On the Margins: Anthony Simmons – Josephine Dolan and Andrew Spicer

‘I make European films … I came into the industry as an outsider who never quite fitted into the slots of the British film industry … I never quite fitted into a niche.’ (in Geisler 1997)

As this epigraph quotation indicates, writer-director Anthony Simmons is conscious of his own commercial and critical marginality within the dominant preoccupations and structures of the British film industry. Simmons’ inability to find a commercial ‘niche’ illuminates many of the systematic problems of the British film industry, problems that were exacerbated by the intense instability and volatility of the industry in the 1970s. The reasons for Simmons’ cultural marginality are more elusive but no less important. His aesthetic style, poetic realism, and his optimistic, inclusive Socialism became deeply unfashionable, but were the foundations of a remarkable consistency throughout his slender oeuvre, an intense career-long concern with social and cultural identities that were themselves regarded as peripheral. In elucidating Simmons’ preoccupations, as they expressed themselves in his film and television works in the 1970s, we also have to overcome his critical marginality. This marginality is shaped by a peculiar contradiction. On the one hand, Simmons has become one of the extensive legions of the lost in British film scholarship. Not only has there been no extended study, his work has not generated a single critical essay. In three recent overviews of British cinema – by Jim Leach (2004), Amy Sergeant (2005) and Sarah Street (2009) – he is not even mentioned. At the same time, his 1977 film Black Joy has accrued a degree of notoriety since it is included in Lola Young’s highly influential critique of race and gender in British cinema, Fear of the Dark. And yet the film is also frequently ignored in accounts of black British cinema, such as Pines (2001) because Simmons does not quite fit the critical framework that traces a trajectory from problematic and stereotypical inter-war films of Empire, through equally problematic and stereotypical post-war problem films to the moment of resistant black film directors in the 1970s and 1980s. This mix of critical neglect and particular attention leaves Simmons in a strange limbo within understandings of British cinema in the 1970s – at the margin of the margins. Any understanding of this marginality needs to be framed by an account of Simmons’ earlier career in order to demonstrate how his sensibility was formed and how this resonates with both the industrial formations of the 1970s and subsequent critical legacies.

Early Career
Simmons was born into an East End Jewish family of market traders, part of a vibrant, close-knit working-class, immigrant culture that was an abiding influence on his film making. His commitment to Socialism developed throughout his time at the London School of Economics where Harold Lasky was a seminal influence, and during his Army service where he also wrote plays and pantomimes, ran wartime newspapers and participated in the Army Bureau of Current Affairs’ discussion groups. Simmons’ Socialism can thus be understood as a broadly-based desire to see progressive change realised in the post-war reconstruction, aligned to a Popular Front ethos rather than to a dogmatic Communism and the belief that working people would be able to take control of their lives and forge a ‘better tomorrow’. After the war student politics – Simmons became vice-president of the NUS – provided the forum for acquiring and expressing left-wing ideas, culminating in a UNESCO-funded trip to Bulgaria in
1947. There he wrote and directed his first film, *Balkan Village* – completed but unfortunately never shown (see Geisler 1997) – which celebrated the creation of a progressive society: ‘the people are changing the land’.

It was in this European arena that Simmons’ aesthetic practices were also forged. Whilst in Rome attempting to finish editing *Balkan Village*, Simmons was profoundly affected by Italian neo-realism, which provided his cinematic education. Witnessing neo-realist film-makers at work engendered a commitment to filming ordinary people on the streets, starting with an idea rather than a finished script and finding the precise subject by getting out and about. In Simmons’ view, this mode of production allowed film-makers to eschew studio artifice and create an authentic ‘reality’ – “You can smell it and touch it” – that was closely in contact with people’s everyday lives, their hopes and fears. Although European-influenced, Simmons’ sensibility was also deeply informed by British models, the work of the Documentary Movement, particularly as it was realised in the films of Humphrey Jennings, notably *Listen to Britain* (1942), where everyday lives are rendered in ways that are also evocative and poetic. Returning to England, Simmons met Leon Clore, a producer and another writer-director, Jack Arnold, the trio forming a company, Harlequin Productions, whose ethos was to make poetic realist films that were critical, if only by implication, of the dominant middle-class culture of British cinema. The initial result was two documentaries – *Sunday by the Sea* (1951) set in Southend and which won the Grand Prix at Venice, and *Bow Bells* (1953) – that celebrated working-class culture using location images filmed silently and then cut to music hall songs. Each is beautifully composed, both visually and aurally, and offer almost painterly films that suture sound and vision into a choreographed whole. Working closely with cinematographer Walter Lassally, Simmons creates a strong sense of place, and poetically registers the detailed texture and rhythms of working-class lives. Although Clore and Lassally became part of Free Cinema, Simmons remained outside a ‘group’ that he judged to be dominated by Lindsay Anderson, whose *O Dreamland* (1953) about a day at Margate, Simmons regarded as a rather sour and hostile depiction of its subject, the opposite of his own affectionate (but not sentimental) portraits.

Thus Simmons remained outside the movement that was one of the key elements in the British New Wave cinema, and as a consequence, outside the canon of critically sanctioned British cinema. Regardless of this marginal position, through Harlequin, he co-produced two crime thrillers, *The Passing Stranger* (1954) – which he also co-wrote – and *Time without Pity* (1957), the latter directed by Joseph Losey. But 1950s British cinema was fairly hostile terrain for innovative film-makers, dominated by companies intent on struggling to maintain profitability by concentrating on genre films. Britain lacked a cultural climate (and a cinematically educated audience) that could nurture and sustain the poetic realist cinema that Simmons was committed to producing. The one significant film he made during this period was *Four in the Morning* (1965) for which Simmons had managed to obtain limited financing from the National Film Finance Corporation (NFFC). Simons intercuts the original documentary story, *People of the River* that centred on the river police fishing a young woman’s body out of the Thames, with two fictional stories about young couples whose relationships are in crisis. *Four in the Morning* is a major work, combining hauntingly beautiful compositions of the environs of the Thames (photographed by Larry Pizer) with two sharply delineated stories that express the bleak poetry of the location and which recall the darker side of neo-realism, notably Antonioni’s *Il Grido* (*The Cry*, 1957) that Simmons so admired (Dolan and Spicer 2008: 135). Despite winning awards at Locarno and Cannes (the *Prix d’Art et Essai*),
Four in the Morning was poorly promoted by the Rank Organisation whose marketing department lacked the intelligence to handle such a distinctive film, one which was too late to be attached to the British New Wave. Thus it became a succès d’estime rather than commercially profitable and Simmons had to earn his living as a radio scriptwriter and as a (highly successful) maker of commercials.

The Optimists of Nine Elms (1973)

The 1970s was a peculiarly difficult decade in which to make feature films in Britain. The rapidly shrinking domestic audience created a mood of retrenchment and hostility to experimentation with several of the large companies (notably Rank) diversifying into multi-media conglomerates in which film production was a low priority (Higson 1994: 219-20). Domestic production was concentrated in a limited series of indigenous production cycles – sex comedies, horror and television spin-offs – while the most important British producers (EMI and ITC) concentrated on big-budget action spectaculars with a roster of stars aimed primarily at the American market. The traditional mainstay of the British cinema, the medium-budgeted, modest first feature for the domestic market, was thus squeezed out, creating the lack of a middle ground (Wood 1983: 5). Overall, there were chronic problems of raising production finance that severely restricted the opportunities for independent film-makers. Each film became a one-off event with little or no continuity of production or the opportunity to build a body of films and thus establish the necessary collateral to obtain further finance.

Within this hostile terrain, Simmons managed to obtain finance for The Optimists of Nine Elms from Paramount, one of the last of a succession of deals that had sustained the British film industry since the mid-1960s in which American Majors had been prepared to finance distinctively, even quirkily, British films and to give production teams a large measure of creative freedom (Walker 1976). Paramount’s decision was based not on Simmons’ reputation, but that of his star, Peter Sellers, who plays Sam, an ageing music hall entertainer turned busker, befriended by two children, brother and sister Liz Ellis (Donnabella Mullane) and Mark Ellis (John Chaffey). However, this was very much Simmons’ film, its genesis going right back to an idea formed during filming of Bow Bells. It started life as a three page story, ‘Hyde Park’, in the early 1950s and became a full treatment told from Liz’s point-of-view that was soft-edged, even rather sentimental (Dolan and Spicer 2008: 138). After various aborted attempts to film with various stars – Buster Keaton, John Mills and Danny Kaye – and publication (1964) as a children’s book, it was entirely rewritten by Simmons, in collaboration with Tudor Gates, as a much tougher piece whose inspiration was the great music hall comedian Dan Leno (1860-1904).

Sellers became deeply attracted by the opportunity to perform the old-time routines of a distinctive star whose surreal patter he felt had been ahead of its time – ‘This morning I was in such a state I washed my breakfast and swallowed myself’ – and had strong links with Sellers’ own routines in the Goons. Simmons became an expert in writing Lenoesque dialogue and worked closely with a notoriously difficult star in order to achieve a highly disciplined performance. Sam’s dress, the tatterdemalion long brown overcoat and Union-Jack lining, battered panama, bow tie, wing collar, spats and dickey, and his make-up – Sellers wore special shoes with a hump in the soles to create the funny rolling walk, with false teeth and a putty nose (Lewis 1995: 425) – ‘follows that of a clown, but not so pronounced’. When combined with the battered and customised pram that stages his busking performances, this careful delineation creates a character at once realistic and
fantastical, a potent combination of the bizarre, the marginal and the magical. In Sellers’ absorbing incarnation, Sam becomes a complex figure of lonelines and sadness – looking back to a vanished tradition – but retaining his dignity and sense of self-worth, embodying Simmons’ belief in the capacity of humans to adapt and survive in difficult conditions.

In true neo-realist style, The Optimists of Nine Elms was shot entirely on location for nine weeks in Nine Elms, a slum district on the south of the Thames between Battersea and Vauxhall, using local children discovered in that area (Dolan and Spicer: 139-40). Collaborating again with Pizer, Simmons creates a run-down landscape of fetid canals, goods trains, mud flats, rubbish tips, teetering bridges and dilapidated buildings – Sam’s home is in a disused building – dominated by the gasworks and the power station. Sam ekes out his marginal existence in a topography at once insistently real and Dickensian. As a Time Out review suggests, ‘Simmons sketches a suitably hard edged and realistic portrait of a drab existence south of the river. Father is aggressive and mother run-down, reduced to having a quick one Sunday mornings when the children are out.’ Crucially, it is Sam who introduces the Ellis children to the magical ‘world across the river’ beyond the narrow confines of their own lives. They accompany him as he performs his routines outside Fulham Football Ground on match day, the spectators looking on as they queue, to the West End where his performance is intercut with that of an actual entertainer, Don Crown and his busking budgies, and to the pet cemetery in Hyde Park. All the actors, including Sellers, worked on scenes during rehearsal on location, and Simmons captures a number of incidental dramas – as when an elderly woman is being loaded onto an ambulance – that lend his story authenticity, the ‘smell and feel’ of real life that he inherited from the neo-realist. Although the story centres on Sam and the children, it is within the context of their parents’ desire to move out of their tenement and into one of the flats in the new council estate over the river. Throughout the film Simmons is careful to endorse this aspiration because he felt the unions were indifferent to urban renewal and the housing movement that he thought created opportunities for working-class people to better themselves (Geisler 1997).

Paramount’s financing also guaranteed distribution. But, like Rank with Four in the Morning, Paramount was unsure how to promote such a singular film. The Optimists (as it was entitled for American distribution) opened October 1973 at the vast Radio City Music Hall in New York with a huge fanfare that was entirely wrong for this ‘intimate’, Bergmanesque film. And, because it did not take off in America, Paramount provided very little publicity for its British release six months later in April 1974. British reviewers were generally enthusiastic about the film which they recognised as different from the usual genre fare: ‘not just another TV spin-off, nor a clichéd version of Dracula or Frankenstein, but something thoughtful, uncynical and fresh’.

Richard Combs identified it as part of an intermittent ‘school of poetic realism’, in British cinema, and David Robinson eloquently argued that Simmons was ‘one of the rare individualists that the British cinema should cherish’, linking the ‘slightness of his output’ with ‘his refusal to compromise his taste for unfashionably genial and human and unsensational themes … the survival of older community values’ and ‘the optimistic belief that people will come right in the end’. However, their notices could not create a word-of-mouth success – for a film that was competing against The Exorcist. Subsequently, Paramount sold the negative to Viacom and therefore The Optimists has very rarely been shown, even on television. This is a pity since rare screenings at National Film Theatre events offer testimony to a haunting aesthetic that is distinctly ‘Simmons’: an aesthetic which resonates with
‘Jenningsesque’ British documentary traditions as much as neo-realist influences. Consequently, despite the authentic ‘smell and feel’ of its working class location, and the exposition of urban decay that prompts the Ellis’s desire to move out of Nine Elms, The Optimists could never be described as ‘gritty’. Meticulously composed shots capture the ethereal light of Thames-side tidal reaches, whilst the rotting timbers of decaying buildings are framed as urban sculptures. Indeed, some shots of river mist framed by the arches of bridges are highly evocative of Whistler’s paintings of the Thames. But this spectacle is not allowed to dominate the narrative or overshadow character development. The marginal topography of the riverbank registers the social and cultural locations and dislocations of Sam and the children who are variously neglected and marginalised by the discriminations of age or youth as they overlap with working class limitations. At the same time, the strange beauty of location impressionistically infuses the narrative with a complex emotional register that positions decline and regeneration as inextricably linked stages of an organic cycle, rather than as mutually repellant, discrete oppositions. This destabilisation of oppositions is reproduced in the alignment of youth and age forged in the bond between the Ellis children and Sam in which youthful energy is exchanged for hard earned experience and wisdom. In this dynamic, the emotional economy of optimism is redeemed from the instrumentalist interventions of economists and planners and restored as an unpredictable, uncontrollable and ultimately life-affirming human trait.

Like most film makers of his generation, Simmons survived artistically and economically by moving between film and TV work and the optimism of the marginalised became something of a hallmark here too. For purposes of comparison, it is worth breaking with the chronology of Simmons’ career to mention briefly On Giant’s Shoulders, because it also equates topographical marginality with that of the social. Adapted from the Marjorie Wallace and Michael Robson book of the same name, and broadcast on 29 March 1979, this critically acclaimed BBC ‘Play of the Week’ was BAFTA nominated and went on to be an EMMY award winner in 1980. On Giant’s Shoulders tells the story of Terry Wiles, a black, half-blind, armless and virtually legless victim of thalidomide. With Wiles played by himself, and Bryan Pringle and Judi Dench cast as Len and Hazel Wiles, the white couple who adopt him, On Giant’s Shoulders also uses river locations as a metaphor for social marginalisation. Yet, as established in the play’s opening sequence in which an exuberant Terry steers a boat centre stream, the drama refutes the negative connotations of the terms ‘victim’ and ‘disability’. Indeed, the play can be located in relation to subsequent cultural theories that shift conceptions of disability from the biological to the discursively and socially produced (see Shildrick 1997). Inevitably with televisual productions of this period, the spontaneous techniques of neo-realist cinema are abandoned - but not at the cost of poetic expression. Tight domestic interiors register the physical and social confinement experienced by people with disability – and their families – whilst sudden cuts to breathtaking views of misty exteriors metaphorically express the potential and ambition to transcend the conventional ideas that frame the meaning of disability. Because Len Wiles dedicates his innovative engineering expertise to solving his son’s mobility problems, this reframing comes in the guise of motorised aids designed by the father for the son. Once again, Simmons offers another life-affirming statement through a moving account of marginalised lives.

Black Joy (1977)
On Giant’s Shoulders is also of interest because it represents an inter-racial family, although questions of racial marginality are subsumed within the dynamics of disability. However, two years earlier, with Black Joy (1977) Simmons had made race the central concern of a film. Following the box-office failure of The Optimists of Nine Elms, it had taken Simmons three years to secure finance for this adaptation of the 1975 play Dark Days, Light Nights by Jamal Ali. Simmons considered Ali to be the ‘Damon Runyon of Brixton’, and the location had considerable appeal since it was set in one of the few districts of London that retained the type of vibrant working-class, immigrant culture Simmons remembered from his youth (Hodgson n.d.), albeit Afro-Caribbean rather than Jewish. Finance was provided by West One, an independent production company run by the successful American agent-turned-producer Elliott Kastner. Although Kastner usually looked to action films and top star casting to ensure profits, in this case he was prepared to ignore the dominant market trends by making a low-budget ‘quality’ film with high cultural capital that would be ready to show at Cannes, and in which the NFFC could be persuaded to take a half stake. Producer Martin Campbell was on hand to ensure that Black Joy did not go over its very modest budget of £300,000 (Walker 1985: 242). Simmons, having co-written the screenplay with Ali, filmed on the Brixton streets in over 70 locations, using his characteristic mode of rehearsed action in the context of real life going on around it, the actors adjusting to playing scenes in actual locations.¹⁰

Made just two years after British Cinema’s first black-directed and cast feature film Pressure (Horace Ové, 1975), Black Joy was also notable for its all black cast. The film tells the story of country boy Ben (Trevor Thomas) who arrives at Heathrow from Guyana, encounters institutional racism at immigration and then, unable to find his relatives in Brixton, falls prey to local hustlers Devon (Paul Melford) and Dave (Norman Beaton) before eventually adjusting to city life in Britain. From the outset, Black Joy had something of an ambivalent reception. Akua Rugg writing for Race Today (January 1978) was representative:

Much has been made of the fact that the film is not political, and merely provides an hour of good dirty fun. The residents of Brixton are shown cussing, fighting, bedding down and messing each other over with monotonous regularity. Reggae and soul music provide a contrast to the drab physical environment of a decaying inner city area … A film which in the main, depicts blacks as making the best of a bad job, rather than seeking alternatives, is a political statement in itself. (in Bourne 1998: 230)

But by 1984, Rugg was arguing that the film does no more than pander to ‘white society’’s prurient interest in certain aspects of black social life’ (1984: 28). Equally though, there is evidence of unequivocal critical acclaim, not least for the performance of Norman Beaton as Dave who became the first black British actor to receive a British film award when the Variety Club of Great Britain pronounced him best actor of 1977. As he says, ‘…it was the most wonderful moment of my life. I had disproved the claim “They can’t act. There are no black actors”’ (Pines 1992: 114).

Despite the strength of Beaton’s claims for Black Joy’s significance within the racial politics of British film production, the film is frequently excised from accounts of black representation in British film. For instance, Jim Pines (2001) traces white-produced stereotypes embedded in both the inter-war genre of Empire and the post-war social problem film before making a seamless move to a celebration of the work of black film directors that chronologically frame Black Joy: Pressure to Burning an
Illusion (Shabazz, 1981). This omission is symptomatic of Black Joy’s marginal position within existing interpretative frameworks that are split between ‘white misrepresentation’ and ‘resistant black representations’. Quite simply, Black Joy does not lend itself to conventional critiques suggesting that white directors reproduce the imperial gaze through a reliance on stereotypical characters or generic verisimilitude. On the contrary, Black Joy is interspersed with scenes that interrogate the white gaze and which expose institutionalised racist strategies. For instance, in the opening immigration hall sequence, a hostile and officious immigration officer registers the ‘common sense’ suspicion of black immigrants that underpins racist ideologies and pre-figures those ‘stop and search policies’ that subsequently inflamed black communities to the point of street riots in the early 80s. This establishing sequence also includes an excruciating scene in which Ben is subjected to rectal examination that illuminates the extent to which the black body is constituted as a site of the colonising white gaze and white regulatory regimes. Effectively, the film produces a marginal gaze that is neither white and colonising nor black and resistant. With this gaze in place, later scenes that juxtapose London tourist sites with the wasteland of Brixton’s demolished streets register the racialised distribution of economic and cultural capital in 1970s Britain. Consequently, Lola Young places Black Joy alongside films such as Pressure (1975) and Burning an Illusion (1981) in which, the imperial eye is denied its narcissistic concentration on white subjectivity as the look is not turned on white people but through them. They are not the focal point but a means through which to view both intercultural and intracultural relations’ (152).

Moreover, as Pines (1991: 7) observes, Black Joy echoes the iconography and milieu of 1970s US blaxploitation films such as Shaft which unsettle stereotypes of black passivity through the high degrees of social agency accorded to its characters, although he also argues that this produces a romanticised view of the ghetto. Thus, as Young elaborates, the political import of Black Joy’s representation of ‘the rough world of the urban black male’s attempts to survive in a hostile environment’ (151) is undercut by the generic conventions that articulate the film’s comedy of manners. Young is even more concerned about Black Joy’s reproduction of black female stereotypes. Firstly, the sexual dynamics of the film make no gesture towards commitment to conventional coupledom or family life. Where this might spell ‘sexual liberation’ for white female characters, for the black woman they reiterate dominant ideas of black female hypersexuality that are shaped by the nineteenth century imperial gaze. Additionally, Black Joy was produced at a time when the black male was both criminalised and then constituted by the popular press as the source of racial tensions. In this context black women - as mothers or wives or girlfriends were then burdened with regulatory responsibilities - that is black women were pathologised as bad mothers, bad wives or bad girlfriends because of their assumed failure to properly control their sons, husbands, boyfriends. Thus, where representations of the white working mother is most likely to be seen as either representing the successes of feminism or as objects of sympathy for the difficulties of multi-tasking, representations of black working mothers such as Miriam (Floella Benjamin) are held up as examples of neglectful motherhood.

Young’s argument about the gender politics of Black Joy is beyond reproach. But this should not overshadow the positive aspects of the film. Simmons use of neo-realist/documentary aesthetics infuses the narrative with a highly political cultural
verisimilitude that is amplified through the soul-reggae soundtrack. As with other Simmons’ films such as *Bow Bells, Black Joy* has a vernacular musical score that synchronises sound and image and thus makes a significant contribution to the narrative. Where *Bow Bells* employs a cockney music hall genre to choreograph the fast disappearing street life of London’s East End, *Black Joy* uses soul-reggae songs from black performers – such as Aretha Franklin, Johnny Nash and Billy Paul – to articulate Britain’s emerging multi-culturalism. With a keen eye to maximising both publicity and profits, the soundtrack was released as an LP which rapidly made its way to chart success, going platinum within two weeks. Initially, the film also found favour with audiences and was well on the way to becoming a commercial success. However, *Black Joy* had to be taken out of circulation when it was realised that performing rights had not been obtained. It was fully four years later when the legal wrangle was finally resolved and the film was again in circulation. By that time it was out-of-date and the opportunity to make money had evaporated.

However, despite these contingencies, the political import of reggae music is not lost and it is impossible to overestimate the significance its emergence within 1970s British popular culture. Reggae fuses the distinctive rhythms of Afro-Caribbean culture with an emergent language of political protest and it was the first indigenous form of black British music. Moreover, its popularity cuts across both white and black identities. Diane Jeater (1992) suggests that in 1970s Britain reggae provided one of the sites where liberal white Britons who refused to wear the mantle of racism could display their anti-racist sensibilities, could express their appreciation of black British culture and talent and could celebrate the enrichment of British culture made in both pre and post Windrush eras by its non-white citizens. Most importantly, it provided a space where black communities could be configured as a cultural and financial resource rather than simply a drain on the economy. Jeater’s argument is clearly located within ‘hybridity’ debates where reggae signals a point of cultural exchange and transformation. Crucially, Stuart Hall (1997) observes that ‘hybridity’ should never be reduced to an interface between white and black cultures, rather, in the manner of reggae music, black culture should itself be seen as a hybrid fusion composed of shifting and multiple global antecedents. Hall argues that since black culture is itself multiply constituted it should not be reduced to a singular monolithic formation around which a uniform and fixed black identity can be organised. From this perspective, *Black Joy*, with its highly individuated characters, its representation of a diverse community, and its use of hybridised reggae music can be seen as a celebration of a rich, black, hybrid culture that is only marginal when viewed through the lens of white privilege.

Simmons’ slender output in the 1970s was partly a product of a narrowly focused British film industry that was hostile to innovation, but also of a distinctive sensibility that never found a niche in an unsupportive British film culture; in this regard the 1970s was only the intensification of more deep-seated and long-term problems. However, *The Optimists of Nine Elms* and *Black Joy* are entirely consistent with Simmons’ fundamental belief in the ability of working-class communities not only to survive but to progress by taking the opportunities that are offered. Both, as we have argued, focus on apparently marginal figures in order to suggest the limitations of mainstream British culture and to locate an authentic and vibrant culture elsewhere. And both, we wish to argue, are major works that deserve far wider recognition than they have enjoyed. Thus to ‘rescue’ Simmons from his undeserved critical neglect is also to remap British film culture of the 1970s, which needs to be understood as possessing many divergent and disparate energies that have not been
recognised hitherto, ones that characteristically inhabit the margins rather than the centre.

References


Leach, J. (2004), British Film, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


1 There is an appreciative and perceptive entry on Simmons by Geoff Brown in Robert Murphy (ed.), Directors in British and Irish Cinema, pp. 553-54. Michael Chanan’s The Politics of Documentary, includes a thoughtful analysis of Simmons’ early documentaries.


3 It was published as a novel by Heinemann, 1964, and reissued by Methuen in 1974, complete with numerous stills from the film.


5 ibid.

6 [http://www.google.ie/search?hl=en&q=optimists+of+nine+elms&start=10&sa=N]

7 Richard Berkley, Sunday Express, 28 April 1974.
8 *Financial Times*, 27 April 1974; *The Times*, 26 April 1974.
9 A poor quality print was available on VHS. The situation has now improved after the BFI rescued the negative from Viacom and screened it at the BFI South Bank in April 2007. It is now available on DVD in America and clips are starting to appear on YouTube.
10 West One Studio Notes; included on the BFI microfiche for *Black Joy*.
12 Popular memory of the soundtrack exceeds that of the film and copies of the original LP are highly collectible.