

Naked (1993)

Down a dark alleyway in Manchester, Johnny (David Thewlis) is having rough sex with a woman. It's hard to see exactly what is going on, but it's clear she is starting to object, to struggle. Johnny runs off. He steals a car and drives overnight down the motorway to London.

In the morning he turns up at the flat where his ex-girlfriend, Louise (Lesley Sharp), rents a room. Louise is out at work, so he talks to her flatmate Sophie (Katrin Cartlidge), a needy, desperate young woman who, like Johnny, is dressed in black. They drink tea and smoke a spliff together. While Sophie talks without moving her mouth much, Johnny spits his words out thick and fast. He is expressive and articulate, well-read and opinionated, disillusioned and nihilistic. Edgy, restless, humorous. An end-of-the-century street philosopher.

He shares his world view with Sophie: 'Have you ever thought you've already had the happiest moment in your whole fucking life and all you've got left to look forward to is sickness and purgatory?' She frowns: 'Oh shit.' When Louise returns from work, Johnny is rude and mocking, ridiculing her for being straight and responsible. Louise lies in her single bed listening to Johnny and Sophie having sex.

In the early morning Johnny talks aggressively to Louise. Later in the day Sophie shadows him round the flat, telling him how much she likes – and then loves – him. He is untouched. They have sex on the sofa. He grabs her hair and pulls it, fucks her violently, smashes her head on the arm of the sofa. Later that day he winds both Louise and Sophie up and then storms out of the flat.

Johnny wanders round Soho. He meets Archie (Ewen Bremner), a Scottish youth with a serious twitch who repeatedly shouts his girlfriend's name, 'Maggie!' When Archie wanders off to find Maggie, Johnny bumps into her, and they go off to find something to eat. 'Do you know that wherever you are in London, you're only 30 feet away from a rat?' asks Johnny. 'Does that freak you out?'

At a tea stall Maggie (Susan Vidler) suggests Johnny is 'about forty'; he says he's only twenty-seven. Johnny is surprisingly gentle and protective. Archie is reunited with Maggie on some waste ground and the couple go off into the night, shouting at one another. Johnny is left alone in the misty night.

Johnny finds shelter in the doorway of an empty office block. The security guard, Brian (Peter Wight), invites him in. They take a tour of the building. 'You could steal all the space and no one would notice,' observes Johnny. Once he starts talking, Johnny seems unable to stop. He shares his apocalyptic, nihilistic views with Brian, telling him, 'I don't have a future. Nobody has a future. The party's over, man.'

The two men look out at a woman (Deborah Maclaren) in the window of the flat opposite. Johnny teases Brian for spying on her. He leaves the building and goes to her flat. She is high on vodka and happy to let him in; like Sophie, she wants to be kissed, touched, loved. Johnny pulls her hair, taunts her, glancing out of the window in case Brian is watching. He tells her he can't fuck her as she looks like his mother. He sleeps in her armchair and then steals her novels.

He meets Brian again and they have breakfast in a nearby cafe. Brian shows him a photo of a dilapidated cottage in Ireland where he hopes to live once he retires. He warns Johnny with grave seriousness not to waste his life.

Johnny wanders the streets, then returns to the cafe. The young waitress (Gina McKee) invites him home. He looks through the books left on display by the absent gay owners of the flat and declares he's read most of them. She asks if he has a photo of his mum. 'I think you might find one over at the newsagent on the top shelf,' he spits. The conversation deteriorates and she tells him to 'just fuck off'.

Meanwhile, the landlord of the girls' flat, an obnoxious upper-class character calling himself Sebastian (Greg Cruttwell), has let

himself in before Sophie gets home. He has appeared earlier in the film, calling himself Jeremy, picking up a waitress in a restaurant and forcing her to have sex. Now he rips off her tights, buggers and rapes her. Louise comes back from work to find Sophie a gibbering wreck. The two women go to the pub to escape Jeremy/Sebastian.

The same night, Johnny is kicked to the ground by a man putting up posters and then beaten up by a gang of youths in a random attack in an alleyway. He returns to the flat with a bloody face and a damaged leg. The third flatmate, Sandra (Claire Skinner), returns from a disastrous safari in Zimbabwe and is appalled by the messy flat. Jeremy/Sebastian makes a pass at Louise but she ironically threatens him with castration; Sandra, who has an undisclosed history with him, is also angered by his presence. He finally leaves.

Louise and Johnny lock themselves in the bathroom and talk; Sophie sits on the stairs crying. Louise offers to hand in her notice and go to Manchester with Johnny. He agrees. It's only a few days since he arrived in London; the next day, while Louise is at work, he steals the money left by Jeremy, leaves the flat and hobbles slowly down the road.

* * *

AMY RAPHAEL: You may insist that all your films differ, but *Naked* is without doubt a departure both in terms of its truly epic nature and its move away from the intimate environs of the family home.

MIKE LEIGH: I tend to talk about *Naked* in terms of the apocalypse, the end of the century and impending doom, all of which are absolutely part of the very essence of the film. As I have said before, I have a general tendency or instinct to dish up something that's different to what went before. On that level, *Naked* is obviously as different to *Life Is Sweet* as *Topsy-Turvy* is to *Career Girls*. Indeed, you can find that in earlier sequences of films too.

On top of that, I was – and remain – very aware of the inevitable correlation between the fixed domestic environment and the risk of the narrow view of a limited domestic film. With *Naked* I was embracing the notion of a film that by its very nature was going to be peripatetic or picaresque. It was a very deliberate, conscious

device to get away from being locked in another street with another bloody family and another domestic situation. Not that *Naked* isn't about families, because it is in some ways; after all, the characters are in retreat from their families or on the run from family situations. But in terms of consciously liberating myself to paint a bigger canvas, that was part and parcel of it.

Did you feel as though your work was becoming too easy to label, perhaps even homogeneous?

In a way I did, yes. In that sense, I thought it really important to break away from the perception of what a Mike Leigh film was. Even Michael Coveney, in his excellent book *The World According to Mike Leigh*, acknowledges how people talk about 'a Mike Leigh situation' or 'a Mike Leigh character'. It's fair enough and I don't in any way disagree or object to it, but even now, after a very long journey, when people say such things they still mean situations or characters in *Abigail's Party* and *Nuts in May*, while actually I've moved on and on.

So in the early 1990s I was really keen to shed those shackles. Having shed them in *Naked*, I returned to a domestic world in *Secrets & Lies*. But the epic dimensions of *Naked* had liberated me, and they are there in *Secrets & Lies* too. Without *Naked* before it, I don't think *Secrets & Lies* would have had the same sense of scale in terms of emotions and dynamics.

Did you have a sense of the journey you'd made from *Bleak Moments* to *Naked*?

Absolutely. When I made *Bleak Moments* it seemed a given that there was an inevitable correlation between my way of working and catatonic or non-communicative characters. The fact is, that's rubbish and there's no correlation in any shape or form. There are garrulous characters much earlier on – Keith and Candice-Marie have something to say in *Nuts in May* – but, of course, *Naked* is a very deliberate attempt to go beyond that. It's a conscious decision on my part to investigate a character who not only has a great deal to say but also has actual ideas on the go, which in themselves are extraordinary enough to explore.

So you wouldn't have been ready to make this film any earlier?

No. I don't think so. If you look at Cyril and Shirley in *High Hopes*, you can see that I'm already looking at the way people express ideas and views. Which is a far cry from some of the earlier films. You could argue that Sylvia in *Bleak Moments* is capable of expressing ideas, but she doesn't actually do so.

But no, I don't think I could have made *Naked* any earlier. And also, given what I've been talking about, it's by no means insignificant that *Naked* was the first film to go to Cannes. It won two prizes; it was the breakthrough film.

I keep returning to the political backdrop in Britain as you were making the last half-dozen films, and it's just as relevant in Naked.

None of my films is particularly about Britain, and *Naked* especially is not. There are references to the fact that Johnny comes from Manchester and travels to London, but they could be any cities; it's a universal landscape. The preoccupations of *Naked* are much wider than the state of John Major's Britain. There's a reference to Margaret Thatcher, but only a minor one.

Yet this was the era of the infamous Sun headline 'If Kinnock Wins Today, Will the Last Person in Britain Please Turn Out the Lights?' (April 1992). And homelessness was a big issue.

When we made *Life Is Sweet*, I disappeared from the West End for nine months while we rehearsed and shot the film. When I returned to do the post-production, there was suddenly a proliferation of people sleeping on the streets. When I started thinking about *Naked*, I absolutely had it in mind to make a film about homelessness. That was definitely an objective. But as I pursued it – and once again I discovered the film through making it – it became abundantly clear that it wasn't about homelessness as such.

Although some people have seen it or remembered it as being about Johnny the homeless person, he's not homeless: at the beginning of the film you see him go back to his house in Manchester and pick up his luggage. The last time you see him is only a few days later. The film strays across the main road of the subject of

homelessness but it's not really about that at all. It merely evokes its spirit. You could argue that Archie and Maggie are not homeless yet, although that will happen. For now, though, it's just the insecurity of having just arrived in London.

Johnny may not be homeless, but watching the film one feels he may become so very quickly.

Sure. From the perspective of the chauffeur of the Rolls-Royce who briefly thinks Johnny's the client he's been waiting to pick up, he is either a pop star or a vagrant.

Why do you think people found Naked so hard to watch when it first came out?

Anyone that criticised it in that way wasn't getting the film. If you dig out the reviews, you'll find questions such as this: why does every woman in the film allow herself to be a victim, to be a doormat? And it's just not true. It's not true of Louise, for a start. It's a far more complex film than those questions suggest, but there were certain kinds of old-fashioned 1980s quasi-left-wing reactionary attitudes on the go.

I saw a BBC programme the other night about feminists in the



2.4 *Naked*: Johnny (David Thewlis) and Sophie (Katrin Cartlidge).

1970s. There were even crèches in Camden where they wouldn't allow boy children! That was the spirit of the criticism of *Naked* at the time. When the film came out, there was a Q&A at the Screen on the Green in Islington and a 'feminist' started attacking it. What she didn't know was that Katrin Cartlidge, Lesley Sharp, Deborah Maclaren and Claire Skinner were all in the audience. They had this woman for breakfast. They weren't having it. No woman involved in the film is the type who would allow herself to be a doormat. We'd never have got the film made. They'd have cut my balls off first. They were nothing if not feminists.

You were clearly disappointed by accusations of misogyny.

No one could have anticipated some of the nonsense that the film would endure at first, nor the flak it would get from so-called feminist quarters. But when we talk about the early fate of *Naked* – and I say early because you'd never hear those kinds of comments or criticisms from young feminist women now – it's vital to discuss the spirit of the shoot. It was a very smart, mixed crew. There was a female designer, art director, boom swinger.

We made a point always that when we shot the scenes which were tough going from an actress's point of view – such as the scene in which Sophie is raped by Jeremy/Sebastian – there wasn't a room full of blokes like there would've been in the old days. And Heather Storr, who always works with me as script supervisor, was around. Having said that, the following is true: the film was shot from the autumn into the winter and it was, at times, a tough experience.

It's also important to remember, I think, that guys like Johnny are very charismatic. There's obviously never an excuse for violent behaviour, but such men exist and women seem to fall time and again for men who they think they can help or mother or whatever.

Absolutely. Of course these men exist.

*If I'm honest, David Thewlis is oddly attractive in *Naked*. He's dirty and out of control and angry, but he's also fiercely bright and he has ideas.*



25 *Naked*: Johnny (David Thewlis).

I agree. And life is never straightforward; people are complicated.

I also don't feel as though the scenes where Johnny initiates sex – either with Sophie or the woman in the window – are in any way glamorous or glossy. They are raw and uncomfortable.

All of that is absolutely right. The film is in no way a celebration of male sadism. The other character that Greg Crutwell gives us – Jeremy/Sebastian or whatever he's really called – is there to offset Johnny. I thought it was important to see somebody who actually is a rapist.

But whatever I say, the perceived wisdom in some quarters is that *Naked* is a misogynistic film. And a cynical film. It's absolutely not a misogynistic film because it's in no way a celebration of misogyny; it's a criticism of it. Many critics have asserted that Johnny is a cynic. On the contrary, Johnny is a frustrated, disappointed, embittered idealist. The very opposite of a cynic. He believes in real values. He's entirely disillusioned about the way people and things are. Having said that, *Naked* survived in all sorts of places and contexts as a voice of the time. Particularly for young people. And it has remained immensely popular.

You just alluded to it being a tough film to make for both cast and crew.

Absolutely. The mood of the film really took us over. Not really in any negative way, given that people were very behind it and very committed to it, but it was very pervasive and powerful. The way it was lit and the concentration . . . when a film's really organic it gets to people.

You mention the way the film was lit: the look of Naked is particularly important, creating as it does an edgy, bleak and chilling atmosphere. Did cinematographer Dick Pope decide to use the 'bleach bypass process' that makes it look as though it's washed out in black and blue? Or did you decide together?

What happened is what always happens. The various artists or heads of departments who collaborate with me knowingly – as opposed to the actors who are unknowing – sit and wait till I'm able to give them a clue. One day during these rehearsals I was able to have lunch with Dick Pope and Alison Chitty – the production designer – and talk about a nocturnal journey, a sense of doom. A solo guy on this journey, et cetera. Out of that we started to talk about tone, mood, colour palette.

Then we did what we've subsequently done more regularly, which is to shoot tests of an entirely visual nature, using stand-ins to represent the actors who were going to be the central protagonists. Dick Pope, Alison Chitty, Lindy Hemming the costume designer, Christine Blundell the make-up designer and myself met up and talked again about tone, palette, film stocks. Dick mentioned the possibility of using bleach bypass, so we sat down in a preview theatre and looked at reels from a whole lot of different films that had been shot using that process, including *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. It seemed obvious that it was what we should use.

When it came to the shoot, the colour control was obsessive on Alison Chitty's part, to the extent that in Brian's office block you actually see a fire bell that is dark grey because she'd had it painted. When we did a shot in the street, there was a red car and no one could locate a driver; the guys finally had to bounce it out of the way.

Just to dwell on the subject of Alison Chitty for a moment, who

remains a very close friend: until *Life Is Sweet* she hadn't designed films. In the end she only did three, including *Secrets & Lies*. She has never designed a film with me since, because fundamentally she doesn't like it. She is very much a play and opera designer, and although she appreciates film, she doesn't like the fact that as a designer you design the whole thing, hand it over to the director and cinematographer, and they then decide on the images. Which is obviously not how it works in the theatre – at least, that's her argument. She's not in the least bit aggressive about it; it's just the path she's chosen to tread. I think her achievement on *Naked* is extraordinary. But the decision to carry the campaign against red to its end is operatic to say the least. Of course, more recently Alison designed my play, *Two Thousand Years*, at the National Theatre.

I presume you and Alison decided on Brian's office together.

I thought Brian should be in a working office block because my experience of working for Securicor in the 1960s was of guarding people's offices. One day Alison came back very excited and announced she had a great idea: what if it's an empty office block with just space that's not yet been let? I thought it was fantastic. A great idea, absolutely relevant to the central ideas that were evolving. Much better than my idea, much more inspired.

The house that you finally found for the girls in Dalston was perfect.

There were lots of feasible flats but none was very interesting. I had a real resistance to using just another ordinary domestic house in a street. It had to have an edge. Alison kept asking me to explain more. Then one day she ran in with the location manager, shouting, 'We've got it! We've got it! It's in Dalston! We must go there immediately.' Which we did. And, of course, it was fantastic, an extraordinary Gothic house. Not only is it interesting in itself, but what made it special – and absolutely squared with what I wanted – is that it's not just a house in a straight line in a street. It had an epic feel: you could look at it from a hundred and one different angles, and – witness the end of the film – you could see it from about half a mile down the street. Of course, finding the house absolutely liberated us. We'd found that edge I was looking for.

Did you also have problems finding a rehearsal space?

I wanted to film *Naked* in the West End, so we needed to find a place that was central. We eventually found a disused office block that had belonged to the ILEA, just off Marylebone Lane. And that's where the film was developed.

*You'll no doubt argue that you could say the same for all your films, but it's hard to imagine any other actors playing the central parts in *Naked*, especially when one thinks of David Thewlis's extraordinary performance.*

I agree about Thewlis. But it's hard to make any generalisations. Greg Crutwell has come in for an unnecessary and unfortunate amount of flak for his Jeremy/Sebastian character, for creating a caricature. I don't think it's true. I was in a pub in Poland Street last night with some friends and there were a whole load of people baying. Someone came up to me and asked if I was Mike Leigh. They bought me a bottle of wine. They were only in their early to mid-thirties and they were Jeremy/Sebastian types, basically.

The meat and bones of *Naked* were, of course, David Thewlis, Lesley Sharp and Katrin Cartlidge. Here's an interesting, convoluted bit of background to this film that shows it's important to bend your own rules sometimes. The accepted etiquette when casting is this: you check an actor's availability and make it clear it's a serious request. If the agent then phones back and says another project has come up, you have to make a decision: let it go or agree to ask the actor to be in the film. In the case of Claire Skinner, we had checked her availability and later decided she should play a central character. When we called the agent to make the offer, we were told she wasn't available as she was doing a series with Lenny Henry. I phoned her up and found out they'd forgotten to tell her or us. It's just what many agents are like. So I asked if she'd join us late, when she'd finished the TV series, as Stephen Rea had done in *Four Days in July*, and bring up the rear. I had no idea what that meant or what she might be doing, but she agreed. If you think about the logic of it, that's complicated because she plays a character whose flat the girls live in. What happened was this: I invented a nurse called Sandra, a practical, down-to-earth woman who was always conveniently on ward duty and therefore not around. The



26 *Naked*: Sandra (Claire Skinner), with Louise (Lesley Sharp) and Sophie (Katrin Cartlidge) on the bed

other actors can't do improvisations with a character who isn't played by an actor. She was a standard off-screen character.

When Claire was due to join in, I decided to put in her version of Sandra retrospectively, as it were. Of course, the Sandra she and I invented was an altogether nuttier lady than the first version, but still practical and down to earth underneath it all. And we went back and re-explored – or explored in greater depth – all her relationships. So, with the appropriate adjustments, we integrated her into the world of the story, including the liaison she'd obviously had at some stage with the landlord.

So we'd done it back to front. I'd broken my own rules. I often do. Rules are there to be broken. It's all about telling a dramatic story, not playing a sport.

Going back to Thewlis for a moment: is it true that you have a theory about everybody seeing a dead body at least once and you wanted him to see one?

I think everybody should experience a whole number of things. I certainly think all artists, all actors should see a dead body and should be confronted by all manner of experiences. Like seeing a baby being born. It is certainly obvious in the context of what we

were doing in *Naked* that it would make sense for David to go and have the experience of seeing a dead body. Sometimes I get actors to do things that the characters wouldn't necessarily do. Things often work in a lateral, more Zen kind of way.

Here's another sideline anecdote. During the rehearsals of *Naked*, one of the big stories that hit the papers was the vexed question of the 'Squidgy tapes'. The question was whether they were real, if it really was Princess Diana and James Hewitt or if it was actors. The *Guardian* paid me £100 to listen to them. I came to the very quick and easy conclusion that there was no way it could be actors. It was for real, because I know what actors improvising sound like and I could have detected it. For actors to have arrived at what was on that tape would have been a very long operation, and not many actors have those specific skills, let alone directors to make it happen.

We talked earlier of the criticisms levelled at Naked, but when you watch it now what stands out?

The section of the film that is most interesting to discuss is this: Johnny has escaped, he's come down to London. For the first passage of the film after that it's fairly claustrophobic and he's mostly in the flat with the two women. There's a sense of being trapped which finally manifests itself in the scene where Louise is watching the box and Johnny is prowling around, followed by Sophie. They go from the living room to the kitchen to the stairs and back to the living room.

From a technical or *mise-en-scène* point of view it's an interesting scene because I've constructed the action to serve the shot. I wanted to get the feel of Johnny prowling around like an animal in a cage, so I decided to use a continuous panning shot, from the kitchen to the living room, to and fro. That scene is lit in a very heightened way because Dick Pope and Alison Chitty colluded and used wicker lampshades that created a speckled effect everywhere. Of course, the score is building throughout that scene to a crescendo, which it hits as Johnny finally leaves the house, rushes down the steps and runs across the road. What I love about that exterior shot is that there's a sign up with arrows pointing in two different directions – a great piece of synchronicity.

The music – which is inspired Andrew Dickson, with Skaila Kanga playing the harp – crashes to a final note there. The next section of the film, when Johnny goes into Soho, is played without music, which makes it feel as though it's shot in documentary mode, although it isn't. All the action round Brewer Street and Tottenham Court Road was shot in one night without any crowd control; people are wandering by, cars go past. So there's a definite sense of the real texture of the outside world. It's a stark contrast to the taut and controlled mood inside the house.

Within that whole sequence there's a mixture of two quite different sorts of locations. In a way, there's a sort of shift back and forwards in style. There are the scenes where you see Johnny and Maggie walking in that great wide long shot and there's a fire and dogs and he's talking about the guts of London. Then they walk over a narrow bridge that's lit in a very heightened way, and finally they arrive at the outdoor cafe. It's a strange, barren landscape that is, in fact, the remains of a railway station near Brick Lane that was closed in 1937.

Those scenes, which are all very heightened and for which the music returns, are intercut with the very naturalistic scenes shot around Tottenham Court Road and the West End. When I proposed this, everybody worried that it wouldn't match. But I wanted to create a world that wasn't a world; not a literal world, a poetic world.

And Naked, of course, is defined by its language more than any Mike Leigh film before it.

That's not strictly accurate. All my films are defined by their language, in the sense that I've been consistently concerned with achieving accurate, heightened, imaginative dialogue.

Of course, what you mean is that Johnny is given to greater flights of ideas and verbosity than any previous character. And David Thewlis was quite brilliant at doing it. But the dialogue style informed the whole film, and the rest of the cast was well up to it, not least Peter Wight and, when she finally showed up, Claire Skinner, with Sandra's wonderful elliptical utterances.

Let's talk about Johnny and Louise. It seems unlikely they spent a

year going out; she appears to be fairly straight, honest, calm, while he is a wild, angry young man. Was she simply taken in by his charisma and charm?

Well, they did go out for a year. You said yourself that you can imagine getting involved with a guy like that under certain circumstances. Well, that's what happened to her, in a nutshell!

She obviously knows that his heart is in the right place. I know from the back story that when she was going out with him she thought he was redeemable, and she still thinks that now. But she got fed up of him and bugged off to London. She doesn't want to know, but he gets beaten up and there they are in the bathroom . . . Plainly there's real feeling between them, and they both know it.

Desperate for love, Sophie is also taken with Johnny. Louise at least has forged a life for herself in London post-Johnny; Sophie appears to be a lost cause, declaring love for him within hours of meeting him.

What I find interesting about Sophie is that for all her nonsense, she comes out with some very clear thoughts. The most truthful thing she says – and the truth that lies at the heart of the film, certainly in its view of the relationship between men and women – is



27 *Naked*: Louise (Lesley Sharp) and Johnny (David Thewlis).

this: 'What they start off loving you for they end up hating you for.' It's so true. And I'm as guilty of that as any other bloke.

Again, she's a wasted person. And also, in the context of a film that is about the relationship between the moment we're in and all the moments in time, it's important that here is a woman who is pathologically incapable of doing anything other than feed off the moment. She wants the gratification and the returns in the moment. Yet Sophie's got a sense of humour. Like all needy, insecure people she's capable of forgetting it at times, but it's definitely there.

You became close friends with Katrin Cartlidge during the making of Naked and were devastated when she died suddenly in September 2002, at the age of just forty-one.

It's impossible to talk about Katrin, this film and *Career Girls* without simply being overcome by an enormous emotional sense of loss. It's indescribable. Plenty of people have died, and obviously one feels bad and sad about them, but very few have died and left me with such enduring and inconsolable grief. I am one of a whole bunch of people who still say, 'I can't believe she's not going to show up and have lunch.'

I first auditioned her around 1983. She had been a child actress. Alison Steadman had been in a TV play with Katrin when she was a kid, so she'd been around for ages. I'd seen her in various things and thought she was quite interesting. Then I saw Steven Berkoff's production of Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, which was very heightened, extraordinary and funny. I thought she was fascinating in that. She was on tour with it in Japan when I phoned her up and asked if she'd like to be in the film. She said yes instantly.

The great thing about Katrin was that she'd turn up every day and say, 'This is such a gas!' She loved it. She was great company and very easy. Just fun, basically. And funny.

She gives an astonishing performance as Sophie . . .

Well, you can imagine a character like Sophie in the hands of an actress who is even in the slightest way like that herself . . . it would be disastrous. But the great thing about Katrin – and the cool thing about her – was that she wasn't like that at all. She

could get into a character, get into the danger of it, yet not in any way run the risk of being damaged by it and therefore not run the risk of getting it wrong. I remember during the improvisations exploring Sophie's character, and it was just fantastic.

The other major player in this film is the indomitable Lesley Sharp. She was going to be in the film that never happened. She was famously in *Road*, the BBC film of Jim Cartwright's play, directed by Alan Clarke, and in the latter's *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*. She's good, clear, smart. The shared intelligence of that cast informed the film in a very particular way.

Let's not forget Peter Wight: the scene between Brian and Johnny in the empty offices must be one of the best examples of how your method pushes actors to their linguistic limits.

Ah yes, the great Peter Wight. I decided in constructing the elements of *Naked* that we needed to create a situation where we could explore Johnny in debate with somebody about all his preoccupations. I suppose I'd say that the creation and shooting of that material was the toughest I've experienced anywhere along the line. We did the basic improvisations for it in the office block in which we happened to be rehearsing in Marylebone.

I'd set up the woman in the window – played beautifully by Deborah Maclaren – because we actually had that configuration there. We'd opened up the raw premise of the thing. As with all these things, the improvisation is not very interesting when compared to the end product. It's merely a pointer, a sketch, a collection of cartoons in the Raphael sense.

What motivates Johnny to go and see the 'woman in the window'? Does he go to seduce her because he knows Brian will be watching and he wants to prove he can?

This is something I'd rather leave you, the viewer, to decide. But . . . OK. She looks like she might be interesting. Johnny is obviously in some way turned on by the prospect of an early middle-aged woman dancing by herself and being kind of sexy in some way. And yeah, in some ways it is to do with Brian. He's either doing it for Brian or to irritate him. Or to give Brian something to get off on. Beyond that, who knows?

How immersed did David Thewlis become in Johnny?

He was actually living in a Soho bedsit. Whatever you do on this scale of involvement, it gets into your bloodstream. So, plainly, playing Johnny day in, day out for months on end inevitably affected him. But the notion that it took him over completely is simply ridiculous. Of course, he wasn't up for going out on the razz because he was busy working on *Naked*. He was reading constantly, catching up for Johnny.

The myth that he was totally immersed in the character throughout the shoot was further perpetuated by an incident that took place while we were shooting the scene where you see him by himself in central London with crowds of people walking past. The scene was shot outside Leicester Square tube station. We put the 35mm camera with a 1,000-foot magazine in the middle of the road on a traffic island and wrapped it in bin liners. Such techniques are all Dick Pope's. He had massive experience of working as a documentary cameraman on Granada's *World in Action* back in the 1970s. This is a man who's been into the sweatshops of Hong Kong with a camera disguised as a briefcase. So we'd set up the shot of Thewlis outside the tube station specifically so no one would notice he was there. The actor Kenneth Cranham came out of the station, saw David and started chatting to him. What Ken experienced at that moment was David in a mood and a terrible state, but the truth is that he was in character because we were shooting. And that's how the story started.

I've read that Thewlis was very turned on by all the reading and learning he did for Johnny.

Once we'd got the hang of Johnny, David would just go off and read while I was working with the other actors. Amazing things would happen. One day, for example, he rushed in and said, 'You won't believe this! I ran into this nutter in Soho who was handing out these pamphlets.' It was the stuff about bar codes. It was fantastic, crazy, so we used it.

Although it was rewarding, it was also a ludicrously tough assignment. As always, we had to create the action in the location before shooting it. You only have access to a location for a limited amount of time. In the planning meeting before the shoot we

couldn't work out how to rehearse night scenes during the day. Someone very smartly pointed out that we needed to rehearse at night too so that it was the right atmosphere. We spent about ten days or a fortnight in permanent night-time mode rehearsing this fucking thing in the building, with Johnny discussing the entire bloody length and breadth of the meaning of life. It was desperate, it really was.

The shoots were all at night too. And my charming Greek-Cypriot neighbours in north London had a faulty burglar alarm in their house which went off at 10 a.m. every morning while they were at work. I'd arrive home really late and hope to sleep till lunchtime, but never made it.

Why does Brian allow himself to be verbally abused by Johnny and let him stay for so long? Is it simply down to loneliness?

Yes. It's great for Brian: suddenly somebody interesting turns up. Part of the answer comes in the scene in the cafe. He's developed some kind of father-like soft spot for Johnny. He's the only person in the film who has any advice or guidance for Johnny: 'Don't waste your life.' That comes from something somebody said to me once, but I won't go into the details. My films are full of such personal things.

The timing of Brian's advice is everything: you can actually see the power between them shift slightly. Johnny is usually the one asking awkward questions, making demands, dominating the relationship.

For once he's on the back foot. A very important moment for that reason, if no other.

Yet he reverts to type pretty much immediately when he meets Gina McKee's cafe girl.

And she cracks up for her own reasons. He just wants a bed for the night.

She asks if he has a photo of his mum, and he replies that she might find one on the top shelf at the newsagent's across the road. We

understand why he might behave in the way he does towards women, although we do not forgive him.

Absolutely. But some people are disposed to take that comment literally. He doesn't mean his mum is actually a whore or a cheese-cake model; he's just being extremely rude about her. Anyway, shortly afterwards we meet the gorgeous Sandra. She shows up in her safari kit in the middle of all this chaos; you couldn't sit in a room and write such a scene.

The juxtaposition of Johnny lying on the sofa, dirty, ragged, in a mess both physically and mentally, with Sandra tidying up the flat, making order out of chaos.

What's great is when she says, 'My wanker boyfriend.' We all know holidays are the best place for relationships to be destroyed (*laughs*). I don't think anyone should underestimate the fact that, in that brief period at the end of the film, Sandra really is as literary an achievement as Johnny. If I were allowed to, I'd say there was particularly good dialogue in that scene.

Following a scene that pleased you so much, you weren't sure how to end the film.

It was certainly a problem for a while. I discussed it at length with David: does he stay? Does he go? Does he return to Manchester or stay in London? Talking about it from my point of view as a filmmaker, there's a big difference between the sort of ideas you have before you start shooting a film and what sort of creative process goes on when you've shot 99 per cent of the film, your cinematic juices are flowing and you've got the hang of the film you're making. It's important to remember that I can only make a decision about the ending when I've shot most of the film.

So the question of 'What does he do?' translates into 'How does the film end?' Which in turn translates into 'What is the cinematic image?' I couldn't get it. I couldn't see what the answer was. I could see all the possibilities but no one decision seemed right. Do you see Johnny and Louise getting on the bus and, if so, so what?

Every day I drove to the location from north London all the way down the road where Louise's house was. I could see the house at

the end of the street. I'd turn off and park at the unit base in the school playground. So every day I'd be looking at the house. I knew I enjoyed looking down the road at the house but I wasn't really paying attention; I was thinking about breakfast or the *Today* programme. Then one day – ping! – I suddenly got it. I'd been driving down the shot, in reverse, for weeks. It had been staring me in the face. The minute I realised what the shot should be, I knew what the image had to be: Johnny hobbling down the road, with the house receding behind him. I shared it with David Thewlis and then with Dick Pope. Dick said we couldn't track down the road because it's too long and you'd see the tracks. We couldn't do it handheld because it would be too clumsy. The only way to do it was with a Steadicam, so we hired one for the day. It's the only Steadicam shot anywhere in any of my films. We did bring a guy with a Steadicam up to the prison in Oxford when we shot *Vera Drake*, but we sent him home after twenty minutes with half his fee. We'd changed our minds.

Frankly, the last shot of *Naked* is a joy to watch. Every time I go to a screening I certainly make sure I'm there for it.

Is there a theme that pulls the film together, other than the obvious one of modern isolation? It's probably fair to say that Johnny, irritated with everyone around him, chooses his own company at the end...

There are other important things about *Naked*. Brian is guarding an office whose destiny is an unknown function. The 'woman in the window' is in a room with a map of Ireland on the wall that she hasn't even noticed. Why is it there? The waitress is living in a flat owned by two camp gay men who've gone off to America, but she doesn't know who they are. There are books in the flat she hasn't noticed or read. Not to mention all that stuff about Sandra's Buddha, Catholicism and maps of the body. Even in the bathroom, when Johnny and Louise are sitting on the floor, there's a towel behind them inscribed with 'NHS'. In other words, this is an enigmatic world.

Then there's Archie and Maggie. I was hitch-hiking alone from London to Marseille in 1961 in order to catch a Turkish ship to Israel. I hooked up with a guy in the pissing rain on the road from

Boulogne to Paris called Wilson McDougall. His outstanding characteristic was that he was extremely thick. He was from Paisley and he wore a kilt. He was seriously out of his depth and a long way from home. He was paranoid, aggressive and in need of guidance. We were initially picked up by an elderly English lady in one of those half-timbered Morris Travellers. She immediately bawled us out about how hitch-hiking gave the English a bad name and would we stop doing it immediately, please? At which point she turfed us out.

We then got a lift to Paris from an extremely nice guy in a smart Citroën. He insisted on putting us up in his Paris apartment. He had a wife with whom one instantly fell in love, remaining so ever since (*laughs*). She was completely gorgeous. They took us out for a very nice supper, and then Wilson and I slept in a double bed. I was stuck with him. I had to get on the road as I only had six days before the boat left. So I gave him the slip in the Gare St Lazare. He lodged in my head for many years. Goodness knows what happened to him. I hope he went back to Scotland.

Did you pick up hitch-hikers later in life?

Yes. One day in the early 1970s Miss Steadman and I were driving to Liverpool in our Beetle and we picked up a Scottish guy from outside Glasgow who was another version of Wilson McDougall. I picked up hitch-hikers till, sadly and strangely, they ceased to exist. This guy had gone down to London to get a job, had hung around King's Cross for several days, had categorically not had a wash of any sort, and was now going back to Scotland. You just want someone to look after these guys, to tell them to please stay in Scotland. Now you see them having been drawn into the whole crack number, mingling with the tourists in the West End.

Anyway, we're driving up the M6 with this guy, and in no time we were virtually retching at his pong. So I said to Alison, 'We're a bit early, shall we go and see Paul and Jenny in Wolverhampton?' She kept asking, 'Who?' till she finally twigged and we managed to dump our passenger at a service station and continue the journey with our windows wide open.

These are the sorts of sources that informed Archie, with his bleat of 'Maggie!' Interestingly enough, given that we are explaining this

film in a completely unprecedented manner, Archie manifests all received notions of male behaviour towards Maggie, while she is quite bright and sharp. I love it when she says to Johnny, 'How old are you? About forty?' He says twenty-seven, but she thinks it's completely implausible. Johnny and Thewlis were, at that moment, twenty-seven.

Didn't David Thewlis and Ewen Bremner almost get arrested while improvising their scenes together?

One day, in the summer of 1992, there was a late-afternoon rehearsal with David and Ewen. I suggested we go out and they do an improvisation in the street. They went off, so I did as I always do, which is to clock what's happening by keeping close to the actors but out of sight. I'd organised it so that David was sitting on the steps of a church in Marylebone, and Ewen showed up. They were talking, and every so often Ewen would yell, 'Maggie!' He kept shouting at passers-by. All that manic behaviour was going on. Somebody at an upstairs window asked him to stop shouting; he told them to fuck off.

Three minutes later a cop car screeched to a halt. The fuzz jumped out, ready to roll the guys. So I leapt in and said, 'Come out of character!' The coppers were completely bemused. I told them we were rehearsing a film. They wanted to know where the cameras were. They didn't believe me, so I told them I had an assistant round the corner in an office who would corroborate the story. In the end it was all OK.

Something similar happened in *High Hopes*. There was an improvisation with Jason Watkins, who, as Wayne, had to wander around King's Cross with his suitcase trying to find an address. I think my instruction was this: if you see anyone else that you know is a member of the cast, then you know they're in character. So he came across Phil Davis, who was fixing his bike. I had deliberately invented an address that didn't exist so that there'd be no risk that Phil would know where it was and so would have to go inside to find the A-Z.

Well, Wayne showed up and they're just standing there wondering where this address might be when – apparently from nowhere – an enormous horse materialised with a uniformed superintend-

ent sitting in the saddle. He asked if everything was OK. They stayed in character, of course. The innocent Wayne asked if he knew where the address was. I thought, 'Oh Christ.' Of course, the copper didn't know the street, so he got on his walkie-talkie. I couldn't stand it any more, so I leapt out shouting, 'Come out of character!' Another confused member of the Metropolitan Police.

At what point did you decide to call the film Naked?

As always, there was a big struggle with the title. I think if Desmond Morris hadn't already written his book, I might have called it *The Naked Ape*, as Johnny makes lots of references to monkeys. At some stage in the proceedings, quite a while after it had been generally released, we had a communication from the distributor in Singapore. The authorities wouldn't allow a poster in the street saying '*Naked*'. Could they have an alternative title? Rather than get into a bother about it – and what happens in Singapore doesn't keep me awake at night – I dredged up a title that I'd previously rejected: *Raw*. I was only inhibited about using it because of the wonderful graphic magazine of that name. So all over the streets of Singapore the posters said *Raw*, but when you went to the cinema the film was still called *Naked*.

Bleak Moments, I discovered after the event, was bought by an American distributor when it first came out and released in the States with this incredible title: *Bleak Moments, Loving Moments*. Bingham Ray, the American distributor, was very keen that I should give *Career Girls* another name – *Hannah and Annie*. As you will immediately realise, I was obliged not to call it that because it sounds like a homage to Woody Allen. Frankly, I never thought about that when we called the characters Hannah and Annie, but there you go. Finally, when I went to Japan to do the press for *Secrets & Lies*, they'd picked up the fact that I had a title for the next film. I said it was called *Career Girls*. 'Oh,' they said, "Korea Girls".

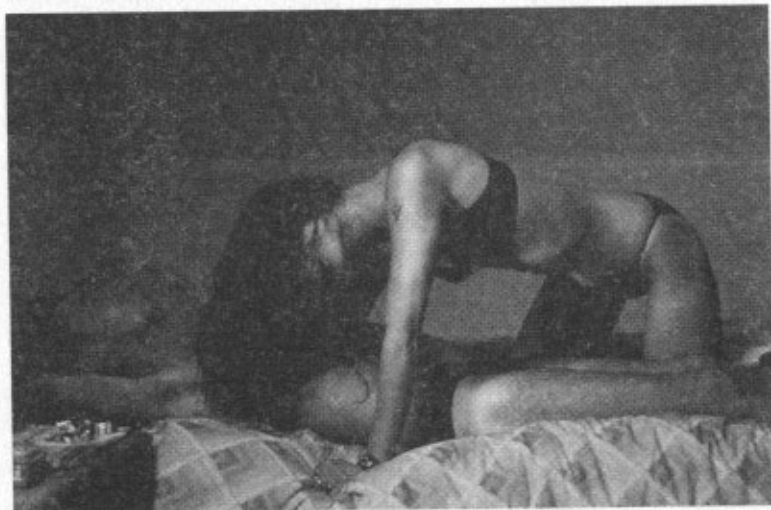
I resisted giving *Secrets & Lies* its final title for a long time because Maurice says 'Secrets and lies' at one point in the film, and I hate using something someone actually says in a film. Finally, I suggested 'Lies & Secrets'. Then I gave in. I got over it.

The poster for Naked attracted a fair amount of attention – mostly negative – showing as it did a still from the scene with Jeremy/ Sebastian and Sophie shortly before he rapes her.

Yes, it was a source of great pain. If there are any scenes that involve nudity in my films, we simply conspire not to take stills at all, because if you do, you can be bloody sure they'll wind up somewhere, the press being what it is. So when it came to that scene, Katrin wasn't actually naked. They both would have been, but at that time you weren't allowed to show male genitals. We decided they'd both have their underwear on. Katrin, being the ultimate trouper, said she wasn't bothered if stills were taken. Of course, that was the bloody shot that got everywhere. Katrin was quite upset in the end. I don't like it, I think it's wrong. And she's not even naked.

Any other regrets about Naked?

Only one. I made a mistake in the casting of the film. In the course of the auditions, one new actor that I met was Marianne Jean-Baptiste; it immediately became clear that she was as sharp as we know her to be. When I was pondering the various women Johnny might run into, she was one of them. For some convoluted reason,



28 *Naked*: Jeremy/Sebastian (Greg Cruttwell) and Sophie (Katrin Cartlidge).

which fourteen years later seems remarkably old-fashioned and retrograde, I had this notion that if one of the women was black it would in some way detract from the real issue. I think it's complete nonsense, even offensive, and I'm embarrassed. It's one of the only things in any of my films that I've regretted, because I know she would have been an interesting, strong character. She wouldn't have been a doormat; she'd have been articulate, strong. It's a shame we didn't get a chance to explore it. I missed it. But there you go. I did, however, get her into the next thing I did, *It's a Great Big Shame!*, and she was really brilliant. I then, of course, got the idea of making her a major player in *Secrets & Lies*.

As an important aside, it would also be true to say that the only thing that made *Naked* really difficult to shoot was the bloody lousy caterers. They were so bad that in a couple of locations, both when we were in the office in Charlotte Street and the house in Dalston on night shoots, people were nipping off to local Turkish and Indian restaurants and paying for their own suppers – something film crews just don't do. The shoot was going well, but as it was coming up to Christmas, people were really depressed about the food. I finally persuaded Simon Channing Williams and Georgina Lowe, the production manager, to sack the caterers and install Set Meals Ltd.

When people showed up on this cold Monday morning in December to shoot yet another depressing scene, they saw this gleaming Set Meals Ltd truck dispensing the most beautifully cooked breakfasts. I saw grown men drop to their knees and weep (*laughs*). If anyone thinks that a discussion about catering is extraneous to the issues of film-making, I can only point out that an army marches on its belly.