

Social realism essay



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Investigating Social Realism: with reference to *Sweet Sixteen* (2002) and *This Is England* (2006) Within the last few years British Cinema and Realism have been linked. “ Realism began in the 1930’s with documentary films, and a prime example of this is with the ‘ father of documentary’ John Grierson, who founded the British documentary movement and created classic films such as *Drifters* (1929), *Industrial Britain* (1933), *Song of Ceylon* (1934) and *Night Mail* (1936). ” In which British Cinema depicting the daily lifestyles of working class citizens. Social Realism presents a tenacious raw and grim image of lifestyles explored by the working class.

It is conventional for social realism to be filmed with natural lighting, as it help encode realism, with also de saturated colours as Social realism tends to deal with real life issues, as the mood of the media text typically tends to be negative. Over the years the genre has been seen to have a gloomy reputation, which has seen an increase in box office revenue. For example *Kidulthood* which depicted gang culture with the streets of London, The film was of a low budget (which is normally conventional for a social realist films) and was funded by the UK film council.

Social realist films tend to consist of the socio-economic group of an ABC1 audience and a psychographic group of aspirers from the age range of 30-60 with a secondary audience of students. Social realism can be seen to educate and inform users about grim issues faced upon society. The upper band of the socio economic group, the ABC1 group would tend to use the film for a sense of personal identity or surveillance (Blumer and Katz, 1974) whereas the lower end of socio economic group, C2, D and E audience would

use social realism for diversion to gain a sense of escapism from the outside world.

Better than any other genre, social realism has shown us to ourselves, pushing the boundaries in the effort to put the experiences of real Britons on the screen, and shaping our ideas of what British cinema can be. " It is conventional for Social Realism films to have low production values, with a majority of films within the last few years funded by the now closed UK Film Council (UKFC). The UK film council was funded by through sources including the National Lottery. It distributed more than ? 160m of lottery money to over 900 films. Most of which was of the genre of Social Realism.

Established directors such as Ken Loach have created many successfully social realism films with low budgets. For example His most commercially successful recent film is 2009's Looking for Eric (Ken Loach, 2009) featuring a depressed postman's conversations with the ex-Manchester United football star, Eric Cantona (played by Cantona himself). A measure of Loach's difficulties gaining broad release for his work is the fact that this film ended up making only ? 12, 000 profit. The film received critical acclaim and won the Magritte Award for Best Co-Production.

In America, social realism, started as depictions of social and racial injustice, and economic hardship in the, through unvarnished pictures of life's struggles; often depicting working class activities as heroic within the 1930s. " British director Ken Loach, started his career in the 1960s, when he joined BBC Television and directed several Wednesday Plays (single plays broadcast in 1964-70) including Up the Junction (1965) and Cathy Come

Home (1966) with producer Tony Garnett; with whom he shared a passion to present current social issues to the British public via TV, in the form of drama.

His beliefs and areas of main concern are clearly displayed consistently in his work: *Up the Junction* is based on a novel by Nell Dunn, who observed the lives of working-class people in South London. *Cathy Come Home*, is where Loach shows us a young working-class couple who become homeless, it is based on the investigative journalism into the issue of accommodation for homeless families carried out by journalist Jeremy Sanford. ”

Through these works Loach determines to present working-class people’s challenging lives, adopting filming techniques from documentary which use handy and flexible 16mm cameras to film outside the studio; and with his preference of using non-professional actors and improvised shooting, Loach established his particular style of drama, which creates a blurring effect between the distinction of fact and fiction, and fact appears through fictional narrative. When he began his long career as a film director, with *Poor Cow* in 1967, he had already established and sustained his basic approach toward film-making.

Loach’s work has never primarily been about visual style: at the core of all his films, are political statements about people being the core issue economically or politically within British society. Loach’s films from the 1960s through to the 1980s, deal with particular social and political contexts, such as housing problems or union strikes. His main concern is the social system; supposedly designed to help people in a predicament, but which

nevertheless works in the opposite manner to further oppress the people and create misery. Shane Meadows is one of the British directors with a commitment to his hometown.

He has been making films located around Nottingham, and this is England is no exception. The film is Set in Uttoxeter in 1983, Shaun (Thomas Turgoose) is an 11 year-old boy who recently lost his father in the Falkland's war. He is bullied at school due to his style of clothing; his flared jeans become the target of mocking by the students who dress in the various trends of the 80s, such as two-tone, new-romantic and punk. On the way home from school, Shaun meets the local skinhead gang and their leader Woody (Joseph Gilgun), who sympathises with his situation and welcomes him into the group.

In order to follow the style of the skinheads Shaun persuades his mother to buy him a pair of Dr. Martin boots, has his head shaved and Woody gives him a new Ben Sherman shirt to complete the look. Shaun is happily accepted by the gang, nevertheless their cheerful gathering is interrupted on the same night by a vicious looking man Banjo (George Newton), accompanied by the returned-from-prison old skinheads leader Combo (Stephen Graham). Who upon spotting one Jamaican Milky (Andrew Shim) in the group; insults him and the night ends in an awkward and uncomfortable mood.

Although the majority of the members (including Woody) sense the riskiness of Combo and try to avoid him, Combo comes back and lectures them about the state of England; his passionate speech on the condition of immigration and criticism of Margaret Thatcher's Falkland war policy leads to a speech on

the pride of being English, and Combo persuades them to join his group. Shaun flips out when Combo comments that the Falkland war was meaningless, in order to protect his father's honour: this interests Combo and he treats Shaun specially and encourages him to join.

Combo's act as a surrogate father figure lets Shaun join with a few other members. They go on to attend a speech by a National Front politician, and Shaun is fascinated by the comradeship between these people without knowing what it actually means. For him it was simply the fun of being in a gang, but it soon expands into insulting graffiti and bullying Pakistani immigrants and a vicious attack on the local Pakistani who runs the local news shop. Milky, Jamaican-English, eventually joins Combo to prove his „Englishness?. A gathering in Combo's flat one day reveals the fundamental difference between them.

Milky tells Combo he has a big family with both parents, which is something Combo could not have. Combo loses his temper and strikes Milky until he becomes unconscious and covered with blood, Shaun tries to stop Combo but results in crying helplessly, and the night ends disconsolately. Shaun's Mother later tells him that Milky is going to be ok, but this incident awakens him from the short summer fantasy, and in the last scene we see Shaun walking towards the sea to throw away the English flag that Combo had given him as a symbol of their beliefs and relationship.

Shane Meadows's film-making is as consistent as that of Loach, filmed on a low-budget, with the use of a mixture of professional actors and local people, and the use of a chronological shooting style. Sweet Sixteen, is Loach's

response to the youth film trend of 1990s Britain; it features a teenage boy as a protagonist as had Loach's most popular film *Kids* (1969). Liam (Martin Compston) plays a 15 year-old boy, whose mother Jean (Michelle Coulter) is in prison, and who is living with his grandfather and his mother's boyfriend Stan (Gary McCormack), a drug dealer.

His small dream is to buy a caravan for his mother, older sister Chantelle (Annmarie Fulton) and her little son Calum (Calum MacAlees); but his hope of reconstructing his family eventually comes up against a harsh reality. Liam and with his friend Pinball (William Ruane), steal Stan's cache of heroin to raise funds for the caravan, but their attempt at drug dealing is spotted by the local gangster Douglas (Jon Morrison). He offers to take them on as his men, but when he only hires Liam, Pinball's pride is hurt and their friendship is damaged.

Liam's new business, which operates as part of Douglas's undercover drug dealing pizza delivery network, is a success, but Pinball burns down Liam's caravan in anger and steals Douglas's car and crashes it into his health club. Douglas offers Liam a luxury flat for his family but also orders him to give Pinball a lesson first. After a long search for Pinball, Liam finally finds him, addicted to heroin in a squatted house on a council estate, and their argument leads Pinball to cut his own ace with Liam's knife and get sent to hospital. On the day of Jean's release from the prison, Liam holds a welcome home party in his luxury flat; however, after this brief moment of family reunion, the next morning – Liam's sixteenth birthday – Jean goes back to Stan. Liam in despair blames Chantelle for her cruel attitude towards their mother, and in return she tells him that Jean does not love them anymore. In

desperation Liam runs to Stan's house and has a fight and stabs Stan in front of his mother.