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‘Swinging Realism’ : The Strange Case of *To Sir, With Love* and *Up the Junction*.

The phrase ‘gritty realism’ was one that found both common and academic currency through the work of the ‘Angry Young Men’ and associated New Wave British cinema in the postwar period. It was intended to convey a narrative commitment to voices and images made ‘realistic’ by an apparent reaction against the overt propaganda of the war effort, the cosiness of the Ealing Studios and the bourgeois images on the London Stage. Today, the terms tend to conflate—the ‘grittiness’ of a new television drama, Ken Loach film or Irvine Welsh novel carries an unspoken assertion of Realism. But are these terms really interchangeable? Setting aside for the moment the continuing debates over the genre characteristics of the latter term, the connotations of the former can be equally complex. Gritty here implies that reality (or at least its narrative representation) has to be at once painful and persistent, like the effects of a grinding wheel: yet also petty and annoying, like sand in the eye or gravel in one’s shoe. It also implies a stoicism, as one ‘grits one’s teeth and gets on with it’ in a manner which combines

both endurance and determination with resignation and fatalism. The two senses together seem to consign the working classes (typically the subject of such narratives) to a mentality that can be explained through Althusser's notion of interpellation. One is simultaneously proud of one's ability to defy and survive the inequalities of life, yet also aware of a profound inability to alter them. It is part of a collective reconciliation with one's lot, and this is why the notion of grittiness is more appropriately applied to the neo-realism of the postwar Angry Young Men, than to the social realists of the previous century. Whilst the literature of the late 1950s sustained the traditional concerns of urban deprivation and squalor, it did not have the bourgeois reforming tendencies of its literary predecessors. Rather, it is noted more for accuracy than ideology: this was the work of the newly empowered post-Education Act working class writers reporting experience, rather than exhorting forbearance. All of which seems puzzling in the context of a period popularly associated with affluence.

What is remarkable about the second half of the 1950s ... is that this period came to be regarded as idyllic, the era of the affluent society, a society in which, because of unprecedented prosperity and full employment, *Britain was changing fundamentally and for the better.*¹

What Childs finds remarkable about this perception is its disjuncture with underlying economic trends toward decline which was evident during the period. Underlying trends, however, rarely compose the felt effects of an era amongst its population. More striking in their time would have been an increase in earnings (for men in industry) of 95% between 1951 and 1964, together with five reductions in income tax in the same period and a reduction of the official working week.² Consequent rises in the sales of consumer durables, homeownership and expendable income per family, in a period which had only seen the lifting of rationing in 1954, are indicators of a sense of economic security vastly at odds with the experience (keenly felt by Prime Minister Macmillan) of the 1930s Depression.

The notion of change is vitally important here. Economic prosperity was one thing, but the establishment of the Welfare State, the political consensus of 'Butskellism' and the increasing cultural influence of America provided a discourse of a new and irreversible era. As Alan Sinfield notes, "Britain had entered upon a new 'Elizabethan age' of stability and

affluence...[a]cademics such as Daniel Bell proclaimed ‘the end of ideology’, while politicians ... like Richard Crossman spoke of the dawn of a ‘post-capitalist’ society”.³ Whatever our ability retrospectively to identify impending recession and retrenchment in economic and social policy, this should not detract from the recognition of the combined impact of the material benefits of affluence and the rhetoric of a classless future upon the popular consciousness. The paradox re-emerges here of a series of literary and cinematic texts that chronicled, and in many cases emphasised, issues of class division, social entrapment and working-class deprivation. In essence there is a paradox between the Macmillan Age as one of great promise and its dominant cultural form as one of bleak disillusion; if you like, a contrast between economic affluence and literary true grit.

Standing in apparent contrast to this is the late 1960s, beginning with the election of Harold Wilson in 1964. This ‘decade’, in its popular conception, was neither gritty nor real—accuracy gave way to experiment in cultural and social life in a way that eschewed notions of endurance and stoicism: why ‘look back in anger’ when you can ‘turn on, tune in and drop out’? There were now a number of alternative lifestyles (apparently) available that seemed to encourage a sense of liberation from a heritage of economic entrapment and prescriptive class and gender identities. In legislative terms, the late 1960s saw the enactment of a series of liberal reforms indicative of changes in popular attitudes towards sexuality and the family, some of which had been proposed by Wolfenden ten years earlier. In 1967, for instance, the Sexual Offences Act legalised homosexual practices between consenting adults in private. In the same year, the Abortion Act became law as did the National Health Service (Family Planning Act). The Theatres Act of 1968 ended censorship of the stage in London and in 1969 the law on divorce was also modernised.⁴ In economic terms, too, personal wealth for the overall population continued to improve. Home ownership amongst householders rose to 50% by 1970 and there were similar increases in car ownership and the sale of domestic durables normally associated with the Macmillan age.⁵

These important factors aside, the notion of a contrast between the two periods is neatly summed up by Sked and Cook’s formulation of the 1960s as “a decade of disillusion in a second age of affluence”.⁶ For these writers, the 1960s disillusionment—arguably leading to Wilson’s defeat in 1970—was due to defeated expectations, rather than any widespread material deprivation. Thus the power of discourse reasserts itself. Macmillan’s optimistic

‘never had it so good’ speech has its most meaningful analogue in this period in Wilson’s more desperate ‘pound in your pocket’ speech after the 1967 Devaluation. For Sked and Cook, Wilson had discursively contributed to his own downfall with a particularly effective campaign on the Conservatives’ mishandling of the country’s finances during the 1964 election. While this safeguarded him from real electoral backlash in the opening years of his parliament (people continued to blame the Conservatives), it did create insecurity not only amongst global financiers but also amongst the electorate. Assertions of ‘change for the good’, classlessness or post-capitalism from the late 1950s must have seemed like empty promises in the spectacular economic freefall of Wilson’s administration. A series of mishandled budgets—three in the first year of office alone—leading to devaluation in his second term of office, in conjunction with increasingly strained relationships with the unions constituted a very public loss of confidence in the future which had been a hallmark of the late 1950s.

In other areas relating to a cognitive map of Britain, violent division seemed predominant. Patrick Gordon-Walker’s successive defeats at Smethwick in the 1964 election and again at the Leyton by-election in 1965 at the hands of racist campaigning, were clear precursors to Enoch Powell’s infamous intervention into the Kenyan Asian ‘Crisis’ of 1967 and the subsequent Commonwealth Immigrations Act (1968). In October 1968, rioting also broke out in Londonderry which would lead to the dispatch of British troops by the end of the following summer. In Britain, too, the public demonstrations over Vietnam in America had spread to London and the students demonstrations in Paris were also being taken up in a series of ‘sit-ins’ in factories and universities.

Thus, the central problematic here is that while the 1950s simultaneously enjoyed economic affluence and cultural realism, the 1960s combined political and economic strife with aesthetic escapism. This, of course is painting with a very broad brush. Decades are not neatly characterised by fundamental changes occurring at regular intervals, nor is the experience of a particular period going to be affluent, austere or swinging for all members of that society. But in an era in which the power of the media was becoming increasingly pervasive it is interesting to see how a society represents itself through popular culture - to see how it contributes to the expression of the spirit of a particular age. Thus, the two texts under discussion here display certain characteristics that might reflect meaningfully on the periods from which they emerge.

To Sir, With Love stands in both periods. It was published as a novel in 1959 as part of the literature which had emerged from the Caribbean dealing with the experience of emigration to the metropolis including George Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954), Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) and Andrew Salkey's *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* (1960). Such writing is not usually regarded as the work of the Angry Young Men, but in its register, setting and content should be regarded as conforming and contributing to the neo-realism which is typical of the period. For most critics, however, *To Sir, With Love* is not accepted as typical of the genre. Kenneth Ramchand states, "Not only is *To Sir, With Love* not a work of fiction. It differs startlingly in temper from those fictional works with which it has been indiscriminately associated".⁷ Where the other texts dealt with issues of an emergent West Indian identity, this text is regarded as avoiding the need for a reappraisal of the self and emerges instead as "a sordid demonstration of the author's vanity".⁸ Arguably, whilst occupying the same social and economic terrain of the neo-realists, it already exhibited the characteristics of social naivety which will be associated later in this discussion with the 1960s cinema adaptation. In this respect one might say that it was before its time. Its production as a film in 1967, however, contains sufficient modifications to dramatically alter even the rather pallid politics of the written text.

Up the Junction, by contrast was first published as a series of short stories in 1963, after the initial appearance of four of these stories in *The New Statesman*.⁹ In subject matter and tone, however, *Up the Junction* shares more affinities with 1950's neo-realism through its emphasis on class identity, changing attitudes to sexuality and use of dialect voices. It is undeniably 'gritty', and its filmic adaptation in 1968 is thus all the more remarkable in terms of its change in tone and content.

Apart from apparently running counter to prevailing notions of affluence and swingingness in their own periods, these two texts also share other affinities. Firstly, both contain a narrator who is somehow alien to the environment of the text. Ricky Braithwaite is a Guyanese ex-serviceman describing East End schoolchildren and their environs: Nell Dunn's narrator is an heiress from Chelsea, similarly looking in from the outside in a manner almost drama documentary in tone. In each, of course, the significance of the central figure/narrator changes with the filmic adaptation, and this change in narrative perspective is clearly going to affect the way in which the subjects of the texts are presented. Secondly, both film adaptations

include a foregrounded music track—Lulu and the Mindbenders in the former and Manfred Mann in the latter. The use of popular music was also a characteristic of the New Wave cinema of the 1950's, but—apart from the foregrounding of Jimmy Porter's taste for jazz in *Look Back in Anger* (1958) as an assertion of social rebellion—it remained largely as part of the backdrop to the action. Here the music, both in terms of its lyric content and its performance, forms a substantial part of the narrative in a period when the role of music—and popular culture in general—was being used to both challenge and interrogate the indices of class structure. Before dealing with these texts in more detail, however, a brief consideration of some of the dominant aspects of 1950s realism is necessary.

John Osborne's drama, *Look Back in Anger* (1956) is the paradigmatic text which, for John Russell Taylor, "started everything off".¹⁰ In terms of its stage setting, subject matter and tone, it marked a breakthrough for the genre and provided a timely challenge to a largely stagnant British theatre. Significantly, its initial, rather moderate success at the Royal Court Theatre was boosted by the performance on television of one act from the play, and it thus entered a wider cultural and public domain in which it took on a metonymic force with which other writers, taken to be antithetical to the discourse of affluence, could be associated. It was also the first of the texts to be adapted to the cinema in 1958 by Tony Richardson and Woodfall films. Richardson, together with Karel Reisz and Lindsay Anderson had formed the 'Free Cinema' documentary movement in the mid-fifties. Their subsequent 'new wave' films produced by independent companies such as Bryanston and the Allied Filmmakers Group—of which Woodfall was the foremost—are absolutely crucial to the popularisation of gritty realism which is central to this discussion.

Richardson's *Look Back in Anger* in some ways also 'started everything off'. As the film goes beyond the bedsit stage setting of the original play, additional scenes at the jazz club, market place, cinema and elsewhere are written into the screenplay. These are images of the working classes at work and at play in ways that will find correspondence in later films such as *Room at the Top* (1959), *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960) and *This Sporting Life* (1961). What is significant about the market scene is the inclusion of the Asian trader Johnny Kapoor. As the genre of neo-realism progresses in this period, so arguably does a sort of one-upmanship in terms of the images and events which signify grittiness. Abortion or failed pregnancy is established here as an essential part of the genre; the arrival of an immigrant

underclass is also introduced as a further genre characteristic. One can certainly argue that Kapoor's inclusion has a real narrative function—the additional scenes and dialogue were written by Osborne probably to provide Jimmy with his own 'good, brave cause' and identify him with another disinherited figure in the British social landscape with appropriate reference to a continuity of social oppression. But it is the precedent that is important. Jimmy's stage persona of alienation is supplemented in the film by a visual signifier for disinheritance—the immigrant figure—and by the jazz music scenes which similarly suggest a sense of individualism in the improvised and potentially anarchic form of the music.

At the other end of the genre—chronologically—is Stan Barstow's *A Kind of Loving*, published in 1960 and filmed in 1962 by John Schlesinger. The screen success of that year, however was the first Bond movie, *Dr No*, signalling, arguably, the transition from popular realism to popular escapism in the period. Where *Look Back in Anger* adds material to the original script, Schlesinger's adaptation operates through exclusion. In Barstow's novel, Vic Brown's increasing disdain for popular culture—as it is exemplified by commercial television—is accompanied by his growing taste for classical music, as he leaves his job as a draughtsman to work in Van Huyten's music shop. Part of his rite of passage in the novel is to progress from a set of class bound horizons to a recognition of a set of ideologically imposed boundaries which include the central issues of sexuality and the family. The film adaptation removes this aspect of the narrative, and concentrates instead on a rather more conventional storyline of unwanted pregnancy, forced marriage and Thora Hird's mother-in-law character.

In the intervening period between *Look Back in Anger* and *A Kind of Loving*, the genre had continued to exploit shock value in a manner which has its modern counterpart in *Trainspotting* (1993). Sillitoe brings in abortion as a result of a married woman's affair. Shelagh Delaney, in *A Taste of Honey* (1958), has an Irish 'semi-prostitute' single mother whose illegitimate child is herself pregnant by a black sailor and living with a homosexual. Lynne Reid Banks, meanwhile, in *The L-Shaped Room* (1960) depicts a pregnant young thespian moving into a bug ridden bedsit with a gay black jazz musician for a neighbour, prostitutes in the cellar, an ageing lesbian on the second floor together with an unsuccessful Jewish writer whom she takes for a lover.

It is certainly possible to argue that social change can account for these developments in narrative content. Both the literary and cinematic realist texts of the late 1950s and early

1960s self-consciously engaged with the social issues of their time. The issue of ‘race’ had become a “new source of open social conflict” in Britain since 1958, and its continued significance to working class life would reasonably ensure its inclusion in narratives which typically dealt with this aspect of British life.¹¹ Similarly, the social position of women in regards to employment, the family and sexuality was the subject of popular debate and legislation during this period. If Osborne’s Kapoor scenes are an indication of the self-conscious intervention with the issue of immigration, there is a similar addition relating to women’s rights. Alison’s appointment with her GP to confirm her pregnancy does more than emphasise her alienation within a working-class environment. Her doctor, visually a thoroughly Victorian character, dismisses Alison’s hesitant (and of course unarticulated) enquiry about abortion with the stern response, “I didn’t hear that question, and I hope you won’t ask it again - of anyone. Or try to do anything foolish”. Due to film censorship, this is a muted contribution to the concerns over back-street abortions which would culminate in the 1967 Act, and it contrasts strongly with a similar scene in *The L-Shaped Room*, where Leslie Caron’s character is accorded significantly more agency. Its self-conscious inclusion in a male-authored screenplay, however, is part of a process which, as Jonathon Dollimore notes of *Room at the Top*, “foregrounds, and so in certain respects demystifies, sexuality as the site of class struggle and exploitation, yet at the same time sanctions more complex forms of mystification and exploitation which facilitate rather than challenge patriarchal power”.¹²

Thus, while one might regard the work of Delaney and Banks as dealing with issues of sexuality, gender and race differently to the Angry Young Men with which their work has been associated, their work still falls within a generic principle of Realism which Baldick defines as “a system of conventions producing a lifelike illusion of some ‘real’ world outside the text, by processes of selection, exclusion [and] description”.¹³ This process of selection and exclusion can contribute to a notion of genre exploitation which is driven as much by internal developments in the genre as by the intentions or social engagement of the authors. For publishing editors and film producers, each successive text would have to develop upon the earlier examples of the genre in its ability to include progressively harsh portraits of life.

Furthermore, while many of these novels and plays provide a complex, problematised approach to their subject, the often simplified narratives of the film adaptations reduce the texts to their lowest class denominator. In a period when the notion of a new society was

meant to be rampant, neo-realism was trading in images that gestured backwards in a fetishised and voyeuristic manner to a static society still characterised by deprivation and depravity amongst the working classes. ‘Looking back’ remains the key term. If Jimmy Porter was angry because nothing had changed and Arthur Seaton had only the weekly cycles of Sunday mornings, or the annual cycles of Goose Fair, Christmas and National Service to look forward to, it is because change does not really exist in these texts. Just as Joe Lampton’s character in *Room at the Top* operates from the narrative viewpoint of a ten-year-old retrospective, so all of these texts, and particularly the films, seem to describe a way of life that was in the past. Arguably, they found popular success precisely because they were not reflecting life as it is, but *how it was*. Just as Richard Hoggart could look back nostalgically to the working class virtues of the pre-war years in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), so audiences could voyeuristically look back at images that the rhetoric of affluence had assured them were never to return.¹⁴

The period of transition between perceived affluence and what might be described as a greater sense of realism in public life is often taken to be 1964. The Labour Party campaign of ‘thirteen wasted years under the Conservatives’ together with documents testifying to continued problems with poverty, housing and social entrapment encouraged a growing public demand for change under Harold Wilson. Therefore, if affluence was accompanied by a realism made palatable by popular myths of change, so once those myths were exploded from the mid-1960s onward, one can identify a retreat from realism in the cultural realm. Just as cinematic texts served to accentuate class divide and poverty in the earlier period, those texts which continued to operate out of that tradition in this period changed their ideological flow.

How does this occur in *To Sir, With Love*? As a novel emerging from a multi-cultural Britain in its infancy, it can be read as a text of integration. That is to say, a text intended to re-educate the white population out of both the racism of empire and the new racist mythologies of immigration. Braithwaite’s tactics—often attacked by postcolonial critics—was to present a central Black character so thoroughly colonised into an ideological Britishness as to effectively invert the coloniser/colonised relationship. In essence, Ricky Braithwaite—as he appears in the text—civilises the savages of East London. His progress here is hampered not simply by the unwillingness of the children to respond to an education system which has already excluded them, but by a series of encounters with structural and social racism. Central

to these encounters, and to Braithwaite's characterisation of Ricky, is the romance between Ricky and Gillian Blanchard—a fellow teacher at the school distinguished by her wealthy parents and flat in Chelsea.

The textual marriage between Ricky and Gillian is a rather asexual union based upon a shared appreciation of high culture and the mutual priggishness of outraged and outspoken respectability. In effect, it is a union based around class signifiers. Ricky has already identified himself in the opening scenes with a 'superior woman' who refuses to sit next to him on the bus. While the other working class occupants despise her for her prejudice, Ricky finds his own initial anger "surprisingly tintured by a certain admiration for her fearless, superior attitude": she was, he thinks, "more than a match for the people around her".¹⁵ Gillian is similarly aloof as Ricky shares her confidence in "the assurance of her own poise and breeding to keep her inviolate".¹⁶

The intention here is not to play down the aspect of race in this novel, but rather to show how Braithwaite used the British class structure and its indicators as a means of responding to racist mythologies which associated the black population with drugs, prostitutes and squalid housing. Just as Ricky displays all the virtues of the privileged classes—the colonial classes—so the Eastenders are, as he mentally notes, "thick armed and bovine with gaudy headscarves and solid legs and large feet which seemed rooted in the earth. They were of the city, but they dressed like peasants, looked like peasants and they talked like peasants".¹⁷ It is from this class economy that the narrative operates. The working-class location and population of the school provides the generic material for economic deprivation and moral depravity essential to the realism of the time, with racism as a central theme. The difficulty most critics have with the text in this regard is with the solutions that it seems to offer. Racism is apparently not acceptable where the victim displays such self-evidently superior qualities, and class barriers are given similar treatment as Ricky quickly gives up on the task of educating his pupils towards school qualifications, and concentrates instead upon issues of deportment, social behaviour and personal morality. The promise of the Macmillan age in this regard seems to relate less to economic activity and more to the dissemination of bourgeois sensibilities in a manner that smacks suspiciously of Matthew Arnold's nineteenth century educationalism.

Thus, the text achieves closure not through a change in the material circumstances of

the various characters, but through a tentative change in their attitude. The proposed marriage between Ricky and Gillian remains threatened by and subject to widespread racism beyond the environs of the school. This is ameliorated, however, by the arrival of the children at the Seales' home (a dual heritage household) which suggests the development of a new society that was the classless, integrated dream of the period.

One can hypothesise about the film which might have been made of this script by the British Free Cinema movement. Gillian would almost certainly have become pregnant in a mirror of the Seales' household, or one of the school children would have conceived with Ricky and lynch mobs would have roamed the streets, or laid siege to the school. The film adaptation was not made, however, until 1967 under the auspices of James Clavell (screen-writer, producer and director) and distributed by an American film studio, Columbia. While these factors may account for some of the narrative changes which emerge from the process of adaptation, they do not detract from the effect of the cinematic script—or from the box office appeal which the makers clearly thought was there in a society eight years beyond the original script.

Most strikingly, the central character becomes Mark Thackeray—played by Sidney Poitier, and as a result Americanised. Thus, the early exchange with another teacher at the school, Grace Dale-Evans, which establishes his wartime service with the RAF in the novel, is used instead to emphasise his Americanness. In the novel, Ricky uses the term 'appointment' rather than 'job', which Dale-Evans takes to be "too highbrow" for the context of the school.¹⁸ It is, however, a term which Ricky notes Gillian uses in the next scene, thus providing an early indicator for their compatibility. The same scene in the film emphasises Ricky's Americanisation. The debate over appropriate discourse now revolves around the use of the term 'majoring' in a subject—a term which (then at least) signified an American education, while Ricky's protracted job search prior to the teaching post is now less significant than his having come from 'spending some time in California'. And the exchange is between Thackeray and the now more common Grace Evans.

This absence of class signifiers continues throughout the film. The superior woman disappears from the bus, and the romance between Ricky and Gillian is removed altogether. What is established by these changes is that Mark cannot be easily identified within British class structures. As an Americanised character, he takes on an almost classless quality which

is enhanced by the fact that he has no British counterpart in the film. In removing this story line, and the external encounters with racism in the restaurant and with Gillian's parents, the film reduces the scope of the narrative almost entirely to the classroom, and thus the narrative becomes one of the opposition between authority and revolt.

To enhance this further, as well as limiting the focus of the film to the classroom, the classroom itself is reduced to two representative figures, Denham and Pamela Dare. Dare is the "hottest number in the class", and Denham is visually upgraded with his leather jacket, black T-shirt and jeans recalling Brando's *Wild One*.¹⁹ In subduing these two figures, Mark effectively subdues the entire class. The narrative order of the novel is changed in the screenplay to accentuate this.

Denham becomes the significant figure in this. There are two crucial encounters in the narrative of both texts which determine the struggle for authority within the classroom between Ricky/Mark and Denham. In the novel, Ricky initially subdues Denham after a boxing bout with him which leaves the children looking at him as though he "had suddenly and very satisfactorily grown up before their very eyes".²⁰ On the second occasion, after Denham's robust response to the abuse of another pupil by the P.E. teacher, Ricky is able to defuse the situation with rather absurd ease through his appeal to personal restraint and appropriateness of behaviour.²¹

In the film adaptation, these two incidents exchange chronological order. The boxing scene represents the climax of Denham's—and thus the class's—rebellion. Faithfully adapted from the novel, it becomes more potent due to the more highly gendered presence that Denham is accorded in the film. His physical defeat breaks the spell of his authority over his classmates and this is signified by his subsequent change to a more conformist style of dress. This scene brings to an end a struggle for control over the class between Denham and Mark which has stemmed from the incident with the P.E. teacher now located earlier in the narrative. The significant aspect here is that Denham is able to reduce this incident to one of institutional authority against youthful freedom: "It's alright for you," he says, "no-one tries to tell you what to do." In the novel, these are lines delivered by Seales, the dual heritage child in a private exchange between himself and Ricky. Thus, a moment which is used in the novel to painfully recall Ricky's own experience of racism, is rearticulated in the film to emphasise the more swinging theme of teenage revolt.

Two characters are thus radically altered in the film text, which in the novel provide a sense of location within society for the main character. Gillian is removed to absent the class distinctions: Seales is effectively sidelined to remove the Black British aspect. In fact, the only scene which is added to the film has Seales crying his hatred for his black father for marrying a white woman, and his continued misery with the death of the mother defines him as the unhappy product of a misconceived union. These two absences are drawn together in the closure of the film text. Where the appearance of the children at the Seales' home for the funeral in the novel is a strong image of hope for the future—racial integration being achieved by the younger generation—this romance is tempered by Ricky's subsequent meeting with Gillian's parents and their concerns over exactly the kind of situation that Seales has emphasised in the film. It is not an entirely unproblematised ending, and it does anticipate the sequels in Braithwaite's writing. In the film, by contrast, the appearance is followed simply by the school dance—a vehicle for Lulu and the Mindbenders—and the only real significance of these scenes is the appearance of two younger pupils whose behaviour suggests that the next academic year will be the same for Mark.

The effect of the absence of both class and race as themes in the film is to reduce Mark's role to one of his struggle for control over his pupils. By subordinating these themes to those of authority and rebellion, Mark is posited as outsider and in detaching him from any textual counterpart, Mark is offered as an individual unencumbered by traditional class associations. In this respect he provides—despite the continued moral and social convictions of the character—a sense of a rejuvenated social order. Thus, when Pamela Dare claims in the film, “We are the first generation to be free, to be really free”, she is claiming a freedom from the past, a freedom to sport in a new social age. An old symbol of authority would not be appropriate to lead the class into the new meritocracy. Notably added to Mark's Americanisation is the idea that he has achieved his position of authority from a similar background of poverty—as one pupil puts it “You're like us, but you're not like us, if you see what I mean”.

To summarise, then, in a period of heightened awareness of social conflict—for example the Race Relations Act was legislated in 1968 (itself a date, as noted above, redolent with public resistance and demonstration)—a narrative which initially tried to work through issues of racial prejudice through reference to British class identities, emerges as a swinging

feelgood movie. The persistent use of a pop soundtrack in the film similarly displaces the presence of classical music in the novel to reaffirm the sense that dispensing with the injustices of the past could be achieved by a form of disciplined ‘turning on’. How does this operate in *Up the Junction*?

More briefly, the relationship between the cinematic and written texts of *Up the Junction* is close to being the binary opposite of that described in *To Sir, With Love*, whilst achieving the same effect in terms of issues of class, identity and social change. Where the latter removes the love interest between the main character and a Chelsea heiress with the signifying potential described above, *Up the Junction* imports a relationship that was not there originally. In doing so it introduces issues of class that were not apparent in the written text. Central to this is the change in status of Dunn’s narrator.

In the book, Dunn’s narrator operates more as an observer than a participant: there are some references to her class, and type of girl she is, but these do not form an substantial part of a text which is primarily concerned with reporting the action and speech of the observees. In this one might recognise a parallel with the liberal humanist writers of the nineteenth century. In the screenplay, however, Polly’s determination to leave behind her wealthy background becomes a focal point of all her relationships in the film. In particular, it forms a central problematic in her relationship with Peter, the working-class van driver/shophand whose character is similarly a fabrication of the screenplay.

Polly’s relationship with Peter drives the class politics of the film. In *To Sir, With Love*, the textual romance of Ricky and Gillian is based upon certain shared moral and classbound interests. Gillian exists as a permanent outsider, and the exchange between herself and the occupants of the East End is always going to be unilateral—she has nothing to learn from them, and her behaviour and interests will not be altered by them. In this, she exhibits the coloniser’s attitude noted in Ricky. Furthermore, when Ricky attempts to impose bourgeois behaviour on the children, she is dubious about the wisdom of such a transgression of class signifiers, and would prefer to maintain apparent class divisions.²² Certainly she sees little of value in the culture of the East End. By contrast, Polly is determined to take on board working class values and praxis and the greater emphasis rests again upon the anticipation of change from previously held certainties about class.

Thus, Polly makes the same claim on freedom as Pamela Dare in the previous film.

She wants to be free to be honest rather than conform to apparently outdated identities and looks forward to a class merger which Booker describes as an encounter between the “crumbling of an old order and the rising new - each fascinated by the powerful image of the other: the insecure lower or less ‘established’ group longing for the style and ‘stability’ of culture and breeding; the insecure upper group mesmerised by the life and vitality of the arriviste”.²³ By comparison, Peter wants only to change himself in order to progress within existing class positions. He lusts after the same fast car, large property and ‘Grade One girl’ that Joe Lampton aspires to in *Room at the Top*. Appearance becomes important in this regard. Where Lampton buys brogues and a silk dressing gown, Peter is a Mod. Michael Brake notes in *Comparative Youth Culture* that Mods attempted to “abstract themselves from their ascribed class location with a neat, hip image ... they emulate(d) the middle classes”.²⁴

There can be little other reason for importing a Mod into a narrative heavily dominated by Norton and Triumphs and bikers. Bearing in mind that the film was made during the heyday of seaside violence between Mods and Rockers, it seems odd that Peter is able to go to a bikers’ party with a clearly apparent look of contempt and distaste in his face, with no actual fights ensuing. The film does not shrink from violence in other scenes, and as the opportunity was not taken to exploit that social situation, we must look elsewhere for the significance of his appearance.

Polly also changes her appearance in the film. Her flat and new boyfriend are accompanied by a hairstyle and wardrobe which allow her to pass into the local Battersea community and, by extension, into a national youth culture and period of fashion and styles which sought to undermine and ironise the visual identification of class background. It is one aspect of the signifying process that saw the appropriation of military dress by hippies, or John Lennon’s psychedelic Rolls Royce. Significantly, when Peter says of Polly (before she has her make-over) “You don’t look like you come from the back streets”, she retorts, “Do you?”

The difference here is that where Lampton and Peter dress in order to succeed within existing class restraints, Polly is attempting to transcend them, working from a conviction in the revolutionary potential of the 1960s rhetoric of social change. Ultimately it is Peter who emerges as a victim of the social hierarchy he wants to progress within by being arrested for theft. And ironically it is the same vested interests (in the form of Polly’s connections) which partially redeem him.

This last is perhaps the most telling aspect of the film. *Up the Junction* as a cinematic document does uphold most of the conventions of the postwar realist genre. There is a painfully detailed and protracted illegal abortion. There are also scenes of street markets, demolished houses and the blue-collar work place. These images, however, are dominated by an overall sense of a growing and vibrant culture that will ultimately overcome the class bound residue of the past. Like the film of *To Sir, With Love*, this narrative looks forward to a promising future in a manner which seems at odds with the enduring power structures that Peter's incarceration suggests. Together they contribute to an expression of swinging liberation and optimism which seems, in retrospect, in contrast to the political and economic reality of the day in much the same manner as the late 1950s insistence on realism contrasted with the age of affluence.

What conclusions can be drawn from this discussion? There can be little debate that, in the process of adaptation, narrative alterations to the literary text are evident in the cinematic version. There can similarly be no real dispute over the contrasting tone of the New Wave cinema of the late 1950s and early 1960s, and the two films from the late 1960s discussed here. But what does this tell us? While I have argued that genre exploitation was an important factor in the development of 'gritty realism' in the late 1950s, such a driving force always runs the danger of losing its defamiliarising effect. Even given the notion of poetic realism discussed by Andrew Higson (1996) and John Hill (1986) in relation to cinematic narrative techniques, and the camera work of Walter Lassally in the New Wave films, there remains what Terry Lovell terms a "repertoire of images [which] soon staled into cliché"—a process only held in check, temporarily, by the process of exploitation referred to above.²⁵ In this respect, Lindsay Anderson's development from drama documentary, through *This Sporting Life* (1963) to the more surreal *If* (1968) can be regarded as a barometer of developments within postwar cinematic realism.

The triumph of gritty realism, however, has to be placed into the broader context of social change and economic affluence. Hill notes one danger of the new wave cinema as transforming the postwar British industrial townscapes as "objects of 'comfortable contemplation'".²⁶ The viewer of such objects for Hill is the modern counterpart of the bourgeois voyeur seeking not so much a working-class experience of recognition and validation as "the very sensation of class difference".²⁷ While it certainly can be argued that a

voyeuristic appeal is a main motor function of the genre development outlined above, the audience figures were too high to explain the popular success of these films in this manner. Rather they should be understood in terms of the popular structures of feeling—the discourse of affluence and change in this period—which suggests the difference Hill alludes to would *also* be experienced by the working-classes: for them, it would be the difference of ‘then and now’ rather than ‘us and them’.

By extension, while the demise of gritty realism as the dominant cultural expression by the end of the 1960s can be explained through notions of genre fatigue, this tends to sever such narrative representations from the inverted paradox of affluence and disillusion identified by Sked and Cook. The reinterpretations of realist narratives from the 1950s as technicolour illustrations of ‘swinging’ London fulfill a similar function to their grainy 1950s counterparts and operate within broader structures less as dissidence, and more as denial.

It seems there really is no such thing as *true* grit.

Notes

¹ David Childs, *Britain Since 1945: A Political History* (London: Methuen, 1984) 105, emphasis added.

² *Ibid.*, 105.

³ Alan Sinfield, ed., *Literature and Society 1945-70* (London: Methuen, 1983), 20.

⁴ Childs, 214-5.

⁵ Childs, 106.

⁶ Alan Sked and Chris Cook, *Post-War Britain: A Political History* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1984), 252.

⁷ Kenneth Ramchand, “The Myth of *To Sir, With Love*,” *Voices*, December 1965, 1, 16.

⁸ F. Birbalsingh, “To John Bull, With Hate,” *Caribbean Quarterly*, 14.4, 74.

⁹ Nell Dunn, *Up the Junction* (London: Virago, 1988).

¹⁰ John Russell Taylor, *Anger and After* (London: Methuen, 1969), 39.

¹¹ Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), 162.

¹² See Alan Sinfield, *Literature and Society*, 68.

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- ¹³ Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 184-5.
- ¹⁴ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957).
- ¹⁵ Edward Ricardo Braithwaite, *To Sir, With Love* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1971), 8.
- ¹⁶ Braithwaite, 87.
- ¹⁷ Braithwaite, 5.
- ¹⁸ Braithwaite, 16.
- ¹⁹ Ramchand, "The Myth", 18.
- ²⁰ Braithwaite, 82.
- ²¹ Braithwaite, 154-58.
- ²² Braithwaite, 74.
- ²³ Christopher Booker, *The Neophiliacs* (London: Collins, 1969), 95.
- ²⁴ Michael Brake, *Comparative Youth Culture* (London: Routledge, 1985), 74.
- ²⁵ Terry Lovell "Landscapes and stories in 1960s British realism," *Screen*, 31.4, Winter 1990, 368. See also Andrew Higson, ed, *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1996), and John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism* (London: BFI, 1986).
- ²⁶ Hill, 136.
- ²⁷ Ibid.