



UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

DISCUSSION PAPERS IN MASS COMMUNICATIONS

No. MC97/1

**BRITISH CINEMA - STYLE AND CONTEXT:
AN EXAMINATION OF BRITISH
'NEW WAVE' FILMS**

By

Justin Hindmarsh

January 1997

ISSN 1363-7185

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Centre for Mass Communication Research

**Leicester University Discussion Papers in
Mass Communications**

No. MC97/1

**BRITISH CINEMA - STYLE AND CONTEXT:
AN EXAMINATION OF BRITISH 'NEW WAVE' FILMS**

By

Justin Hindmarsh

January 1997

ISSN 1363-7185

Editorial note: Justin Hindmarsh is an MA graduate in Mass Communications at the University of Leicester, having attended the course during 1993/94. Until the end of the academic year 1995/96 he worked as a teaching assistant on the BSc degree in Communications and Society at the Centre for Mass Communication Research.

The telephone number for the Centre for Mass Communication Research has changed from that shown on the cover. The new number is 0116-2523863. The fax number is 0116-2523874.

Acknowledgements

A special thank you to Anders Hansen for his advice and co-operation during the construction of this Discussion Paper.

Also many thanks to Professors J. D. Halloran and Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi for their advice and support.

INTRODUCTION

Major social and cultural changes in the nineteen sixties, especially increasing affluence and its effect on the culture of working-class communities, helped to motivate the formation of one of the most distinctive film movements in British cinema history - social realism, otherwise known as the British "New Wave".

This discussion paper is a contextual analysis of the films of this movement with respect to how the social, economic, political and cultural changes of the respective decades were conveyed in the films' formal strategies, mise-en-scene and modes of representation of class, gender, ethnicity and morality.

The paper aims to do the following:

To discuss the social and cultural changes in British society in the early nineteen sixties, especially amongst the working-class, and the effect of those changes on sexual morality, youth and the status of women.

To note changes in the structure and identity of British cinema and the emergence of social realist films, the so-called British "New Wave", reflecting the social and cultural changes outlined above.

To analyse the principal films of the social realist movement including Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, A Kind of Living, and A Taste of Honey, with respect to their formal strategies, mise-en-scene and the representation of working-class life, gender, morality and increasing affluence. And to discuss the portrayal of changing cultural patterns in the working-class community.

SOCIETY AND POLITICS IN THE EARLY NINETEEN SIXTIES

Many observers look back upon the period between the mid-fifties and early sixties as a time of great change in British society. As Prime Minister Harold MacMillan commented in 1957;

"Most of our people have never had it so good. Go round the country, go to the industrial towns and you will see a state of prosperity such as we have never had in my lifetime - nor indeed ever in the history of this country" (Hill, 1986: 5).

According to Stuart Laing (1986), such relative prosperity created a view that the class

system was dated due to changes in the lifestyle of the working-class through the areas of employment, education, housing and domestic consumption. Unemployment was as low as 400,000 in June 1959 whilst white-collar workers had increased from a pre-war 23% to 36% of the workforce by 1961. During the same period the number of unskilled manual workers reduced from 15% to 9% creating a more skilled workforce (Laing, 1986: 22 and 23).

By the end of the nineteen fifties state education boasted an increase in expenditure, smaller classes and 20% of 15-18 year-olds still in education compared with 6% in 1931. As Laing claims;

"Such improvement was frequently cited as evidence of the general well-being, both material and spiritual, of the whole population" (Laing, 1986: 25).

However, Laing still points to class differences in operation with regard to university entrance where between 1961-62 85% of university undergraduates came from social classes I and II compared with a mere 15% emanating from parents in manual occupations. This was despite the doubling of student numbers since the war, and such inconsistencies motivated the Labour party to push for comprehensive schools in the nineteen sixties.

In terms of housing, new post-war suburban housing estates were appearing throughout the country, usually located in new towns like Stevenage and Harlow, or near new industries or on the outskirts of older cities. Laing describes them as;

"Standardised and endless, small semi-detached houses with gardens" (ibid: 26).

Private ownership also increased from 25,000 in 1951 to 150,000 by 1964 whereas over the same period there was a fall in the number of council house completions.

Large reductions in purchase tax during 1958 and 1959 allowed domestic electrical goods such as washing-machines, vacuum-cleaners and refrigerators to become affordable images of affluence to the working-classes.

Moreover, cars were perhaps the most potent visible signifier of affluence. Between 1948 and 1958 the number of licenced cars and vans increased from two million to 4.5 million, and then onto eight million by 1964. As Laing points out;

"The car out the front (or, even better in the drive) together with the television aerial above symbolised the new way of life within. Television, was, of course, the defining symbolic object of affluence" (ibid: 29).

This statement was backed up by the statistics which showed there had been an increase from 650,000 to 13 million television sets in Britain between 1951 and 1964, a greater increase than any other domestic appliance.

Such ostentatious symbols of affluence led some critics to highlight an "Embourgeoisement" process taking place on the old working-class;

"With rises in living standards and an accompanying conversion to 'consensual' middle-class values" (Hill, 1986: 7).

However, the affluence was not merely restricted to the working-class but extended to British "youth". An explosion in popular culture represented through teddy boys, pop stars like Elvis Presley, Bill Haley, and Cliff Richard and "teenage" idols like James Dean and Marlon Brando had opened a distinctive commercial and artistic market for 16-21 year-olds. Consequently, increased earning power and greater personal identity led to higher spending on clothes, records, magazines, pop concerts and other consumerist items.

John Hill highlights a concern felt at the time that the overflow of mass communications in its various manifestations of television, advertising and pop music caused a general lowering of cultural standards in favour of a more standardised mass culture, thereby threatening people's everyday quality of life.

Richard Hoggart in "The Uses of Literacy" 1959: 12, 284, 285 - a main contributor to the 1960 Pilkington Committee report on the future of broadcasting, extended the argument by identifying the danger from "mass culture" on the traditional working-class culture. Hill quotes Hoggart thus;

"The new mass culture is in some important ways less healthy than the often crude culture it is replacing ... We are becoming culturally classless ... No doubt many of the old barriers of class should be broken down. But at present the older, the more narrow but also more genuine class culture is being eroded in favour of the mass opinion, the mass recreational product and the generalised emotional response" (Hill, 1986: 12).

Consequently, it was "youth" which seemed to personify this decline not just in culture but in terms of general standards of behaviour. Crime figures for 14-21 year-olds increased from 1955 onwards and stories of "teddy boy" violence, especially cinema riots surrounding the American rock 'n' roll film Rock Around the Clock (1956) had stimulated intense press coverage. In the late nineteen fifties and early nineteen sixties, "youth" violence was also linked to race. A dramatic rise in immigration during this period, especially from the West Indies, increased social anxiety and, in consequence, riots in Nottingham in 1958 ignited three days of fighting between black and white youths in Notting Hill.

As a result of such juvenile violence a government White Paper in January 1959 initiated a prison-building scheme for young offenders together with new detention centres and Borstals. However sexual immorality, both with the young and generally was also a concern. The Wolfenden report in 1957 recommended a more tolerant attitude towards what many regarded as "sexual permissiveness", culminating in their request for the "de-criminalisation of homosexual behaviour" (Hill, 1986: 18). Also at this time women were playing a greater role in the workplace. A lack of post-war labour allied to a government export-drive and an increase in rearmament resulted in a rise in the proportion of women, especially those married, in employment. Between 1951 and 1961 the number of married women in work rose from one in four to one in three, giving them a greater sense of identity away from the home and family.

In 1956, the Russians invaded Hungary, and Britain engaged in her final imperial conflict, and ultimate humiliation, in the Suez invasion of Egypt. This all coincided with the appearance of new contemporary writers in Britain such as Kingsley Amis and John Braine, as well as the first performance of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* at the Royal Court Theatre. John Hill describes these writers as being; "far from satisfied and complacent", with this new society at that time, and claims that with the help of Suez and Hungary they were able to tap the "disaffections and tensions" prevalent in society by;

"Binding together all the key issues of the period: youth, class, affluence and the status of women" (Hill, 1986: 21).

The following sub headings discuss how the British cinema addressed these issues.

The various cultural and social changes discussed earlier produced a change in the structure and identity of the British cinema during the mid-late nineteen fifties. In the industry there emerged an openness to new ideas which permitted

"A possibility of innovation ... subject to the demands of financial success" (Hill, in Cook, 1987: 48).

In this environment a group of socially committed directors under the label of "free cinema" surfaced and were able to present their series of documentaries at the national film theatre to a general audience. The "free cinema" ethos devised by directors such as Lindsay Anderson, Tony Richardson and Karel Reisz was based upon two ideas connected to the "aesthetic potentialities of the medium", as was pioneered by documentarist Humphrey Jennings in the nineteen thirties (Hill, 1986: 128).

The first stresses the importance of the role of the artist whereas the second is concerned with a more "poetic realist art" or "poetic realism" and therefore less instructional.

John Hill suggest that this

"led to a 'new cinema' whose commitment was to 'realism' a determination to tackle 'real' social issues and experiences in a manner which matched and a style which was honest and 'realistic' as well" (Hill, 1986: 127).

However, as well as these "free cinema" origins Pam Cook (1987: 47-49) has also rooted this "social realist cinema", as it became known, in developments in literature and the theatre. Plays by John Osborne, Keith Waterhouse and Shelagh Delaney and novels by Alan Sillitoe, Stan Barstow and David Storey in addition to a new generation of young actors, such as Albert Finney, Rita Tushingham and Tom Courtenay all helped according to Pam Cook, not only to "reproduce reality" but to "transmit without adversely transforming, literary texts", as well as anchoring in the films a notion of quality taken from the artistic cues of British literature and theatre. Hence the fusion of these diverse creative elements helped to forge the British social realist or "New Wave" cinema between 1959-63 which was characterised by location shooting, working class characters, contemporary social issues, unknown regional actors, a fundamental opposition to both the "phony conventions" of studio-based cinema and

"A metropolitan Southern English culture which excludes the rich diversity of tradition and personality which is the whole of Britain" (Lindsay Anderson, 1986: 114).

Above all these new young directors believed that

"Films should be an immensely dynamic and potent force within society" (Richardson, 1986: 128).

ANALYSIS OF FILMS

The first film to have a post-war working-class hero was Room at the Top (1959) directed by Jack Clayton and adapted from John Braine's successful novel of the same name.

Joe Lampton played by Laurence Harvey is an ambitious white collar worker who gets a rich man's daughter pregnant and consequently marries her in order to avoid embarrassing her social class and in turn is adopted into that class.

Joe represents a new working-class determination not to be "sold short by their betters" which echoed the feeling which

"Swept the first post-war Labour government to power on the services vote" (Walker, 1974: 46).

Hence Joe Lampton's thrusting gritty working-class hero with a regional accent was easily identifiable to audiences at that time and the character's popularity was heightened through his use of sex as a weapon to climb up the social ladder. Sex was emphasised much more in the film than in the book especially during a scene when Susan played by Heather Sears admits that sex is an enjoyable experience, something unheard of in British cinema at that time, all of

which contributed to the film receiving an X-certificate, for its

"Unblushingly frank portrayal of intimate human relationships" (Murphy, 1992: 15).

In fitting with Joe's character he looks upon Susan, the rich man's daughter, as another commodity (complete with sports car) which he must have and so finds it difficult to explain to his traditional working-class parents the reasons why he wants her, other than, "Her father's brass".

Alice, with whom Joe has a more intense, honest and satisfying sexual relationship, is deliberately cast as a foreigner and is therefore classless and is used as an effective counter-point to highlight the

"Shallow class-bound allegiances of the girl he eventually has to marry" (Walker, 1974: 47).

The "naturalness" of their relationship is highlighted through certain natural location shots by the sea. However, Alice dies and so proves to be one luxury Joe can't have which leaves the film displaying

"... the tragedy of a man stuck in a rigid hierarchical society where ambition and enterprise are turned into self-destructive weapons" (Murphy, 1992: 15).

Later that year Tony Richardson directed the film, *Look Back in Anger*, taken from John Osborne's play. Richardson extended what was essentially a "one-room play" into a variety of settings which enabled him to bring in some of his "free cinema" techniques. However, the main character, Jimmy Porter, played by Richard Burton remained at the centre of the action. The essence of the story seemed to highlight Jimmy Porter's working-class and sexist frustrations and anger being taken out on his wife's "upper-middle-class and imperial background" stressing the need for her to accept "her proper place - on her back". Pauline Kael in (Stead, 1989: 188-189) describes the film as "challenging" and full of the "glory of talk" which she felt helped to explain its struggles at the box-office coupled with the casting of Burton. Some felt he was too theatrically-trained, too old and even too well-established an actor with his

"classical features and ecclesiastical voice" ... which had "robbed him of his impeccable working-class credentials" and so placed him in "A league where he could only play kings and emperors" (Stead, 1989: 188-189).

Peter Stead develops this argument further, claiming that British cinema needed a Marlon Brando style actor who could express social anger allied to an authority and energy which could enable him to "speak for a whole generation". Something which Stead feels neither Burton nor Laurence Harvey were capable of, and he highlights the problem of

"Finding actors who could retain traces of cultural authenticity from their backgrounds and yet remain attractive and intelligible as they were exposed to wider audiences" (Stead, 1989: 190).

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning

In 1960, however, British cinema found such an actor, by the name of Albert Finney. Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (1960) was filmed largely on location in Nottingham and was set around the social realism of the personal life of a young factory worker, Arthur Seaton, in the continuation of what had become known as the "the angry young man" theme. The film was based on a novel series of short stories by contemporary northern writer Alan Sillitoe which helped to make it more episodic and therefore tie it to the conventions of narrative cinema.

It was produced by the Woodfall Independent Production Company which had been founded by playwright John Osborne and "free cinema" director Tony Richardson.

A visual characteristic which seemed to be developing amongst the "New Wave" genre was the trend for authentic and accurate location shooting. Directed by another "free cinema" protagonist, Karel Reisz, Saturday Night and Sunday Morning used the actual Raleigh bicycle factory as well as Nottingham Castle and the house of Alan Sillitoe's mother in the film itself. These documentary characteristics are evident early in the film as we see Arthur cycling into work through the thronging masses towards the smoke-billowing factory. En route to the factory Karel Reisz immediately familiarises us with the industrial environment in which the film is anchored. We see various shots of back-to-back near slum terraced houses, cobblestoned streets and panoramic shots of rooftops and factory chimneys, all symbols of working-class iconography. As Arthur approaches the factory gates the dark dank industrial horizon captured by the panning camera in long-shot coupled with Johnny Dankworth's Jazz blues score hints at the impending mood of gloom and rebelliousness which we are to encounter almost immediately in the film. The location of the factory constrained within the heart of the industrial city itself seems merely to reflect the limitations and frustrations felt by Arthur in his aggressively anti-middle-class "workbench soliloquy" which follows this scene:

"Nine hundred and fifty bloody five. Another few more, that's the last for a Friday. Fourteen pound three and tuppence for a thousand of these a day. No wonder I alus got a bad back, though I'll soon be done. I'll have a fag in a bit. No sense working every minute God sends. I could get through it in half the time ... but they'd only slash me wages, so they can get stuffed. Don't let the bastards grind you down. That's one thing you learn. What I'm out for is a good time. All the rest is propaganda".

Karel Reisz was a Czech refugee who came to England in the nineteen thirties. This detachment from English society and more particularly the class system allowed him to give an

"Objective expression to a voice hitherto unheard in British cinema" (Murphy, 1992:19).

As Reisz himself commented:

"In a metaphorical way Arthur embodied what was happening in England: he was a sad person, terribly limited in his sensibilities, narrow in his ambitions and a bloody fool into the bargain, by no means a standard-bearer for any ideas of mine" (Murphy, 1992: 19).

Arthur then is set apart as an outsider and is counter-pointed against all those "poor beggars" around him who have been "ground down by the system". Among this group Arthur targets is his "Mam and Dad" who he claims are like "a lot of dead sheep - a television set and a packet of fags but both dead from the neck up". This point seems to stem from a general dislike for mass culture in the "New Wave" which John Hill alludes to in (Hill, 1986: 153-154). Consequently Arthur ridicules his father for his apparent total fascination with television and particularly empty adverts by telling him about the man who "lost the sight of one eye through looking at telly day in and day out".

Arthur divorces his life from his work and concentrates on his leisure time by "playing the system" so he can earn good money and spend heavily on clothes and his mistress Brenda, who is married to Jack, another character seen as being conformist. Jack is frequently contrasted to Arthur during the film and comes across as being weak and easily deceived, whose idea of marital harmony is to buy a television. Jack lacks independence and his overall air of resignation seems to be connected to his failure to satisfy his wife's needs.

The film's central themes would seem to be Arthur's relationships with Brenda and Doreen. It is interesting to note that Winnie a character who played a significant part in the novel was dropped from the film. In terms of personality and sexual prowess Winnie was considered Arthur's equal in the novel and so her presence in the film would as Stuart Laing claims;

"Have disturbed the clear pattern of an aggressive Arthur choosing between the essentially passive figures of an older married woman and a young unmarried girl (a reproduction of the pattern of 'Room at the Top')" (Laing, 1986: 119).

He goes onto claim that such an exclusion

"Defines problems and solutions in direct relation to 'the patriarchal principle'" (Laing, 1986: 119).

As well as the accent being on male sexuality, Arthur enjoys different sexual rewards from the women in his life. His most intense physical sexual satisfaction comes with Brenda and is expressed during the film through her ability to

"Vocalise the desire and pleasure" (Hill, 1986: 160).

However Doreen is seen to represent a "new working-class consumerism", signified by her mother's "modern" house with fitted kitchen and a "fifties modern" living-room (Lovell, 1990: 367). This is seen to contrast with earlier shots of Brenda's house, and indeed Arthur's

parent's home, which are seen to be more traditional and antiquated with free standing kitchen cabinets and gas stoves on legs.

This "clash" between the traditional and "new" working-class is highlighted in Doreen's mother's initial cool response to Arthur. Consequently, the seduction of Doreen is more "fear-edged", shot in complete silence with her words unheard. She is seen as a stabilising influence drawing Arthur into marriage and conformity, as is exemplified in the final scene when she reproaches him for throwing stones.

In terms of morality Brenda's pregnancy by Arthur, coupled with bad language such as "bugger", "Christ" and "sod", earned the film-makers the wrath of the censors. The initial script had allowed a "successful" abortion attempt to be carried out but this was looked upon in a dim light by the censors who claimed it showed

"A rather casual attitude to abortion and suggests to the young that if they got into difficulties all they need is to find a kind-hearted older woman" (Laing, 1986:120)

Consequently, the language was altered and the attempted abortion was presented as a failure. The film was subsequently passed but with an X-certificate. Seemingly the film's presentation of a risqué approach to sexual morality enhanced by the X-certificate merely appeared to arouse people's curiosity and interest in it and ultimately aid the film's popularity at the box-office.

The film opened in the West End in October 1960 and recovered its costs within the first three weeks of release and eventually made a profit of half a million pounds. Many, including Harry Saltzman, the film's producer, felt it was

"People's identification with Finney, especially young people and working young people" which was, "More responsible than anything else for the business it did" (Cook, 1987: 49).

As Peter Stead claimed Finney seemed to have

"That long-awaited quality of 'bloody Englishness'".

Finney not only physically looked the part but as Peter Stead elaborates;

"Finney himself was independent, surly, powerful, and northern enough to express all of Arthur's rebelliousness and bloody-mindedness and yet he could also charm his entire audience by the very obvious relish with which he wrapped his mouth around northern vowels and with which he enjoyed every meal, drink, and woman who came before him" (Stead, 1989:193).

The plaudits are not surprising perhaps when one considers Finney's Salford background, his own experiences of shop-floor factory work and as he stated himself

"I'd known quite a few Arthurs in my boyhood in Salford" (Walker, 1974: 83).

However the effect of Arthur's raw-blooded anger and frustration was also deepened

through what Stuart Laing describes as the

"Fore-closing of options which the urban/industrial setting imposes on Arthur" (Laing, 1986: 121).

Laing claims that the camerawork both stylistically and through selection of shot highlights the detail of this constrained environment in which Arthur lives, using examples such as Arthur and Bert strolling through the city at night and important scenes such as the backdrop of factory chimneys and rooftops behind Brenda as she tells Arthur of her abortion failure. With the exception of the funfair and fishing scenes Laing claims that contrary to other "New Wave" films there is "no escape from the city sequence", and he concludes that this

"Attempt to authenticate Arthur through a diversity of exterior and interior settings works within an overall presentation of closure and claustrophobia in his physical and mental environment" (Laing, 1986: 121).

Arthur's position as "observer within the landscape" is analysed in some detail by critic Terry Lovell. Despite the use of point-of-view shots and Arthur's voice-over commentary the "gap" between what the camera observes and that of the observer (Arthur) within the landscape remains. Lovell quotes Andrew Higson who cites the scene at the end of the film which features

"That long shot of our town from that Hill"

which placed Arthur in the environment and so

"Inscribes a middle-class observer/outsider as viewer, and as the source of the film's enunciation" (Lovell, 1990: 369-370).

Lovell acknowledges this distance between the viewer and the viewed and takes the theory a step further by suggesting this "space" which is opened up could be best enjoyed by

"Hoggart's Scholarship boy: the adult working-class male looking back with nostalgia at a remembered childhood landscape" (Lovell, 1990: 370).

Lovell believes that such an individual can empathise with and feel involved in what is being observed by bringing to the scene

"The knowledge of the insider combined with the distance achieved by the move outside and beyond,"

concluding that it is:

"This position which can align itself most readily and personally with the point of enunciation of many of the 'New Wave' films" (Lovell, 1990: 370).

Consequently, "Hoggart's scholarship boy" may recognise the young, restless, sexually virile

worker, such as Arthur, as the man he may have become had he remained in that environment.

The film's loose style which allows such space for audience interpretation and involvement emanates from the director Karel Reisz. Alan Lovell in (Murphy, 1992: 19) identifies it as ...

"Almost an anti-style. The camera does only enough work to tell the story as simply and directly as possible".

Lovell goes on to point out how this technique allied to the Czech's analytical approach makes Reisz unique amongst most feature directors who he claims seem anxious to draw the audience's attention to themselves and their style. In complimenting the director for "leaving the audience alone", Lovell claims that ...

"Very few film-makers have enough confidence in the audience just to assume their co-operation. Karel Reisz does just this" (Murphy, 1992: 20).

Robert Murphy feels that Alan Sillitoe's "script from a very filmic novel" also helped Reisz in this respect.

A Taste of Honey

Due to the box-office success of Saturday Night and Sunday Morning the Woodfall Independent Production Company was finally on a sound financial footing. Consequently this allowed Tony Richardson to fulfil his long-held desire to direct A Taste of Honey (1961) as Woodfall's next feature. Richardson had recently returned from Hollywood where he had directed Sanctuary for 20th Century Fox, which had turned out to be an unhappy experience due to his creative talents being severely constrained by the "formulaic" studio conditions or as Richardson himself put it;

"It was like working in a straight-jacket" (Laing, 1986: 124).

As a reaction to the Hollywood system Richardson, on his return to Britain, vowed to shoot A Taste of Honey entirely on location. A Taste of Honey was an adaptation of Shelagh Delaney's stage-play but Richardson's cinematic approach allied closely to that of Reisz. Talented continental cameraman Walter Lassally was brought into give the film a naturalistic tint:

"I used a grainy stock for the indoor scenes which gave the film its key feeling, then ordinary stock for the exteriors," explained Lassally (Walker, 1974: 122).

The film's frequent use of outdoor locations and the casting of a young unknown Merseyside actress (Rita Tushingham) as the lead, had helped to emphasise its northern industrial setting. The "reality" of the bitter-sweet story was also enhanced by her

"Plainness that was almost eerie," according to (Walker, 1974: 123).

The northern setting is evoked through shots of the city landscape of Manchester, especially at

the start of the film during Jo and Helen's bus ride through the city, on a visit to Blackpool (and the famous "Tower Ballroom") and in shots of canal banks and industrial waste ground. John Hill extends this argument by claiming it is the "places rather than the actions" which command the viewer's attention (1986: 132). He highlights an example where Jo is seen making her way home from school in a sequence which lasts nearly a minute before any "narrative significance" occurs. Hill quotes Barthes to substantiate his argument that place is used ...

"To signify reality, to furnish the effect of the real".

However Hill also highlights the "creative treatment" used to evoke the "reality-effect". In the scene where Jo walks along the canal the combination of "lingering" dissolve shots and the melodic sound of singing children capture what Paul Dehn describes as:

"Manchester's canal-threaded hinterland to a misty, moisty, smoky nicety. And they have found unforced poetry ... among the mist, the moisture and the smoke" (Hill, 1986: 132).

Hence Richardson's "personal expression" is communicated through the representation of "reality".

The obvious difference between *A Taste of Honey* and the other films of the "New Wave" is the casting of a woman as the main protagonist and one who is not dependent on a strong male character. The reversal of gender roles is also apparent as shown earlier when Jimmie the black soldier, with whom Jo has a sexual relationship, dresses Jo's grazed knee in the ship's kitchen (as a mother would) and Jimmie is also the ship's cook preparing meals for the crew whereas neither Jo nor her mother, Helen, are seen cooking anything in their dank, dirty kitchen.

Geoff, the homosexual, who lives with Jo during her period of pregnancy, also, like Jimmie, acts as a surrogate-mother; cooking, cleaning the flat and making baby clothes. And again like Jimmie, who is black, Geoff, as a homosexual, is portrayed as an outsider to contemporary society and clearly gender issues are not the only concerns to be addressed in this film.

In the play, adult memories of and longings for a lost childhood as expressed by Helen (Lovell, 1990: 372-373) are replaced by real children in the film. They are seen with Jo and Geoff under the arches and accompany them on the bus-ride to the country. These scenes as well as others, are used to link the children to Jo and her unborn child, as well as to represent a more traditional working-class way of life and culture which has been lost. The adults are used to represent a new brash working-class consumerism exemplified by Helen and Peter's raucous, drunken behaviour in Blackpool and symbolised by Peter's new bungalow. This conflict, between the traditional culture and mass culture is highlighted as the children mock and jeer at Peter's "flashy" car, and is a theme which was not prevalent in the play. Its inclusion in the film was to inject aspects of contentious contemporary social ideology.

Unlike *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* which is associated with dominant male sexuality the "interior and exterior spaces" in this film are related to generation rather than gender (Lovell, 1990: 374). As Lovell explains;

"Jo is poised between childhood and womanhood precipitated into adult life by her affair with Jimmie and her pregnancy, and her moves outside may be related to her reluctance to abandon childhood rather than the masculine search for sexual encounters, while the interior of her flat is associated with her search for nurturance rather than sex" (Lovell, 1990: 374).

Hence, Jo and Jimmie's sexual intercourse outside on waste-ground associates this change from adolescence to womanhood.

The film's urban and regional settings coupled with the general "naturalistic look" allied it to the earlier films of the "New Wave". However these visual and stylistic similarities present a problem of identification for *A Taste of Honey*, for as Lovell concludes;

"... because of the masculine address of this whole group of 'New Wave' films ... and because *A Taste of Honey* is visually and generically at one with them, it has attracted little attention from the feminists" (Lovell, 1990: 376).

A Kind of Loving

By mid 1961 the films of the "New Wave" had become commercially attractive. Joseph Janni, an Italian producer based in Britain who had shown a financial interest in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, before Woodfall stepped in, managed to persuade Anglo-Amalgamated, a small production/distribution company to raise the £165,000 for *A Kind of Loving*, based on the novel by another northern writer, Stan Barstow. The film was to be directed by John Schlesinger, whose experience had mainly been in television documentary, especially the prestigious BBC "Monitor" arts programme.

The documentary "look" is apparent in the film's opening scene showing children shouting and playing on cobbled-stoned terraced streets and running across waste land. The camera pans slowly left exposing a church and a wedding gathering standing on the steps preparing for the photographs. Here, we are introduced to Vic and his family who are quite clearly set in this working-class community, in a style which Laing describes as

"The established rhetoric of the 'personal' television documentary" (Laing, 1986: 134).

However, Schlesinger's style avoided stereo-typical and cliched northern locations familiar in "New Wave" films to cinema-goers at that time. He used a modern factory because as he said:

"The whole of the north isn't black and grimy" (Walker, 1974: 118).

A modern flat for Vic's sister and brother-in-law, rather than a shum terrace, and in addition he studied the interiors of suburban houses and watched people "spear" their food at meal-times.

Walker describes all this research as helping to create:

"an awareness of social change" ... stemming from ... "a perspective reality",.

which he allies to the Italian neo-realist style.

The film's two main characters, Vic (Alan Bates) and Ingrid (June Ritchie) are working-class but unlike the aggressive male heroes of earlier "New Wave" films, both have white-collar jobs and aspire to "something better" such as foreign travel and a new semi-detached home. The film deals seriously with issues of class division, gender and generation. Vic and Ingrid, like Arthur and Doreen are seen as emanating from two segments of the working-class. Vic's roots are traditional and respectable, personified by what Laing describes as his

"Father's status as a railwayman, member of a brass band and his sound commonsense"
(Laing, 1986: 131).

However, Ingrid's mother is seen to represent the "snobbery" of the new working-class consumerism which she reflects through her description of all manual workers as "those people" and whom she scoffs at when reading about "miners' sons earning up to £30/£40 per week", claiming that they are "holding the country to ransom".

The contrast between the two lifestyles is illustrated after Vic first meets and then walks Ingrid back to her mother's semi-detached house complete with garage. Vic is then shown from a low-angle shot, running home excitedly, through allotments and cobble-stoned streets to his parent's terraced house and no car. Vic's high-cultural tastes prevalent in the novel, are virtually abandoned in the film in order to heighten the conflict between traditional working-class values and the new mass culture. This is exemplified in the scene where Vic is "made" to stay in with Ingrid and her mother to watch their favourite television quiz show instead of attending his father's brass band concert, where he performs a trombone solo. The conflict between the two "cultures" is captured in Ingrid's description of the concert as being "... a bit old-fashioned". John Hill sees this scene as pivotal in the film's presentation of gender positions with the women representing the new mass culture, especially television, and the men being seen to represent the traditional working-class world (Hill, 1986: 156).

The film more than the novel, concentrated on Vic and Ingrid's relationship, from the passionate sex to Ingrid's pregnancy, then to increasing indifference from Vic resulting in an initial marriage breakdown. Laing describes their reconciliation and the film's solution in terms of a reassertion of the

"Normality and naturalness of the patriarchal family" (Laing, 1986: 132).

emphasised for example by Vic removing Ingrid from her mother's semi to live with him in a cramped flat, thereby rejecting the new affluence and re-establishing the male's dominance.

In the final scene Vic and Ingrid stroll in the park on a grey day with the industrial city in

the background accompanied by the sound of shunting railway wagons. Again, this view would seem to anchor them back into the traditional northern setting.

Although originating from different documentary strands both Tony Richardson and John Schlesinger made films which identified with the problems facing young people as well as possessing a desire to shoot extensively on location (Murphy, 1992: 26).

THE DECLINE OF THE "NEW WAVE"

This was certainly true of Schlesinger's next film *Billy Liar* (1963) where the title character (Tom Courtenay) tries but ultimately fails to "escape" from the real world he inhabits which is physically being rebuilt around him. The older buildings are sacrificed for modern offices and supermarkets. However, Billy welcomes neither the new nor the old which is emphasised in the contemptible way the older figures of authority are represented in the film. Liz (Julie Christie) embodies freshness with her vivacious energy and desire to "escape" with Billy to a "swinging London".

Tom Courtenay's next starring role was in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* which proved to be Woodfall's last social realist film. The sporting theme continued with *This Sporting Life* (1963) which had substantial financial backing from Rank and was the directorial debut for Lindsay Anderson. However when the film was released the popularity of the "New Wave" appeared to be waning. British director Carol Reed claimed that people were fed up looking;

"For an hour or two at a kitchen sink, a one-set movie, the greasy dishes and the mental and moral miasma of certain elements in society" (Murphy, 1992: 26).

David Storey's novel *This Sporting Life* is a tragic love affair set against the masculine world of a Yorkshire rugby league club, and is blacker than the earlier social realist novels.

Rather than reflect on the commonsense and wisdom of the working-class, Storey evokes a drab canvass of lives stricken by poverty and sexual repression (Murphy, 1992: 27). Director Lindsay Anderson concentrated on

"The artistic and personal" ... and ... "played down the sociological aspects of his subject",
....

claiming the film was neither about sport, nor

"a north country working-class story. ... It is about a man of extraordinary power and aggressiveness". ... Who has ... "a need for love of which he is hardly aware" (Murphy, 1992: 27).

Consequently, *This Sporting Life* appeared pessimistic and gloomy and struggled at the box-office which in turn convinced Sir John Davis, Head of the Rank Organisation, that the public didn't want, "the dreary kitchen sink dramas".

However, structural changes within the industry as much as anything had a bearing on the decline of social realism. Bryanston Films; the Confederation of Independent Production Companies, including Woodfall, so prominent in producing social realist films lost the financial support of American moneymen like Walter Reade, who left in 1963, and Harry Saltzman who left Woodfall for the James Bond series.

This left Bryanston to produce blockbusters for the American market - and Woodfall who had by now turned away from social realism with Tom Jones (1963) - to emphasise more on "sensuality and sexuality" culminating in Dick Lester's Swinging London and in the film The Knack (1965). These colourful films coupled with the James Bond thrillers became popular in the mid-late nineteen sixties, and it was only through Ken Loach's Poor Cow (1967) and Kes (1968) that the social realist movement manifested itself, primarily through BBC television's "Wednesday Play" unit.

CONCLUSION

The social realist movement, based mainly on literary works, is concerned with the portrayal of the individual's struggle against the power of social forces, against the snobbery and bigotry of the prevailing culture, as well as the ambivalence felt by the working-class protagonists in respect of their community. This film movement chose to expose these issues against a contemporary background. The formal strategies adopted by the "New Wave" were based on the British documentary - realist tradition. The mise-en-scene, consisting of northern locations is also illustrated in the choice of regional working-class actors for the principal roles. Albert Finney - with his Salford background - proved a perfect fit for Arthur Seaton (Saturday Night and Sunday Morning).

The "New Wave" also attacked the growth of materialism because it was changing the nature of working-class culture, moving it towards the middle-classes under the guise of a "popular culture" or "mass culture".

Despite the "left-wing" sympathies of the social realist directors their films:

"Never expressed a hint of commitment to any specific political agenda or ideology", (Quart, 1993: 15).

Instead in the words of McFarlane, 1992: 137 they possessed

"... a broad social awareness and general sense of political responsibility ... an attack on traditional English cinema as snobbish, anti-intelligent, emotionally inhibited, wilfully blind to the conditions and problems of the present, dedicated to an out-of-date national ideal."

The close proximity of Tory and Labour policies in the late nineteen fifties with both committed to welfare capitalism and the cold war meant that the social realism was structured around cultural and moral issues rather than political concerns.

In the films themselves strong male sexuality ensured that women were regarded solely

as objects of desire or career advancement, especially in the characterisations of Seaton, Lampton and Machin. Explicit sex and abortion had hitherto been taboo subjects in the British cinema.

Camera techniques used in all the films were similar in respect of creating "space" for audience involvement.

Shots of social realism urban landscapes - often used as visual motifs near the films' conclusions - "that long shot of our town from that Hill" (see Lovell above) achieved the effect of making the camera represent audience point-of-view rather than character point-of-view by directing audience view into the "space" created away from character involvement.

The stimulus of nineteen sixties changing cultural patterns produced a positive response from the "New Wave" film makers to establish, albeit over a few short years, a British cinema which could justifiably bear the title of national, a rare event in the history of the British film industry.

The success of social realism is indicated by the Academy Awards for Room At The Top in 1959 (Walker, 1986: 51) and by the profitability statistics quoted above for Saturday Night and Sunday Morning.

Although all of these films were seen by large audiences a determination of audience perception, across the strata of the English class structure, would require the formation of a comprehensive and detailed research study.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Cook, P. (1987). The Cinema Book. London: British Film Institute.
- Hill, J. (1983). "Working Class Realism and Sexual Reaction: Some Theses on the British 'New Wave'". British Cinema History. Eds Curran, J and Porter, V; Weidenfeld and Nicolson. London: 303-312.
- Hill, J. (1986). Sex, Class and Realism (British Cinema 1956-1963). London: British Film Institute.
- Hoggart, R. (1959). The Uses of Literacy.
- Laing, S. (1986). Representations of Working-Class Life (1957-1964). London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd.
- Lovell, T. (1990). "Landscapes and Stories in 1960s British Realism" in Screen Vol 31 No 4 Winter 1990: 357-376.
- McCabe, C. (1981). Realism and the Cinema: Notes on some Brechtian Theses. Popular Television and Film. Eds, Bennett T, Boyd-Bowman S, Mercer C and Woollacott J. British Film Institute and Open University Press: 216-236.
- McFarlane, B. (1992). A Literary Cinema? British Films and British Novels. All Our Yesterdays - 90 years of British Cinema. Ed Barr, C: 136-141.
- Marwick, A. (1991). Culture in Britain since 1945. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Murphy, R. (1992). Sixties British Cinema. British Film Institute: 11-34.
- Quart, L. (1993). The Religion of the Market: Thatcherite Politics and the British Film of the 1980s. British Cinema and Thatcherism. Ed Friedman, L: 15-34.
- Sinfield, A. (1989). Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain. Oxford: Blackwell Ltd.
- Stead, P. (1989) Film and the Working Class. London: Routledge.
- Walker, A. (1986). Hollywood, England. The British Film Industry in the Sixties. London: Harrop Ltd.
- Willemsen, P. (1990). Review of "Sex, Class and Realism: A British Cinema 1956-1963". The Media Reader. Eds Alvarado, M and Thompson, J.D. British Film Institute: 105-111.

FILMOGRAPHY

Room at The Top. (1959). (Remus Production Company). Director: Jack Clayton.

Look Back in Anger. (1959). (Woodfall Independent Production Company). Director: Tony Richardson.

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning. (1960). (Woodfall Independent Production Company). Director: Karel Reisz.

A Taste of Honey. (1961). (Woodfall Independent Production Company). Director: Tony Richardson.

A Kind of Loving. (1962). (Vic/Waterhall Production Company). Director: John Schlesinger.

Billy Liar. (1963). (Woodfall Independent Production Company). Director: John Schlesinger.

This Sporting Life. (1963). (Rank). Director: Lindsay Anderson.