye'll seek to haud me, an' ye needna murn,
For to a form ye canna ken I'll turn
'Twixt ae braith an' the neist: an whan I'm gane
Ye'll ha'e o' me what ye ha'e haen o' a'
My kindred since licht on earth 'good da' –
The braith that gi'es ye courage, an' the fain
Wild kiss that aye into yer saul maun burn.

'You Know Not Who I Am'

After the German of Stefan George

You know not who I am – but this is fact
I have not yet by any word or act
Made myself human…and soon I must take
Another guise to any I've yet taken.
I'll change: and yet my own true self I'll keep,
Losing only what you know as me. In vain
You'll try to hold me, and you need not mourn,
For to a form you cannot know I'll turn
Between one breath and the next: and when I'm gone
You'll have of me what you have had of all
My kindred since light on earth began to dawn –
The breath that gives you courage, and the eager
Wild kiss that always into your soul must burn.

(1993: 22)

The poem works in the Scots version in a different way, with a different kind of authenticity. The English is more like a black-and-white photograph where everything is in place and in focus. There's nothing ungraspable. But the Scots is both present and somehow elusive, hard and real but also moving fast and emotionally quick. Using the poem to bookend *MacDiarmid* was something Tait felt provided 'a comment on the film and what it's about and on the partiality fully to be expected of a portrait' (2004: 133). Likewise, the images and audio fragments of MacDiarmid which Tait presents focus on the detail without trying to make any overarching generalisations. As with her other portraits, what she presents is a familiarity, something instantly recognizable but otherwise ineffable, unsayable, and utterly resistant to commercial imperatives. Tait's film brings out these elemental questions about energy, restlessness, time, growth and the creation of valuable things, both in nature and by human intervention.

Tait did experiment with the possibility of funding her filmmaking activities through established documentary routes. Her films also briefly attracted the attention of Grierson, who commented on them admirably after one of her 'Rose Street Festival' screenings. Yet nothing ever came of it. Her film *The Drift Back* (1956), about repopulation and the return of people from the Scottish mainland to Orkney, and from the Orkney mainland to its surrounding islands, follows traditional Griersonian lines most closely. One of her only fully-funded films, it was made with the support of the Orkney Education Committee and was intended to be the first of a series of films focusing on Orcadian subjects (Neely forthcoming).

In many ways the budgetary and technological constraints Tait confronted often served a positive function in the development of her distinctive poetic style, in a way comparable to written poetry enlivened by its need for verbal economy. One of Tait's earlier experiments, *Calypso* (1955) was made with 35 mm film stock that she found while in Rome and took the stock's existing Calypso music soundtrack as its starting point. Tait handpainted a series of colourful figures to accompany the soundtrack. The quick succession of images and the inevitable slight variations in the painted figure reproduced over and over again, cause the figure to tremble into life and reverberate with the energetic soundtrack. With many films, Tait would draw up an ideal plan, detailing what stock was necessary, what stock she had already and what she would be likely to obtain. This sometimes meant films were made over a number of years, as Tait accumulated the necessary footage. She would also consider the possibility of incorporating previously shot material into new films. These limitations demanded a degree of resourcefulness which often led to experimentation and innovation. Although Tait never had any involvement with the Free Cinema movement, the presumed feelings of liberation from commercial restrictions have some resonance in her working methods. Many of Tait's films, her portraits in particular, make no effort to conceal the interaction between filmmaker and subject.

When Tait established the uncertain nature of garnering external funding and the difficulty of selling her short films to television, she decided to abandon hope of commercial prospects and allow herself to fully experiment with the poetic. Sometimes her films take the text of poems as a starting point of exploration. Tait's

filmic interpretation of Gerard Manley Hopkins' 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo' (1955) is one clear example. On other occasions Tait's development process reflects her own background as a poet. Films often began life in the pages of her notebooks. Lists of places, images or scenes carve out the rough, sculptural forms. Her film *Where I Am is Here* (1964) Tait describes as:

> Starting with a six-line script which just noted down a kind of event to occur, and recur, my aim was to construct a film with its own logic, its own correspondences within itself, its own echoes and rhymes and comparisons, all through close exploration of the everyday, the commonplace, in the city, Edinburgh where I stayed at the time. (2004: 161)

The repetition and variation of images develop into a visual form of rhyming. A shot of birds sliding across the ice is juxtaposed against one of children doing the same. The impersonal and the personal, the general and the specific, the celebrated and the discarded, are each addressed with a shared observational intensity. The approach breaks with the authoritative and summative tendencies of documentary, but also challenges conventional articulations of Scottish culture. For Tait, there was an important distinction to be made between filming the 'landscape' and filming the 'scenery', particularly in Scotland where Tait felt scenery was too often shot out of convenience. Her landscapes aren't empty but are peopled. Her films often eschew the grand establishing shots of the landscape and instead focus on the detail. Tait explains *Where I Am is Here* as a film 'minutely examining the landscape of Edinburgh, or the townscape.' (2004: 81)

Tait's film poetry shares much in common with other avant-garde filmmakers, such as Maya Deren. For Deren, the poetic film inscribed a certain 'attitude'. She wrote: 'If philosophy is concerned with understanding the meaning of reality, then poetry – and art in general – is a celebration, a singing of values and meanings' (Deren 1979: 123). Tait, in her short piece 'Film-poem or poem-film', points to the challenge for filmmakers in attaining the ideal Deren describes. Tait's fondness for Lorca's poetic notion of 'stalking the image' (2004: 89) reflects her belief in the innate, lyrical qualities of everyday life. Her commitment to filming what was around her engaged with Lorca's idea that all things, regardless of their emotional or physical scale, must be given equal attention. In 'Now', a poem from *origins and elements,* the description of Tait's laboured attempts to satisfactorily register the movement of a flower opening its petals and the disappointment felt when she concludes it is impossible to do so, illustrates her devotion to understanding a reality eluding cursory glances. It is the concern with empathy and identification, a decelerated manner of looking, that distinguishes Tait's films from more objective, documentary modes, but also from a tradition of subjective diary films (Neely 2008).

Enrico Cocozza

Like Tait, Enrico Cocozza harboured professional aspirations for much of his filmmaking career. The Scottish amateur filmmaking network provided a supportive structure for his activities. Although Cocozza was already actively involved in this network before studying in Italy, the years following his return to Scotland were particularly prolific. Cocozza established a film unit and built a small studio in Wishaw, producing 63 films between 1952 and 1960, including some for The Italian

Consulate in Glasgow, The Scottish Film Council, and Star Informational films of New Jersey. (3/7/3: 2). He was also an active member of the Wishaw Film Society and served as honorary Treasurer and Secretary of The Connoisseur Film Circle, a club that eventually turned an old auction house behind Cocozza's mother's café into a cinema. Jean Cocteau, on whom Cocozza would later complete a PhD thesis, was listed as one of the society's patrons. Screenings were held three nights a week and members could borrow from a library of film books. Lectures also formed part of the Circle's activities: the brochure for the Film Circle's inaugural season of 1950-51 highlights the possibility of Forsyth Hardy delivering a lecture on Swedish cinema (3/7/20). Although the cinema's initial screenings largely consisted of European avant-garde films, eventually Cocozza would show his own films there. That Cocozza was equipped to both produce and distribute his own films, meant he was able to operate relatively independently, restricted only by his ability to fund his productions.

Like Tait, Cocozza's creativity also took literary form. He was a writer of short stories, and his novel *Assunta: The Story of Mrs. Joe's* Café, named after his mother who owned the Belhaven Café in Wishaw, was published in 1987. That said, Cocozza's links with the 'film poem' are not as strong as Tait's. *Porphyria* (1836) Robert Browning's poem about a jealous man who murders his lover, was the basis for his 1960 film of the same name and other projects, such as *Invocation* (1951), which Cocozza described as 'a visual interpretation of a poem' (3/7/4), evoke Tait's slow, meditative pacing. A poetic montage gives up-close attention to a wide variety of trees and wildlife in the changing seasons. Shots are long in duration, pausing on the texture of the bark of a silver birch, the movement of a stream, the sky, budding flowers, building intrigue and suspense through the repetition and variation of images and visual rhyming. The ending is delivered with a comic edge, a hand popping out from the earth, wriggling out into the free air. It breaks the serious tone and departs in similarity from Tait's work, but is indicative of Cocozza's general playfulness and irreverence towards avant-garde conventions. While Tait occasionally expressed uneasiness with the term 'avant-garde' used to describe her work, Cocozza, humorously interrogates avant-garde forms, presumably to challenge some of the established traditions in the amateur filmmaking circuit. In relation to the film described above, Cocozza explains it in his catalogue of work as 'quite beyond the Cosmo audience at the Scottish Film Festival' (3/7/4). Similarly, he refers to his film *The Living Ghost* (1959-60), which like *Chick's Day* won the major award at the amateur festival, as his 'last serious film – as pretentious as the rest' (3/7/4). Another film, *In the Shadow* (1957), he describes as 'another of these heavy symbolic efforts that are merely an excuse for some good low-key photography that does not cover the dreadful acting.' (3/7/4).

This sense of a challenge to canonical filmmaking conventions as strong as Tait's but more ludic in tone is captured in Edwin Morgan's poem 'Enricco Cocozza', in his collection *Cathures* (2002). That poem marries Cocozza's sense of playfulness with Morgan's own. Morgan evokes and writes in the voice of Cocozza as persona, poking fun at Griersonian documentary: '*Drifters* was shown to the Herring Board: Even the herring were bored. Sorry John!', and later in the same piece declaims, 'See worthiness? That is Scotland's shame.' For Morgan, as for his Cocozza, Glasgow 'is not worthy' – Glasgow 'is Gotham City', and problems have to be lived, if you want to shoot them. Cocozza and Morgan shared the experience of growing up homosexual in the early-twentieth-century west of Scotland, and if Morgan's Cocozza recognises

and realises his own sexual disposition alongside Eisenstein's ('He cruised the Berlin clubs…'), Morgan recognises how both these film-makers used their own imagination to break past the restrictions of their social contexts through their art. In his own poem Morgan evokes Cocozza's film *Bongo Erotico* (1959) as 'quite gallus, banging it out' and

Staring sultry at my favourite dancer
As he sways in his sloppy satin knickers.
Well it's not *Braveheart*…

It is rather, 'flesh and heat / Fleshed out of Fifties forbiddenness.' Morgan conjures up the cinemas he knew in Glasgow:

The picture-palaces were glittering –
Green's Playho se ('We want "u" in'),
Grand Central, Classic, Curzon –
Glittering but filled with shadows,
Community of shadows on the screen,
Community of shadows in the stalls,
Great coming and going –
(29)

Morgan's poem is a celebration of creativity in a specific time and place, working against social oppression and difficult personal circumstance, but it connects the specific character of Cocozza to a wider Scottish cultural history in which both the social oppressiveness and the personal creative resistance is seen in a context of paradoxically shared isolation, recognition of which is consolation and empowerment, both social and creative. The poem ends:

Whatever the shame, whatever the stain,
Dante would sigh to see
Those lost ones sitting in the smoky dark
With their *mal protesi nervi*, and above them
The pitiless projector's beam, behind them
The pitiless projector's whirr, before them,
The film, the film,
The one they watched, the one I watch them in.
To be free, you must show it, oh you must let it run!
(30)

Morgan's insistence on the value of Cocozza's film-making is taken to a further level of abstraction and affirmation in the poem-sequence entitled 'Demon' published at the end of *Cathures*. For Morgan, the Demon is a figure who intervenes in the life of individuals to remind us of the mischievous or perverse, the necessary energies in the dynamics of life. Whenever serenity threatens to turn into complacency, the Demon appears to upset what seems like stability. In 'A Little Catechism from the Demon' there is a reference to film which seems to fix an idea of what the medium can do:

> What is the film? It rolls, it tells.
> What is the film? *Under the Falls*.

Where is the theatre? Under the hill.
Where is the demon? Walking the hills.
Where is the victory? On the high tops.
Where is the fire? Far in the deep.
Where is the deep? Study the demon.
Where is the mountain? Set out now.
(113)

This configuration of images suggests specific relations between aspiration and research, the work of watching, reading, studying, learning from film, rolling and telling in the theatre under the hill.

Biographically, Morgan's interest in cinema is suggestive. Born in 1920, his middle-class childhood and young manhood in Glasgow, before and after his service with the Royal Army Medical Corps in the Middle East in the 1940s, saw increasing self-awareness of his homosexuality. In a city where public behaviour was closely observed and decorum insistently required, especially in certain professions, particular cinemas were well-established locations where such sexuality might be tacitly acknowledged. So Morgan's interest in film-houses as well as films has an unconventional aspect that cuts across the accepted conventions of film's commercial or normative social priorities. When he writes, at the end of the title poem of his breakthrough volume of 1968, 'The Second Life', 'Slip out of darkness, it is time' (54) he is talking not only of Glasgow rebuilding itself, the snake shedding its old skin (as a boy his nickname was Kaa, the rock-python from Kipling's *Jungle Book*), or himself gaining a new confidence at the age of forty, but also implicitly of the moment when you emerge from a darkened cinema into the lighted city streets.

Similarly, perhaps Cocozza's reluctance to conform within a culturally and socially conservative climate informed his ability to experiment in other areas of his life, filming in busy streets and parks of Wishaw and producing films that broke the established boundaries of the amateur circuit. At the Scottish Amateur Film Festival in 1949, his film *Fantasmagoria*, was declared 'the problem picture of the festival' (3/7/26:2). Filmed on Coltness Estate in Wishaw, the film is difficult to categorise. Essentially a horror film, Cocozza himself plays 'the evil one' upsetting the estate. The film begins with a big orchestral score accompanied by an eerie but poetic voice-over, one part poetic montage and one part homage to *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (Ed D Wood Jr., 1959). The festival adjudicator, Stephen Watts, a London film critic, described *Fantasmagoria* as 'an experiment which quite clearly required courage' but noted the uneasy coexistence of 'moments of drama and imagination' with 'moments of profound obscurity' where one character could either be read as 'Olivier playing Lear, or Santa Claus in a Glasgow store.' Watts surmised, 'If the film were shown in London in a specialised cinema the reactions of the film critics would range from people walking out in the middle of it to people who would say it was a new art` (3/7/26:2). Whether intentional or just a consequence of a limited budget and amateur actors, this conflict of meaning and intention is what makes Cocozza's work reverberate so powerfully. Even a decade later, when the Scottish Amateur Film Festival's adjudicator encouraged amateurs to 'be bold – experiment with new ideas – avoid the conventional – don't ape the professionals', Cocozza's *Porphyria* was offered the suggestion that 'the accent should not have been so localised' (3/7/26:4).

Cocozza's parodic engagement with a range of cultural texts informed his most innovative work, but also marked him out for some as 'unprofessional'. The demon in the fringes of Scottish filmmaking, he satirised the avant-garde, calling into question the strengths and limitations of amateur practices, but also the limitations of the preconceptions around Scottish filmmaking practices. His passionate engagement with a wide range of film styles and genres, and his inspired reinterpretations of them, share Morgan's sense of humour, but also his ability to re-imagine familiar settings in new contexts. In *Ad Infernum Buddy?* (1952) he parodies *Quo Vadis* (LeRoy, 1951); *Robot Three* (1951) is a film about a mad scientist, reminiscent of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde;* and in *Bongo Erotico* Cocozza explores the genre of erotic film, shooting in negative and capturing the movements of sparsely clad dancers in his bedroom. *Chick's Day*, about a teen from Wishaw who commits a robbery, takes the gangster genre as its starting point. As with many of Cocozza's films, genre is not sentence to creative confinement, but a site for artistic invention. The local dialect of the central character Chick forms the soundtrack's prominent voice-over. Rather than conform to generic conventions Cocozza retains local specificity, confidently appropriating various elements from a variety of genres. There are odd shifts in tone and Cocozza's approach is a playful one. In one scene involving the protagonist and his mother, the voice-over takes complete control of the soundtrack when her words are replaced by the protagonist's mocking, mimicked version. Sometimes the effect is a comic one, at others it is deeply moving. As Mitch Miller writes, 'this transference, from cool parody of documentary style analysis, to Cagney confronting the electric chair, his luck entirely spent, is effected without any perceptible incongruity. This is because, despite the affectation of gritty realism, the film is structured around Chick's own thoughts' (2002: 12). In this sense, it is the employment of local dialect that enables the reinvention and reinterpretations of established genres, the incongruity that allows for the interrogation of established modes. As Kenneth Broar writes, for Cocozza 'his Wishaw locality, far from being a parochial or limiting factor, quite to the contrary *fed* his internationalism, and in turn this outward-looking spirit fed into his life in Wishaw' (1999). *Chick's Day* was clearly successful in its ability to register with international audiences. The film had screenings in Moscow, Hong Kong, Australia and New Zealand and was distributed commercially by Contemporary Films of London. It also won awards in Spain and Portugal.

Conclusion

While some see the work of filmmakers such Cocozza, or even Tait for that matter, as failing to achieve the standards of professional, mainstream film production, others praise them for their experimentation. Whether looking at a particular time and place through avant-garde or other generic frameworks, where Tait and Cocozza's films best succeed is their commitment to the present of the national society and culture from from which both filmmakers worked. In this sense, Jonas Mekas' description of the film poem also resonates in both Tait and Cocozza's work:

> These films, their subjects, their themes, are very small. Just maybe a feeling, a mood. When we go to a commercial film, a theatrical narrative or art film, and when we ask what is the subject of that film, we usually have many obvious, 'important' themes we can point out. But these other films are very unpretentious. They don't want to change you by force. They don't work, they do not plot, to undermine you so you will be this or that.

(1969: 192)

Yet it is also important to remember that neither Tait nor Cocozza were opposed to mainstream filmmaking. Cocozza regularly appropriated mainstream genres and the films most greatly praised by Tait were mainstream: she was, for instance, an admirer of Jerry Lewis' work. For her, meaningful films could be made across the wide ranges of industrial practices. Tait's *Blue Black Permanent* may be about poetry, but it is not by any stretch of definition a film poem. It is a feature film made with large cast and crew and formed by its production contexts. But *Blue Black Permanent* does bear similarities to Mekas' description of the film poem, articulating a complex narrative form of storytelling, complicating rather than consolidating the various points of view associated with the three generations of women depicted in the film. In the October 1960 issue of the magazine *Scottish Field*, MacDiarmid wrote an essay about Margaret Tait, 'Intimate Film Making in Scotland', that praises Tait's films as a singular achievement in contemporary Scotland: she is 'ploughing a lonely furrow, but she has set a process in motion which is bound to develop' (417). Relying largely on her own desire to make films, Tait was as Mitch Miller describes, 'a square peg in the Tartan-cinema pigeonhole… worlds away from the Griersonian custodians of fact that dominated the Films of Scotland Committee, or the Scotch-misty London-manufactured stereotypes of the mainstream industry' (2006/07, 15). A similar claim can be made for Cocozza. Many of his films are modernist in their playful approaches, intertextual referencing, their fragmentation and subsequent shifts in subjectivity. Both Tait and Cocozza's work was mostly self-funded. The lack of local support or recognition for their experimental films can be blamed on an inability to recognize work that broke with established forms of representation, a problem which still confronts many Scottish filmmakers today.

Tait and Cocozza both engaged with the local and the specific, but it was their dialogue with international traditions that pulled them outside the boundaries of popular debate within Scotland. While Tait's films were screened internationally, the majority of screenings in Britain took place in England. Particularly within an avant-garde context, her work gained a significant degree of visibility after screenings at a number of festivals in the late 1970s and 1980s. This was a dilemma that Tait was acutely aware of. Writing for a dossier for the GFT in 1988, she reflected back on the earlier stages of her career and 'the dreadful days of the Films of Scotland Committee', describing how 'everybody was expected to turn out the same sort of stuff; and it was all awful.' (D97/27). It seems natural, considering this restrictive local filmmaking environment, that Tait drew inspiration from as many sources as possible. MacDiarmid was of interest to Tait because of shared poetic pursuits, but for other reasons too. Amongst Tait's papers in the principal archive of her papers in Orkney, is a clipping of a letter that MacDiarmid wrote to *Scotsman* in 1960, four years after the Films of Scotland Committee had been re-established. He writes:

> The hang-over of our past rural life has had most deplorable effects in the vast body of post-Burnsian doggerel, and, in my experience, the present folk-song cult plays into the hands of the great number of people who are hostile to all intellectual distinction and to experimental and "avant garde" work generally, and I regard their attitude as a menace to the arts not less serious than, and closely connected with, the pressure to reduce all arts to the level of mere entertainment.

(in Finlay 1996: 100)

Tait, no doubt, would have agreed, as her impressive body of film and literary work testifies.

Recent years have seen an increased interest in both Cocozza and Tait. The Scottish Screen Archive and Lux (formed from the London Filmmakers Co-op and London Electronic Arts/London Video Access) have played a key role in ensuring the restoration, preservation and circulation of their films. In 2001, Scottish Television produced *Surreally Scozzese*, a documentary on Cocozza's life and work. In 2004, following the restoration of Tait's films, the Edinburgh Film Festival hosted a retrospective of her work, supplemented by an international touring exhibition of the same. Tait and Cocozza's originality of formal construction and adept engagement with a range of cultural sources, both global and local, generic and specific, demonstrates a willingness to take risks and sometimes to fail – and for trusting to the authenticity of one's own experience. Their significance in Scottish culture goes far beyond that of cultural artefact. There is still much to learn from their empowering approaches to experimentalism. Their visions still have much to teach.

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