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**Nostalgia in the British Cinema: The Significance  
of Nostalgia in the Social Realist Filmmaking  
Tradition with a Focus on the Work of Shane  
Meadows**

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the  
degree of Masters of Arts by Research

York St. John University

School of Humanities, Religion & Philosophy

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*'Maybe you're the same as me, we see things they'll never see, you and I are gonna live forever.'*

## Abstract

This thesis explores how British social realist films are framed in relation to the past, with a significant focus on the work of Shane Meadows. In this explorative study, the choice to use nostalgia to interrogate the British social realism is motivated by the contemporary cultural trend of the nostalgic mode. Fredric Jameson has suggested that ‘everything in our culture suggests that we have not ceased to be preoccupied with history’ (1992: 282). Jameson’s sentiments can be seen through countless reflections of the past through many forms of media and countless film genres, including that of the social realist style and Meadows’ work. Using the research methodologies of thematic and close analysis through a selection of social realist films, this thesis examines, not only why and how social realist filmmakers, including Meadows have framed their films in relation to moments of history or past styles, but observes said past and filmmaking in terms of what Melanie Williams states as ‘morbid nostalgia’. This thesis covers many areas: a definition of social realism, the nostalgic mode and its relationship with social realist texts, a case study of *This is England* (2006) and finally social realism and nostalgia’s place on television.

The conclusion of this thesis demonstrates how contemporary society provokes filmmakers to seek the past as a place of comfort to only discover that the past is just as bad as the present fulfilling Williams contention of morbid nostalgia. This thesis further concludes that for Meadows, this nostalgia runs contrary to conventional wisdom in that it is not, for him, a heartening and hopeful feeling but one which has led him to present what has been quite effectively termed, a morbidity of nostalgia.

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## **Introduction**

In his book, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Frederic Jameson states that ‘everything in our culture suggests that we have not ceased to be preoccupied with history’ (1992: 282). This preoccupation can be seen throughout the vast breadth of film, television, literature and art. To the same end, Pam Cook similarly argues that:

[T]he critiques of memory and nostalgia in film studies are part of more general engagement in the humanities with issues of history and identity, ranging across disciplines. But they are also partly a response to the emergence of nostalgic memory film itself, which reconstructs an idealised past as a site of pleasurable contemplation and yearning (2004: 4).

The main objective of this thesis is to determine why contemporary social realist dramas are framed by their own relations with the past, rather than confronting their present directly; this shall be examined by focusing on the filmmaking style of Shane Meadows. Whilst this work will pivot around the work of Meadows to contextualise the study, there will be an additional exploration and analysis of the British New Wave and its directors’ instigation of the filmmaking style.

Jameson describes nostalgia as ‘a collective wish fulfilment, and the expression of a deep, unconscious yearning for a simpler and more human social system’ (Jameson, 1992: 283). In addition, Pam Cook also defines nostalgia as ‘a state of longing for something that is known to be irretrievable, but is sought anyway’ (2004: 3). For social realist cinema in the 1960s, however, the critique of the present was based on a hope for the future and on a belief that the contemporary structures of oppression and misery might change. This thesis will, conversely, seek to explore how Meadows’ critique of the present derives from critiquing the past. Melanie Williams, Martin Fradley and Sarah Godfrey suggest that a number of Meadows’ films could be described as ‘morbidly nostalgic’ (2013:10) in the way he frames aspects of the past within his work. This thesis will seek to understand how the combination of nostalgia and the social realist style establish Meadows’ work as ‘morbidly nostalgic.’

Social realism is a style, format and sometimes a genre concerned with topical issues in contemporary society. British social realism is concerned with themes such as drugs, sex, religion, politics and class. The latter theme dominates not only the British variant, but that of other forms of social realism. In a *Sight and Sound* article in 1956, Lindsay Anderson stated:

Everyone who has seen more than half a dozen films with his eyes open knows that if cinema does not create the significant social movements of our time, it intimately reflects them. And that it provides a reflection just as intimate – and just as significant – of social stagnation (1956:44).



Anderson was one of the key individuals associated with British cinema in the 1960s, having directed films such as, as *If....* (1968), and *This Sporting Life* (1963). The latter film, and a collection of other films preceding 1963, fell under a kitchen sink realism that focused on Northern working-class characters, impoverished communities and run-down landscapes. A more contemporary example of this style is, arguably, the British film *This is England* (2006), directed by Meadows. The film's premise is the coming of age of Shaun Fields, a 12-year-old boy who has recently lost his father in the Falklands War. Set in 1983, many themes and issues of the time, such as war, subculture, racism and political unrest, are represented and reflected in the film. A number of British social realist films use nostalgia to assess issues of the present day by comparing it to the past. This can be seen in *Trainspotting 2* (2016). The film explores themes from the first instalment to comment on current issues of present day society.

*This is England* and other work of Shane Meadows offers visions of a nostalgia which looks to the past to explain the conditions of the present. For example, in their introduction to their collection, *Shane Meadows: Critical Essays*, Williams, Godfrey and Fradley suggest that:

[The] *This is England* series does not hesitate to interrogate the gulf between period kitsch and the often brutal socio-political schisms of the period; nor does it shy away from drawing explicit parallels between the 1980s and the various social and economic crisis of the present (2013: 12).

Through the interrogation of *This is England*, it will be argued that for contemporary social realist films, the diagnosis of the present seems only understandable in relation to the past; that is, by way of how this thesis defines nostalgia. This thesis will explore how the notion of nostalgia is habitually used to both demonstrate and inform the audience of the issues at not only the time of production, but that in which the film is set. More specifically, one argues, in *This is England*, Meadows has arguably assessed society in 2006 and concluded that it is an unpleasant place to be, and, in line with Cook's statement, that the past is a place of comfort and yearning. However, once Meadows has sought the comforting past, he has found that it remains as sour as the present from which he is trying to escape, leading him to be critical about the past and his youth.

This continues to happen as he revisits the characters from the film across three television serials: *This is England '86* (2010), *This is England '88* (2011) and *This is England '90* (2015). This is further addressed with Meadows taking themes of the effects of Thatcherism on a group of individuals, and looking back at English society under an oppressive Conservative government, and the notion of youth, much like Alan Clarke's *Made in Britain* (1982). Therefore, because Meadows has used specific narrative styles from Clark, one argues, the yearning Meadows also holds, is for a past social realist cinema. Nevertheless, what is unusual in Meadows' work, compared to the definitions provided by Cook and Jameson's nostalgia film, is that rather than the wistful sentimentality of days gone by held by members of the audience, nostalgia here is in fact futile and morbid in nature. Thus, it will be concluded that nothing has changed and both society and culture remain largely the same as they did before.

Moreover, this thesis seeks to explore how certain social realist films use tone, themes and nostalgia without the films actual taking place in the past, such as *Brassed Off* (1996). Ewa Mazierska has written that, ‘many films offering a larger picture of the changes to the labour-capital divide, such as *Brassed Off* (1996) by Mark Herman, were made some time after Thatcher’s demise’ (2015:163). *Brassed Off* is set ten years after the yearlong miners’ strike between 1984 and 1985. Scenes such as the one in which Pete Postlethwaite’s Danny gives a speech about the government failing industry help to illustrate the consequences of the labour-capital divide. Therefore, it will be posited that the past can be read as harming the present, and that some characters are unable to leave the past because they are tied to it. This is further backed up in Alexander Walker’s book *Icons in the Fire*, in which he states that Mike Leigh’s *Naked* (1993), Herman’s *Brassed Off* and Peter Cattaneo’s *The Full Monty* (1997) are ‘all films about individual regeneration amid urban decay achieved through defiance of Thatcherite economics’ (2005:123). As one can see, social realism and nostalgia are inextricably linked, and this will be explored further throughout the course of this thesis.

In order to understand social realism, this thesis will seek to explore influences that have shaped the style. Social realism is a style that has grown from the documentary movement of John Grierson and Humphrey Jennings. Their dedication to exhibit a social commitment throughout their work carried on through to the Free Cinema movement of the 1950s and rejected the Ealing comedies and war films which populated mainstream cinema, and this detachment became a unifying factor of this movement. The ideas and themes that Free Cinema held at its core progressed further when key individuals from the movement began making feature films, using the

documentary style of the previous movement to create an illusion of reality. However, 'since society evolves and changes so too social realism evolves and changes' (Lay, 2002: 8). Therefore, films from the British New Wave, such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962) and *This Sporting Life*, contain different subject matters from those of the 1990s and further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In Jameson's exploration of postmodernism and the related death of the subject, he has suggested:

The great modernisms were predicated on the invention of a personal, private style, as unmistakable as your fingerprint, as incomparable as your own body. [...] the modernist aesthetic is linked to the conception of a unique self and private identity, and unique personality and individuality [...] There is sense in which the writers and artists of the present day will no longer be able to invent new styles and worlds; they've already been invented (2011:285).

This thesis will look to explore Meadows' work in relation to Jameson's statement, investigating the extent to which Meadows uses previous styles and worlds as a form of nostalgia. Furthermore, Simon Reynolds' work on '*Retromania*' will build upon Jameson's notion and place it within contemporary society. Reynolds argues that 'the 2000s have been about every other previous decade happening again all at once: simultaneity of pop time that abolishes history while nibbling away at the present's own sense of itself as an era' (2011). He refers to this period's '*Retromania*'. Therefore, this thesis will explore media reactions of when echoes of history and Freud's theory of the

uncanny reflection present themselves in the social realist format, and how they ultimately imitate those echoes and reflections.

Lay further states that ‘social realist texts are texts which explore contentious issues in a society, especially at moments of crisis or conflict’ (2002: 9). This is true for other genres of film too, such as science fiction and horror, but while these may use strong metaphors, such as, Stormtroopers in *Star Wars* (1977) evoking a Nazi regime, social realism tends to construct an honest version of society using relatable narratives and simple representations. Within the years of Meadows’ filmmaking, there have been moments of crisis within British society, reflecting what Mark Duguid outlines as ‘ugly issues such as poverty, unemployment and the seeming abandonment of the working-class’ (2009: 3). Consequently, the social realist format at such times thrived by reflecting these issues and themes. For example, the recent spike in food banks has been reflected in Ken Loach’s *I, Daniel Blake* (2017). Therefore, due to Reynolds’ ‘*Retromania*’ and the sociological factors in Britain, one can argue that Pam Cook’s assumption that society has a ‘growing preoccupation with memory and nostalgia’ (2004: 2) can be understood in terms of societal crisis. However, this thesis is concerned with the issue of tone around nostalgia. Social realism has never been rose-tinted in the way that it tackles the present, therefore it is unlikely it will represent the past in the same way.

### Research Methods

The methodology of this thesis will consist of qualitative research that will adopt a textual/contextual approach the usage of nostalgia in British social realist cinema and

the work of Shane Meadows. Established interviews, archive footage, and newspaper articles will be used to form a strong body of research providing a cultural context of social realism and nostalgia. Therefore, Lester Friedman's *British Cinema and Thatcherism* serves as a companion in analysing the social context of the time. By analysing social context, this will allow a comparison of present day and the past, which will to an assessment of the futility of nostalgia. In addition to discourse analysis, historiography will be applied throughout the study to analyse writings on important social topics from the past, such as the Free Cinema manifesto, and Channel Four's remit, to aid the research and provide evidence for the arguments that will be made.

The sampling strategy that has been used to identify the collection of films in this thesis was employed by analysing the content of critically popular social realist films between 1960 and 2017, and identifying the narratives that visions of the past are showcased. The same sampling strategy has been employed when identifying a range of films in Meadows' filmography; however, due to this thesis focusing on contemporary cinema, certain films of Meadows have been omitted due to them not fitting with the criteria one is looking for. Nevertheless, this thesis recognises that Meadows' early film *Twentyfour Seven* (1997) does exhibit moments of nostalgia and seeds a framework for what is established later on in Meadows' career. Although the selected sample of films will be closely analysed throughout this thesis, a case study conducted on *This is England* will form a substantial part of a Chapter Four.

Whilst the selected sample of Meadows' films all present themes of nostalgia, *This is England* perfectly illustrates the subject this thesis is seeking to investigate. Furthermore, conducting this case study will allow this thesis to compare it to other

social realist texts, such as *Kes* (1969), *Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962) and *Fish Tank* (2009). The comparisons will be conducted through textually analysing the specific scenes that have been identified in the sampling stage of the research. This comparison is necessary to understand how Meadows work stands out as different in the context of the style and the way in which he utilises nostalgia.

Chapter One will contextualise the social realist movement by closely following its development through history, starting from early documentary by Flaherty and ending with Meadows. In addition to contextualising the development of style, one draws on the cognitive theory outlined by Hallam and Marshment in order to provide a theoretical framework for both the social realism aspect of this thesis and nostalgia. They state that ‘cognitive theories are interested in exploring how we make sense of our physical and material world’ (2000: 125). By taking a cognitive approach when analysing social realism and nostalgia, it helps one to understand why filmmakers have explored such aspects of society and further periods of time in relation to psychology. Hallam and Marshment further state:

Psychological engagement with the text emphasises familiarity and recognition.

– It maintains that viewers engage with narrative films in ways similar to those in which they engage with everyday experience. Realism articulates a relationship between the conscious, perceiving individual and the social world, activating a mental *mise-en-scène* of memory, recognition and perceptual familiarity (2000: 125).

In addition, psychoanalysis will also aid defining social realism Albano argues that:

[O]ne could maintain that film makes real a series of uncanny situations. The tendency to break down the frontiers between real and imaginary, the impression of reality, the experienced presence and the real absence of the object on screen, the existence of the double, the identification with another (Albano, 2013).

The use of psychoanalysis and Freud's concepts will help define the social realist style by exploring the impression of reality and how that affects the psychological state of the viewer. This thesis will then question how the audience distinguishes this impression from actual reality. Therefore, the process of engagement places meaning as interactive, either accepted or rejected by the audience as they watch a film.

Chapter two will consider the psychology of nostalgia in the filmmaker and the audience by exploring Freud's psychoanalytical theory. As has been argued, 'cinema and psychoanalysis both show a scene heterogeneous to reality (cinema) or to conscience (psychoanalysis), and they are both *unheimlich* (uncanny)' (Albano. 2013). Therefore, the uncanny will be linked to nostalgia, but not the more common wistful kind. Thus, when referring to nostalgia, one must consider the psychological aspects an individual, considering both the viewer and the filmmaker, goes through in the process of memory and recounting an event. Albano further states:



[F]ilm reactivates a series of unconscious processes related to childhood complexes (the primal scene and voyeurism, the defence against castration anxiety and fetishism) investigated by Freud. In fact, according to Freud [...] the domains of fiction and poetry serve to anchor and motivate the obsolete within what has been repressed, to mark an "intimate correlation" between animistic tendencies and foreclosed childhood complexes (2013).

The use of psychoanalysis will provide a strong theoretical framework that will weave not only through chapter two, but throughout the entirety of this study. It will be framed in terms of the reflection of the repressed and used to establish how the human mind begins to be nostalgic about specific moments of time and not others. This will be interrogated by analysing the filmography of Meadows and decoding it in terms of autobiography. Films such as *A Room for Romeo Brass* (1999) have strong links with a particular moment in Meadows' childhood, such as when he made friends with an unsavoury individual; *Dead Man's Shoes* (2004) draws inspiration from the death of a friend, but when Meadows returned to the area in which he grew up, life had continued to move on and this friend had been forgotten (Calhoun, 2017). Due to the autobiographical nature of his work, the process of remembering will be explored. According to Deleuze, the 'virtual is absolutely real, it is a dimension of reality (the actual) itself and how such an experience can impact and modify our relationship with the world, with others and even ourselves' (D'Angelo and Scapparone, 2014). In this explanation, it can be argued that nostalgia is a construct that the mind makes when remembering something with affection, which at one point in one's life was real. Therefore, through this logic, nostalgia, or the virtual, can modify an individual's relationship with the world, and themselves.

Chapter Three will build upon the contextual analysis of both social realism and nostalgia, and begin to explore how and why they are inextricably linked. Furthermore, Chapter Three will seek to apply the linked notions of nostalgia and social realist style to the work of Meadows. This will be taken by an application of close analysis of a range of texts, including the work of Meadows and others, through semiological analysis and decoding of mise-en-scène. Branston and Stafford state that ‘semiotics is defined as the study of signs, or of the social production of meanings and pleasures by sign systems, or the study of how things have come to have significance’ (2010: 12). Therefore, this thesis will look at signs and signifiers of the time that suggest class, occupation, and codes that define the social status certain individuals of the population hold. Branston and Stafford assert that ‘semiotics emphasises that our perception of reality is itself constructed and shaped by the words and signs we use, in various social contexts’ (2010: 13). Therefore, in order to analyse and confirm this reflection of society within social realist films, an analysis of the mise-en-scène is necessary.

Continuing with close textual analysis, chapter four will examine the role of nostalgia in British social realism through a case study of *This is England*. Considering the three televisual series that subsequently followed the film, chapter five will explore social realism’s place in the medium of television. This interrogation will not only add context to social realism, but it will help this thesis’ overall argument about Meadows as a filmmaker, whose work refers back to previous moments of history and trends to evoke ‘morbid nostalgia.’ The chapter will revolve around an argument made by Samantha Lay. She asserts that, ‘to understand social realism in Britain without consideration of the influence and parallel developments in television at certain crucial

times, is all but impossible' (Lay, 2002: 21). The final chapter will rationalise Lay's argument by attempting to understand the journey that Meadows takes, from one medium to another, and the continued exploration of 'morbid nostalgia' in continuing existing storylines from the films.

# **Chapter 1: Nostalgia in the British Cinema: A Definition of Social Realism**

Social realism is a discursive term used by film critics to describe films that aim to show the effects of environmental factors on the development of character through depictions that emphasise the relationship between location and identity (Hallam and Marshment, 2000: 184).

Whether a term, movement, style or genre, one may argue that social realism in British cinema began its life with Second World War filmmakers and propagandists, John Grierson and Humphrey Jennings. Their films depicted unity within the nation through emphasising everyone's role in the war. The quote above is just one definition of social realism that this chapter will explore. Although Hallam and Marshment summarise the thematic tropes often found within the social realist tradition, there are a number of other definitions that are conflicting and complicate the application of the style within this thesis. Therefore, this chapter will examine different definitions of social realism to provide the most appropriate definition that will aid this thesis in identifying social realist texts, when exploring them in relation to nostalgia. To understand social realism one must look at all the possible definitions of the style, and other strands of realism throughout the British cinema. In *Sight and Sound*, John Berger stated that:

Every time an art needs to revitalise itself after a period of formalism, artists will turn back to reality; but their attitude to reality, and the way they interpret it, will depend on upon the particular needs of their time. That is why realism can never

be defined as a style, and can never mean an acquiescent return to a previous tradition (1957:12).

Despite Berger's argument that realism's style is indefinable due to the changing of cinematic trends, one can argue that over the course of a century there have been many different strands of realistic styles, such as poetic realism and Neorealism. Scholars and critics have observed that the styles naturally crossover and complement each other.

### Melodrama – On Stage Realism

Looking at realism in terms of psychology, one can see that 'realism articulates a relationship between the conscious, perceiving individual and the social world activating a mental mise-en-scène of memory, recognition and perceptual familiarity' (Hallam and Marshment, 2000: 123). Therefore, owing to this recognition and perceptual familiarity, the role of realism can be traced back to turn of the century theatre. Here, melodrama was the form used to interpret the perceived social world and ultimately formed the basis of the realist format. Nicolas Vardac (1949) argued that the 'spectacle of the real dominated the melodramatic stage for half of a century before moving image and cinema replaced the illusion of reality' (cited in Hallam and Marshment, 2000:9). Despite the differences in observation, depiction and use of music which subverts the realism sought, melodrama uses situation and plot in the same way social realism does. As Hallam and Marshment demonstrate, melodrama's 'action takes places against elaborate scenic backgrounds, and themes are drawn from a range of sources that represent and mediate contemporary life' (Hallam and Marshment, 2000:

6). The idea of drama representing contemporary life leaves the melodramatic genre at the turn of the century inherently realist in nature. In TV's *This is England '90* (2015), one could argue that some of the formulaic features, such as a plot that plays on the audience's heightened emotions, are similar to that of the melodramatic genre because it represents and mediates contemporary life. For example, Hallam and Marshment suggest that melodrama is characterised as primarily concerned with situation or plot. This plot is seen through the murder of Lol's father in *This is England '86* but continues to play a part in the narrative up until the final episode of the last series with Combo's storyline.

### Documentary Realism

Moving away from the theatre of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, the technological development of cameras and the ability to capture moving image allowed realism to be explored in the pursuit of providing education. In a *Guardian* article, Derek Malcolm stated that:

Robert Flaherty was a pioneer of the documentary, and one of those whose work sparked many of the continuing arguments about truth and falsehood within the genre. [...] if you look at *Nanook of the North* you can see where so much else has come from (2000).

In 1922 Flaherty released what is considered the first documentary, *Nanook of the North* (1922). He led an expedition to Quebec in order to capture the life of the Inuit people. After Flaherty released his third feature, *Moana* (1926), even John Grierson,

who would become a famous documentarian, stated in the *New York Sun* newspaper that ‘of course Moana, being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth and his family, has documentary value’ (2000:28). Much like realism and social realism, documentary has many definitions and is often hard to apply to many films without taking into account multiple descriptions and the certain flaws they bring. Although the realism still stands unaffected, this thesis argues the main flaw of *Nanook of the North* is that authenticity is compromised through the use of bulky cameras that are far from discreet, therefore prompting the subjects of Flaherty’s film to act differently than they actually would in everyday life. In addition, Stella Bruzzi agrees that ‘documentary film can never offer a representation of real events indistinguishable from the events themselves’ (2006:68). Therefore, although the documentary serves to reflect reality and is at heart using realistic elements, this thesis argues that it is not realistic at all.

One can follow the chronology of style from Flaherty and Grierson to Humphrey Jennings, and the Free Cinema movement. The Free Cinema filmmakers, Lindsay Anderson, Karel Riesz, and Tony Richardson, were stylistically and thematically influenced by the above individuals. Due to the nature of when the newly born Free Cinema movement emerged, the films were not merely just for entertainment purposes, they had ‘a social purpose and a role to play in the betterment of society’ (Lay 2002: 39), an educational function similar to documentary. The movement has become a legacy through its pioneering practices and techniques that have distinguished its products from the mainstream. Rather than having working-class caricatures, the movement brought class to the forefront in order to explore and represent issues that were not necessarily featured in mainstream cinema at that time. Therefore, through the

use of innovative styles and aesthetics, such as, the intimate camera work, use of music and youth led narratives, the mode of this cinematic expression is often defined as documentary realist.

Initially, the concepts of Grierson were not concerned with style and aesthetics, but rather with sociological issues. As stated by Samantha Lay, Grierson's intentions and desires were rooted in making a drama from the ordinary, the working-class, against the background of the extraordinary. This can be seen in his first film, *Drifters* (1929). The film documents the story of Britain's North Sea Herring fishery. In the documentary, the fishermen (the ordinary), face hardship through the unstable nature of their occupation (the extraordinary). Unlike Flaherty, who was willing to compromise authenticity of his films by altering ways in which his subjects lived, Grierson was dedicated to show the 'authentic', even if it compromised the vision he had for the film, such as, the narrative and purpose. Furthermore, another key member of the movement who was dedicated to showing the 'authentic', Basil Wright, stated that, 'the primary interest of the documentary director is sociological' (Wright in Kuhun 1980: 180). Documentary is sociological in terms of a dedication to the functioning of society; however, despite being an important factor of the movement, Grierson stated that documentary is the 'creative treatment of actuality' (1966: 147), much like Vertov's reconstructed reality; it is a style. For Russian constructivist, Dziga Vertov, the camera was an instrument for penetrating external reality. Thus, his aim and technique was to:

[D]irect the attention of the viewer to the non-narrative formal structures of the work rather than to the content, through lighting, montage, distorted camera angles, fast or slow motion, freeze frame and flicker effects – in an attempt to



force the viewer to acknowledge and recognise films as reconstructed realities rather than mirror or reflection of pre-existing events (Hallam and Marshment: 28).

Through fast editing and filming techniques, Vertov achieved what he defined as 'ultimate realism'. One hundred years since the film was made, one argues that the methods Vertov used are avant-garde and may fall in the surrealist style of filmmaking rather than the realist. Despite his style presenting a deviation from forms of realism concerned with this thesis, it was Vertov's commitment to social issues that draw resonance for this exploration. Therefore, it is observed that the commitment to social issues have been a defining feature of realism, even if it meant making subjective choices which compromised the style's reflection of society. The subjective choice of the working-class facing hardships of everyday life provided Grierson and more importantly Jennings the opportunity to creatively represent reality of the time. Consequently, one can observe that Grierson's definition compromised the primary interest of Wright's and other key members of the movement.

### Poetic Realism

Lindsey Anderson has stated that 'the Griersonian tradition [...] was always more preachy and sociological than it was either political or poetic' (Anderson in Jennings, 1982: 59). Due to the nature of filmmaking under the economic and environmental factors of the 1930s and 1940s, much of the documentary films made by Grierson and the Crown Film Unit were Second World War propaganda. However, despite this Griersonian tradition, Humphrey Jennings' visual and lyrical style granted

him superlative status over other members of the movement. *Listen to Britain* (1942) showcased the representation of the working-class and social issues filtered through the poetic style of Jennings became known as what Andrew Higson perceived to be poetic realism. He argued that:

[P]oetic realism involves a more perfect conjunction of surface realism and moral realism, a conjunction which transcends ordinariness, which makes the ordinary strange, even beautiful – but above all, which has emotional depth and integrity (Higson, 1995:190 – 1).

In other words, the films still focus on sociological issues but are also imbued with moral realism, one that is committed to the issue from a reasonable standpoint. This commitment provided Jennings with the ‘emotional depth and integrity’ to provide the audience with something entirely different from the working-class representations that were based on their comedic failures, such as the content seen in *Steptoe and Son* (1962 – 1974). Therefore, cinema became so much more than entertaining the masses but dedicated to the duty of the representation of the working-class and their plight.

Jennings’ aptly named *Listen to Britain* (1942) observes and listens to individuals across Britain at wartime. A staple technique of Jennings’ was the relationship between the role of work and leisure. This is established through the use of musical themes that are distinctive to both aspects of life. For example, at the beginning of the film, the music that is layered over images of a ballroom full of young adults is contrasted with different musical themes of miners preparing to go down the pit. Samantha Lay states that, ‘the soundtrack creates a unity and harmony, whether at work

or at play music binds the nation' (2002: 51). It is argued that the images of ballroom dancing, singing and children playing in the film paired with the jolly melodic non-diegetic music creates a nostalgia of normality for a time before the war begun. Musical themes and soundtrack have been used in social realism the same way they have been established in other forms of cinema. They are both used to articulate feeling and emotion which the sole image may not. This iconic technique of Jennings' was later adapted and used by the Free Cinema group, notably seen in films such as *We Are the Lambeth Boys* (1959), as members of the youth club working during the day is contrasted with leisure in the evening.

The contrasting images Jennings used provided subtle and touching propaganda, unlike the bold American Uncle Sam posters, and they convey a togetherness in the war effort by ditching the representation of class differences to unite everyone across the country. Samantha Lay states that 'what is interesting is how harmony and unity continue to be foregrounded in this new iconography' (2002: 53). The combination of the two became the iconic trait of social realism of the time, forgetting the class differences to show a unified Britain at wartime. Although this combination had been left behind in that period by the time of the Free Cinema Movement, the poetic nature of togetherness continues to be foregrounded in communities of people in modern social realist texts. Like Jennings, and later the British New Wave filmmakers, the Free Cinema group continued to use recognisable tropes of meaning, such as a representation of a unified culture of the time, to delve into and go beyond the surface realism in order to achieve poetic realism.

## Neorealism

However, shortly after the documentary and poetic realism movements of the 1930s and 1940s, Italian Neorealism emerged from the debris of the Second World War. Often recognised as one of the main influences of the British New Wave and their social realist style, Neorealism pioneered many techniques that key individuals of the Free Cinema movement, would also use in years to come. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith expressed that, ‘with the main film studios either bombed or in temporary use as a transit camp for refugees, Italian filmmakers were able (or forced) to set up small scale productions’ (2007: 123) which promoted styles and characteristics such as location shooting and the use of non-professional actors. Films such as *Roma Città Aperta* (1945) and *Ladri di Biciclette* (1948) were made in the left wing political period between 1945 and 1948. Although Neorealism is a broad term that can be attributed to a handful of European post-war cinema movements, the films made in the Italian Spring contributed to pioneering realism, and Neorealism has gone on to help define a form of realist cinema that we understand today.

*Ladri di Biciclette* is a good example of the iconic techniques of Neorealism. Firstly, as mentioned, Italian Neorealism generally provided a close insight into the lives of ordinary people. In the film, it is that of the underclass in a suburb of Rome. Hallam and Marshment suggest that, ‘the audiences of the day based their criteria of ‘realisticness’ on the content of the image and the obvious authenticity suggested by the unglamorous faces, the shabby clothes worn by the characters and the poverty of the environment’ (2000: 16). The use of non-professional actors and location shooting provide the film with a realistic mise-en-scène and cinematography that was contrasting

to the mainstream aesthetic of films at the time. Bazin argues that Italian Neorealists were by no means the first in history to use nonprofessional actors, ‘but never before have the actors been so skilfully integrated with the most specifically aesthetic elements of the film’ (2005:44). By employing non-professional actors, it allows for their untrained acting ability to fit the realistic nature of the film. The scene in which Antonio has his bike stolen while putting up a poster of Rita Hayworth, could be read as ironic, due to the lack of baggage the non-professional actors carry and the difficulty when working with large Hollywood actors like Rita Hayworth. Many of the individuals used were from the setting of the film, therefore real working-class individuals were used, which brought their regional dialects, and life experiences in order to make the film as realistic as possible. In addition to the aesthetics of the film, Hallam and Marshment argue that:

[T]rivial events are included that serve a variety of functions: they furnish an appearance of everyday life, adding small but significant details that will be important to later events, or they serve to fill out the depiction of everyday life (2000, 16).

Therefore, *Ladri di biciclette* and the handful of other Italian Neorealist films pay attention to the miniscule details of daily life. These films use the narrative in order to reflect society and provide an authentic representation of reality, something not always associated with mainstream cinema. The use of a subtle musical score is used to further aid the authentic representation of reality. In his book, *Cinema of Anxiety: Psychoanalysis of Italian Neorealism*, Vincent F. Rocchino argues that, ‘the music in *Ladri di biciclette* rarely tries to dominate or order the image track, as contemporary

music montage of pop-tune scenes have a tendency to do.’ (1999: 71-72). The music takes an invisible and suggestive role in connoting the conscious choices of the characters underpinning the drama within the film.

Another technique pioneered by the Italian Neorealists was the use of longer takes. Although Bazin suggests that longer takes were already used, in such films such as *Citizen Kane*, he argues that the Neorealists composed a new style of shots that were ‘unusually long – some lasting three or four minutes’ (2005:43). Furthermore, he argues that, ‘the unlikely sobriety of this structure is possible only because of the remarkable plastic balance maintained [...] which only a photograph could render. [...] the image reveals an intimate knowledge of the subject matter on the part of the filmmakers’ (2005:43). Similar to the Griersonian wartime films, the use of longer takes is able to create an authentic real-time equivalence of everyday life, which allows the subjects of the film to be observed in terms of the space presented in these long takes. This pioneering technique not only provided a mediation of a particular world view and political attitude, but united form, content and expression that allow space for audience reflection. The innovations of the Neorealists were passed through many national cinemas throughout Europe at the time. ‘Neorealism’s influence on cinematography and film style shaped what has become known as European art cinema’ (Hallam and Marshment, 2000: 45).

### La Nouvelle Vague

The post-war art cinema was one that was dedicated to political filmmaking and producing a unique artistic aesthetics in order to represent something real and

meaningful. In the late 1950s and early 1960s two European art cinemas ran concurrently with each other. *La Nouvelle Vague* and the British New Wave, were two national cinemas that followed and used the stylistic features of the Neorealists. The collection of films featured in both cinemas share a commitment to a socially conscious and realist style of filmmaking influenced by Neorealism. These films operated outside the mainstream communities of the profession, which allowed more freedom of choice in choosing projects away from commercial constraints. John Caughie has argued that, ‘the late arrival of European influence in British cinema can be read as a backwash of a wave that has happened elsewhere’ (Caughie, 1996: 38), citing that *La Nouvelle Vague* is often seen to be superior, birthing a wealth of films that have been replicated by the British New Wave. However, despite the superiority that is acclaimed by the French New Wave, the British New Wave began earlier than the Free Cinema movement, between 1956 and 1959, which executed many of the stylistic and realist features used by the French thereafter. Geoffery Nowell-Smith wrote about the British New Wave:

Alongside the *Nouvelle Vague* it was the first concerted attempt anywhere since the days of Italian Neorealism to create a new and different cinema, rather than just the occasional different or superior film (2008:132).

### The Free Cinema Movement and the British New Wave

The British New Wave filmmakers were a collective that achieved a renaissance of artistic quality and social commitment. These filmmakers, Karel Reisz, Tony Richardson and Lindsay Anderson all emanated from the Free Cinema Movement. The movement consisted of a collection of films by those filmmakers and many others from

across the country and Europe, shown at the National Film Theatre between 1956 and 1959. The cinema followed a strict manifesto:

No film can be too personal. The image speaks. Sound amplifies and comments. Size is irrelevant. Perfection is not an aim. An attitude means a style. A style means an attitude. Implicit in our attitude is a belief in freedom, in the importance of people and in the significance of the everyday (Hedling, 1998: 41-42).

The newly emerged youth demographic in the 1950s became a new audience and culture of the time. It could be argued that the post-war youth subculture did not necessarily follow the traditional working-class system, instead they pursued leisure rather than work. In his book *The Teenage Revolution*, Peter Laurie affirms: ‘distinctive fact about teenagers’ behaviour was economic: they spend a lot of money on clothes, records, concerts, make-up, magazines: all things that give immediate pleasure’ (1965: 9). Due to the filmmakers being part of the youth culture, they reflected the culture of the time for a wider audience. *Mama Don’t Allow* (1956) and *We are the Lambeth Boys* (1959) are all concerned with contemporary culture, documenting the emergence of the youth culture and its search for leisure. The documentary style, montage scenes and music, especially in *Mama Don’t Allow*, show the poetic and social realist style that these filmmakers have adapted from Jennings and Neorealism. Due to the citation of youth culture on the screen, the music that features in the documentaries is inherently related to youth culture. For example, where Jennings, and Neorealism used musical score to underpin the narrative, the Free Cinema Movement often used a mixture of both musical score and popular music. In *We are the Lambeth Boys* the rock and roll



music of Lonnie Donegan and his contemporaries can be heard whilst images of young people are dancing at the youth club. Therefore, due to the focus on youth culture and the working-class in the Free Cinema movement, these issues became prominent themes and ideologies when the key players in the movement made feature films.

The Free Cinema movement provided an initial glimpse of how the use of social realism would be utilised in British cinema. The subject matter, combined with the stylistic documentary shooting, allowed the filmmakers to achieve a realistic style that would resonate with the viewing audience. With their established poetic style and mature ideologies, the move to feature films allowed them to produce fiction that would continue to reflect issues of the working-classes and youth culture. Colin Gardner argues that the lead character in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), Arthur Seaton, 'embodied what was happening in England: he was a sad person, terribly limited sensibilities, narrow in his ambitions and a bloody fool into the bargain' (2006: 119). Part of this comes from the fear of settling down, or conforming to societal demands. The film ends with Arthur and Doreen, the girl with whom he has decided to settle down, walking in the fields behind the new housing estate that is being built. When discussing where to live, Arthur states, 'I wouldn't mind living in an old house myself.' This is Arthur outwardly resisting the confirmation of what is to come, however, when Doreen argues that they will eventually live in one, Arthur throws a stone at the new houses and simply accepts it. This is shown through the use of the actors' body language and facial expression to show the audience his acceptance of the life he has fought against. To Robert Murphy, this is seen as a 'downbeat ending showing the inevitability of Arthur being tamed by the system' (1992: 19). In addition to *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, *Look Back in Anger* (1959), *Room at the Top*

(1959), *A Taste of Honey* (1961), *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962) and *This Sporting Life* (1963) were all films of the British New Wave and between the three filmmakers, Anderson, Reisz and Richardson, they created influential social realist or kitchen sink drama films that are integral to definitions of British social realism.

### Modern Social Realism

Through contextualising realism in cinema over the last hundred years, and by critiquing and analysing certain movements of realism, one can argue that the modern incarnation of social realism falls in line with John Grierson's definition of documentary. The creative treatment of actuality, and in line with the cinematography and shooting style of the Italian Neorealists. However, Hallam and Marshment define social realism as, 'the relationship between place, character and identity [...] they are all set in economically marginalised communities, places where people are disenfranchised by poverty and lack opportunity' (2000: 192). This definition solidly encapsulates the typical aspects and themes of a narrative of social realism that can be found in many of the British New Wave texts, and significantly in the work of Ken Loach. However, the definition does not take into account the poetic nature that some of the films possess. Films such as *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* are inherently social realist due to the subject matter defined above, but they bring a certain poetry to social issues through stylistic shooting and editing such as, long isolated tracking shots of the protagonist which immerse the audience within his psychology.

On the contrary, Lay challenges the notion of the 'social' in 'social realism'. She argues that:

Our understanding of the ‘social’ has changed and, as we have seen the representation of the social and the public has given way to an increased representation of the private and the personal (2002: 121).

Pawlikowski’s *Last Resort* (2000) is the only social realist text to explore the role of online pornography and the dangers of the internet. Although the film still falls in line with the Hallam and Marshment definition, it explores a new role of social realism that has yet to be done since the film’s release. Nevertheless, one could argue that Charlie Brooker’s *Black Mirror* (2011) uses the social realist style in some of its episodes to explore the personal and private contemporary society. Episodes such as *The National Anthem* (2011) and *Shut Up and Dance* (2016) explore how social media and the internet impact the public. Although the content of *Black Mirror* may be one that is fantastical at times, the realism is very much explored by sharing similarities to reality. Furthermore, Lay also states that,

In a multicultural society ‘British’ can mean many different things to different groups. But filmmakers are not exploring this in social realist texts to the extent as, for example the position of white working-class males (2002: 121).

One can see that within the social realist filmmaking style there is a lack of representation of certain cultures, and at the time of writing her book, Lay concluded that the subjects of diaspora and ethnic minorities were marginalised in narratives surrounding the class system for white males. However, within the past ten years an influx of British social realist films that include the representation of minorities have

become popular. Films such as, *Kidulthood* (2006) and *Shifty* (2008) all focus on marginalised groups in London. Furthermore, through Meadows' extensive work with the *This is England* (2006) series, minorities have been explored and consequently so too has the notion of Britishness, such as in *Somers Town* (2007), which sees a diasporic Polish father and son experiencing the British culture in London. The comparison between the cultures boils down to the main characters Marek and Tomo, one Polish and the other from the North of England. This exploration provides a fresh look at the social realist style, allowing important aspects of what now is known as British culture. The film presents a new area for Meadows, one that connects with the traditions of class but also shows areas of deviation in his usual films. Therefore, due to the shift of British culture and the social aspect of contemporary society, Lay's vision of social realism is indefinable.

David Forrest's definition is similar to that of Hallam and Marshment; he argues that British social realism is, 'a focus on marginalised young protagonists, disconnected from their environments and searching haplessly for meaning and structure in their lives' (2013:35-36). Despite Forrest's generalisation of the age of the protagonists, he has identified the same themes of narrative progression that Hallam and Marshment have explored. However, like the ones before him, he has lacked identifying the stylistic features of a typical social realist text, although he further argues that there has been a 'move towards an image-led narration in which the specificities of social and political detail are side lined in favour of a more liberated textual approach' (2013: 37). The drive for aesthetics has ultimately compromised the political and social commitment of the text; however, on the other hand, the films are less realist and more stylised, image-led, and therefore 'liberated' from certain aspects of tradition. Consequently, one could

argue that the stylistic approach of many of the social realistic texts only adds to the social commentary it is attempting to make.

### Definition

After looking at a number of definitions of realism and realist movements, this thesis has yet to find a consensus among scholars. Therefore, with the aid of these definitions, this thesis defines Social realism as the creative treatment and respect for reality with the episodic narrative focus, combined with the observational style of camerawork, of an individual's relationship with the environment, with society and with the family unit. This definition can be viewed in line with the psychological definition from the start of this chapter, the way one perceives and articulates a conscious and subconscious understanding of a media text that is used to reflect society is important in terms of not only decoding and encoding a text to determine its relevance within the social realism filmmaking style but can be further attributed to the role nostalgia plays within social realism and how one may interpret it.

## **Chapter 2: Nostalgia in British Cinema: Context & its Place in British Cinema**

Similar to the previous chapter, this one also seeks to provide a contextual discourse to establish a framework that will be applied to this thesis' investigation. By contextualising the origins, and effects of nostalgia, it will aid this thesis' application of the term to British social realism and that of Meadows' work. Furthermore, through contextual analysis, it will help elucidate Melanie Williams' idea of morbid nostalgia present within the work of Meadows. Additionally, the chapter will begin to weave the psychology of filmmakers and the audience in order to understand the role nostalgia plays when encoding and decoding a film.

### **Shane Meadows**

It's easy to laugh at the 1980s. Many people base their memories on the stuff they see in those I Love The 80s TV shows: massive VHS recorders, Atari consoles and rubbish digital watches, all shown against a backing of Now That's What I Call Music Vol 2. But my memories have more meaning than that (Meadows, 2007)

The quote above is taken from an editorial which Shane Meadows himself wrote for *The Guardian*, while promoting the release of *This is England* (2006). Throughout the article, Meadows articulates the differences between the collective consciousness of England, and what he perceives as his own experiences of the time. His own

experiences can be seen through the content of *This is England*, when asked in an interview, for *indielondon*, whether the character of Shaun is what he was like in the 80s, Meadows responded, “It’s totally biographical” (2007). Pam Cook has suggested that ‘social and personal change, both express uncertainty and hesitation about moving forward into a brave new world, and both use memory to articulate that anxiety’ (Cook, 2004: 100). In the years preceding the release of Meadows *This is England*, the United Kingdom and other counties around the world experienced social and personal change that caused uncertainty for its future, such as the Iraq war and the increase of terrorism. These events led to films of the time focusing their anxieties through their narratives. . Although, Meadows’s exploration into the past is more concerned with his authorial voice rather than anxiety of the future, this denial of a painful present and ‘looking at the past to find a vision for the future’ (Cook, 2004:100) can be seen throughout his filmography.

Across the breadth of Meadows’ filmography certain themes such as, masculinity, family and relationships can be linked to the idea of nostalgia through Meadows’ own personal experiences. In fact, Williams describes such themes as ‘Meadowsian’ in nature (2013:2). The recurring themes of masculinity may be attributed to the relationship between Meadows and his father. Meadows has stated that his father’s arrest for suspicion of murder was a ‘big shift, as a nine-year-old to come back and find that your dad’s locked up in prison’ (Harvey, 2011). Although eventually cleared of all suspicion, it may be argued that the stigma and association with the crime had lasting effects on Meadows and his father (Fradley et al, 2013: 2), shown through his themes that are present in his work. Therefore, one may argue that Meadows is using

his past personal experiences to explore his nostalgic tendencies for a normal childhood that he failed to experience.

After dropping out of school before he finished his GCSEs, Meadows turned to petty crime. Although not notable enough to warrant a serious offence, the inept criminal experiences would later become a prominent ‘Meadowsian’ theme in his work. Other than his own misdemeanours, Meadows witnessed many of his friends and the inhabitants of Uttoxeter turn to crime. In a *Guardian* interview, Neil Spencer stated, ‘Uttoxeter, Burton on Trent, Nottingham, Sneinton, Calverton – washed-up mining villages, chintzy suburbia, forgotten chunks of rust-belt Britain – have been the unpromising backdrop for every Meadows film’ (Spencer, 2002). The mass unemployment caused by the closure of mining pits across England caused the youths of the 1980s and 1990s to be without any job prospects and to turn to crime, in order to fill not only their time, but also to fill their pockets of the missed wage from Thatcher.

One can argue that the class positioning as well as the geographical landscape has shaped the identity of Meadows’ authorial filmmaking style. As Meadows’ inspiration comes from his past, it may be argued, however, that it is not merely creative indulgence but it is fuelling his nostalgic fantasies in line with the Pam Cook quote. In the same *Guardian* article explored above, Meadows stated:

You got your entertainment from mixing with a variety of different people. While making the film, I realised that all of my fondest childhood memories surrounded human contact: mucking about with mates or going camping. In 2007, people put less emphasis on that sort of thing and more on planning their



careers and their TV viewing. As far as I'm concerned, if you're working from nine to five then coming home to watch shows that your Sky box has recorded for you while you were out, you might as well be on a fucking drip (2007).

This thesis argues with this statement, suggesting this it is merely a reactionary sentimentality of middle-aged, golden-aged thinking, and is hopeful for the better times to return. Furthermore, Cook also states that nostalgia is as a 'state of longing for something that is known to be irretrievable, but is sought anyway' (2004: 3). For Meadows, the thing he is nostalgic for is retrievable. He uses it to compile an autobiographical narrative to treat his nostalgic impulses and to mask the anxiety of present day worries and the bleak, uncertain future. Although his quotation provides notions of nostalgia, it may be argued that through the promotion of his film, Meadows is vested in creating a link between himself and the material, therefore it may problematise the nature of nostalgic utterances. Nevertheless, due to the vast amount of content within his films that are nostalgic, this thesis argues that Meadows is simply not using the nostalgia he feels for his youth as a marketable material, he genuinely is nostalgic for lost times.

This thesis contends that *This is England* (2006) is a nostalgia fuelled remake of Meadows' own life experiences, and his exploration is, perhaps, filling the void of that which has been lost. Cook has stated that, 'the emergence of the nostalgic memory film [...] reconstructs an idealised past as a site of pleasurable contemplation and yearning' (2004:4). To some extent this is true of the work of Meadows, however, it is argued that the representation of the past or the narratives of his films are anything but filled with happiness and are occupied with anxieties that crowd present day life. Therefore, this

thesis postulates how can a film be wistfully nostalgic, when what is being represented and remembered is so bleak?

### Postmodernism

The use of nostalgia in social realism has been present since the Free Cinema group banded together in the 1950s using the principles that Humphrey Jennings pioneered, resulting in an ideological nostalgia; for example, the styles and themes that were used to create unity through propaganda in the Second World War, were employed in such films as *We are the Lambeth Boys* (1959) and *Every Day Except Christmas* (1957). Furthermore, in order to understand the inner workings of the stylistic choice of nostalgia, one must look further than the filmmakers who implement it. Jameson has written extensively on postmodernism and the nostalgia film. He argues that postmodernism ‘cannibalizes all the architectural styles of the past and combines them in overstimulating ensembles’ (1992: 19). Previous works of art, literature and film are brought together to offer something ‘modern’ but not in any sense of the word new. The audience exist in a world where their awareness of style and aesthetics is based on intertextuality and referentially, only understanding contemporary texts with their relation to the past popular culture and history of the said time period. Nostalgia film on the other hand, not only uses the style and aesthetics to create film, but instead ‘approaches the “past” through stylistic connotation, conveying “pastness” by the glossy qualities of the image’ (Jameson, 1992: 19). This may be the case for the majority of nostalgia films, a representation of past with the glossiness of a Hollywood budget behind it. Films such as *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) set out to recreate a past time, that

only a small portion of the audience remember or were part of, for a modern audience suited to glossy images and captivating narratives.

### Memory and Consciousness

In his article *Between Memory and History*, Pierre Nora comments:

[W]e have seen the tremendous dilation of our very mode of historical perception, which, with the help of the media, has substituted for a memory entwined in the intimacy of a collective heritage the ephemeral film of current events (1989).

Considering that Steven Spielberg was not present during the events of D-Day, he is merely representing the collective consciousness of what one perceives D-Day to be and has substituted memory with media and film. Furthermore, the D-Day scene was also intended to recall news reel footage of the time, which also fits with aesthetic memory of the event, filtered through intertextuality. Thus, the representation of “pastness” is glossy and to some extent invalid. In Gilles Deleuze’s book *Bergsonism*, Deleuze states that Bergson was aware that things are mixed together in reality, he argues that:

[W]e mix recollection and perception; but we do not know how to recognise what goes back to perception and what goes back to recollection. We no longer distinguish the two pure presences of matter and memory in representation (1988: 22).

Nostalgia is situated in a wider discourse surrounding memory and consciousness. Bergson believed that present perceptions are uninterpretable without some form of memory and we, as a human race, blend perception and recollection. An example of this, is the nostalgia film that Fredric Jameson has outlined in his book, that the nostalgia film 'consists merely of films about the past and about specific generational moments of that past' (1992:296). Through the representation of a glossy false past in film, it mixes the recollection and perception of the audience, creating an aura of doubt to whether the events happened. Therefore, the things one recollects is not necessarily what one perceived. Alison Landsberg describes this as prosthetic memory:

Mass media alters our notion of what counts as experience [...] The cinema makes available images for mass consumption has [...] the ability to generate experiences and install memories of them - memories which become experiences that film consumers both possess and feel possessed by (1995).

Accordingly, one argues that through excessive exposure to the mass media and cinema, the mixture of recollection and perception causing prosthetic memory may result in significantly altering an individual's schema of lived experience, by creating one that never took place. To strengthen one's claims, Jameson has also stated memories of the past are conveyed through the images of the past using intertextual referents. He states, 'Lucas's *American Graffiti*, which in 1973 set out to recapture all the atmosphere and stylistic peculiarities of the 1950s United States, the United States of the Eisenhower era' (1992). Thus, one can observe that nostalgia and the nostalgia film produces the same effect on an individual, mis-remembering and providing a

falseness to the lived experience they thought they had. The 1960s is a perfect example of prosthetic memory and nostalgia. Fred Davis argues that, 'nostalgia must in some fashion be a personally experienced past rather than one drawn solely from, for example, chronicles, almanacs and history books' (1977). This is true; however, individuals can distort memories. In a *Guardian* online article journalist Catherine Bennett argued that:

[O]nly someone very unsettled by the present could look back, in longing, on upbringings in the 40s, 50s or 60s that featured [...] cold, illness, dirt, outside lavatories, pain, shameless bullying, bigotry, unending domestic drudgery [...] the 11+, abject secondaries, snobbery, corporal punishment [...] sexual ignorance, disapproval of difference, fear of pregnancy, illegal abortions (2012).

Consequently, the role of nostalgia is thought to be filled with wistful sentiment, romanticism and fondness, however, it may be debated that the time that is being longed for is filled with as much ambiguity, anxiety and unrest as the present that one is trying to forget and leave behind. It is not until study and observation is taken, that one can see the two sides of nostalgia. One side, that is filled with sentiment and the other, that is filled with prosthetic memory and masking the anxieties of contemporary society. The way one may understand the way nostalgia and memory is articulated is to look at the psychology involved in evoking the experience.

### Nostalgic Origins

Davis argues that to begin to understand nostalgia and how the human mind processes it, one must look towards the origin of the word. 'Nostalgia is from the Greek *nostos*, to return home, and *algia*, a painful condition; thus, a painful yearning to go home' (1977:414). The term was coined in the late seventeenth century by Swiss doctor, Johnannes Hofer, and was used to describe the homesickness felt by the Swiss soldiers fighting far from their homeland. Symptoms included, melancholy, depression, anorexia and bouts of weeping. It was soon after this diagnosis that nostalgia became a psychological disease, and became a colloquial term one used in relation to the past. Although the feeling of melancholy and loss of identity can still be attributed to modern definitions of nostalgia, the experience is seen fondly wistful for times gone by. When compiling his research on nostalgia, Davis interviewed university students on their opinion of the nostalgic experience. One student affirmed, 'I mostly get nostalgic over the nice, pleasant and fun things in my past...The unpleasant things I've either forgotten, or when someone reminds me of them I drive them out of my mind. But I never feel nostalgic for them' (Davis, 1977:418). The student's response demonstrates that people are comfortable being nostalgic about times in their life that are filled with happiness, providing them with warm memories when feeling nostalgic. However, the memories that they regard as unpleasant are not explored and left repressed.

### The Uncanny

Alternatively, one possible objection is that, although individuals believe that the past is reassuring them and filling them with past achievements, it is based on the rhetoric of the present; therefore, current circumstance may cloud the memory, and repress the other emotions.. Therefore, the psychoanalytical theory of Freud may be

used to articulate the repression in relation to nostalgia and memory. In Freud's *The Uncanny*, he outlines how the uncanny is a feeling of fear at 'something that should have remained hidden and has come into the open' (Freud, 2003: 148). Similar to the Swiss physician who coined the term nostalgia by combining the meaning of two words, Freud begins to look at the German word, Heimlich, meaning 'belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, dear and intimate and homely' (2003: 126). The English translation of Heimlich is canny, therefore if something is said to be canny, it is familiar and homely. However, Freud developed this further by adding the prefix 'un', altering the meaning of Heimlich and canny, producing a new meaning of unfamiliar, strange and unhomely. The example Freud uses to illustrate the uncanny is the use of waxwork models and automatons, 'because these arouse in the onlooker vague notions of automatic – mechanical – processes that may lie hidden behind the familiar image of a living person' (2003: 135). The likeness the waxwork models carry produce an uncanny feeling in the observer, a knowing that something that should not be there, has come out into the open.

This thesis argues that an uncanny feeling is produced by the media through the double articulation of the past and present colliding. Regardless of the emotion of the memories, something that was hidden has come forward, presenting an individual with an uncanny feeling. Moreover, the uncanny is forever present with the positive memories the individual did not necessary repress, because as stated above, the happy memories may have taken place at a time of political unrest and unease, therefore being repressed to prevent damage to the happy emotion. Thus, this thesis asserts that repression to prevent damage to the happy memory could be defined as morbid

nostalgia; seeking the happy memory to only bring forward the bad memory that was attached to it. Furthermore, Freud has argued:

Psychoanalytic theory is right in asserting that every affect arising from an emotional impulse - of whatever kind - is converted in fear by being repressed, it follows that among those things that are felt to be frightening there must be one group in which it can be shown the frightening element is something that has been repressed and now returns (2003: 147).

The preoccupation is not with the fear of what will be repressed, but more preoccupied with the fear of something that has been repressed will return to haunt the individual it plagues. Freud further claims that, 'in the unconscious mind we can recognise the dominance of a *compulsion to repeat*, which proceeds from instinctual impulses' (2003: 145). This implicates the individuals experiencing the uncanny, as unconsciously they have the impulse to repeat. One may explore and replicate the past in order to repeat what once existed, but in doing so is overwhelmed with the uncanny. This very much epitomises the nature of cinema and Jameson's 'nostalgia film'. Albano states that, 'film reactivates a series of unconscious processes related to childhood complexes (the primal scene and voyeurism, the defence against castration anxiety and fetishism) investigated by Freud.' (2013) Many cinematic releases base their content upon a reflection of society, be it ideological or aesthetic, the images combined with narrative, setting and characters are put before the audience to interpret them through a system of internal *mise-en-scène* of memory and relate them to their own realities. This may result in either a positive or negative psychological response. Furthermore, in support of Freud's relationship with nostalgia and memory, Albano states that, 'cinema



and psychoanalysis both show a scene heterogeneous to reality (cinema) or to conscience (psychoanalysis), and they are both *unheimlich* (uncanny)’ (2013). As one can observe, psychoanalytically speaking, the way one’s mind interprets the memory and the past is important to understand the way social realism in cinema uses such tools.

Through close analysis and careful observation throughout this chapter, one can begin to understand the nature in which Meadows engages his own journey into the past and the way he produces a nostalgia film. Despite an argument for Meadows articulating an image of the past that is uncanny for members for audience, one could also argue due to it being consciously encoded it is not uncanny. Thus, having a different effect on the audience depending on what they share with him politically and socially as memory. An example of this is the film *Pride* (2014) that shares a similar image of the 80s. They are created to offer a particular image of the past which reflects with Jameson’s understanding of the nostalgia film. Moreover, Stuart Tannock has stated that:

We need to separate out the critique of the content, author and audience of a nostalgic narrative – who is nostalgic for what and in the names of which community – from the critique of nostalgia itself – the positive evaluation of the past in response to a negatively evaluated present (1995:456).

With the evidence given by Stuart Tannock, it does not matter that the nostalgic text is consciously encoded, the main concern is with the critique of the present and how Meadows represents that issue.

## Postmodernism, Morbid Nostalgia & The Stone Roses: *Made of Stone*

Although Meadows has only made one period piece, the *This is England* series, many of his films are reflections of memory and explorations of his own past, either stylistically, or through setting. Furthermore, Martin Fradley et al states that, '*Stone Roses: Made of Stone* (2013) offers just another example of Meadows' obsessive return(s) to the 1980s combining nostalgia and melancholia' (2013:11). The mode, style and form he uses harks back to the Free Cinema movement, which has led to this thesis arguing that *Made of Stone* can be described as a postmodern nostalgia vehicle.

*Made of Stone* was a personal project for Meadows as he ventured into documentary filmmaking. He was unable to attend the famous Stone Roses Spike Island concert, so when the opportunity presented itself to follow the band as they reformed, it allowed Meadows to reclaim opportunities missed in his youth. In her chapter *Don't Look Back in Anger: Manchester, Made of Stone and Supersonic*, Beth Johnson argues that '*Made of Stone* and *Supersonic* uses the recent trend of nostalgia as a springboard to look back at the past' (2018: 127). Although both films use nostalgia and music as tool throughout the film, they are not as similar as one may think. The former can be understood and documented as a revival of the real thing; whereas the latter is established as a mediated stand-in for a desired reunion. They both use features of the classic 'rockumentary', such as, subject interviews, fan participation, stock footage and live music videos; however, it is Meadows' *Made of Stone* that traverses a new landscape of 'rockumentary'.

The style and form of the Free Cinema Movement have become all too familiar in Meadows' work, such as, poetic statements made through aesthetics and music. Therefore, given the opportunity to make a documentary about one of his favourite bands, it has allowed Meadows to manipulate the styles from the Free Cinema, which is inherently made up of stylised documentaries, and create a piece of personally driven work, which is underpinned by the current music revival trend. In *Postmodernism and Consumer Society*, Jameson states that, 'there is sense in which the writers and artists of the present day will no longer be able to invent new styles and worlds; they've already been invented' (2011:285). It is argued that Meadows is merely using the styles of the Free Cinema group that they replicated from Jennings and the Italian Neorealist filmmakers. The nostalgia for these chosen methods is never ending and becomes something more associated with postmodernism.

*Made of Stone* begins with a stylised, slow-motion, black and white shot of Ian Brown interacting with fans at a gig, whilst audio of Alfred Hitchcock is played defining happiness. The slow-motion allows the audience to comprehend the grand nature of the reunion and resurrection of the band. Paired with the Hitchcock's narration the sequence subliminally feeds the viewer that this is a happy momentous occasion as felt by Meadows. The face of Ian Brown is that of the present day among the adoring fans, it reinforces the nostalgia that is felt from the moment the first chords of *I Wanna Be Adored* is heard, that he is the same man that he was in the Nineties.

After the opening sequence, stock footage of the bands meteoric rise and eventual fall plays against *I Wanna Be Adored*. The choice of music is apt due to the bands desire to be successful. The montage nods to and resembles that of the opening

sequence of *This is England*, which also uses an array of stock news and event footage put to the backdrop of a popular song of the period that functions as a benchmark for the audience to start. Although a notable feature the documentary style, the fact that the opening montage resembles that of a previous film of Meadows, suggests that *Made of Stone* is placed in a wider collection of autobiographical films that uses his own personal history to create a story. This is illustrated further through the participation of Meadows on camera, rather than behind it. When being filmed in the recording studio, Meadows finds a note addressed to him from Stone Roses drummer Reni, glee immediately fills his face as he looks at the camera and says, 'that's going straight in the scrapbook.' The fact that Meadows participates in the film complicates the objectivity that documentaries are supposed to hold further adding to the conclusion that this film is postmodern.

The postmodernism and nostalgia is developed further through the aesthetics of the film. The footage differs and contrasts depending on the time-period it is focusing on. The present is filmed in black and white, whereas the footage of the past is in colour. Unlike *Dead Man's Shoes* that uses black and white footage to showcase haunting images from the past, *Made of Stone* uses it as a platform for Meadows to reminisce about his youth and memories of the band. The colour that is normally used to reflect the present day, has been subverted to show the past. The subversion of colour connotes a new meaning to the film and what Meadows is nostalgic for. In keeping with the idea that black and white is used as a depiction of remembering and nostalgia, it is argued that Meadows utilises it to illustrate that the present is a nostalgic dream sequence as he journeys to fill gaps in his formative years. The colour on the other hand presents itself as obtrusive and negative much like modern day life, often citing only

negative things to do with the band. Meadows creates a hybrid nostalgic film that showcases the positive nostalgia that is felt for The Stone Roses and what they meant to his youth, but also what Williams et al defines as ‘morbid nostalgia’ (2013: 10) as the band struggle to maintain a relationship over the course of their active years and the let down the fans have felt in those periods.

*Made of Stone* along with *This is England* illustrates how the social realist style has been blended with nostalgia. The combination of Meadows’s memories and the nostalgic social realist style provides the audience with a new nostalgia film, ‘morbid nostalgia.’ Therefore, one argues that Meadows’ films can be placed within the discourse of nostalgia due to the content of his films being based on his previous experiences and his misadventures. The romantic memories enable the leap back to the past, but once there, the experience of the uncanny takes place, leaving the audience with the fear of what has remained repressed about the time period has come out in the open. Martin Fradley et al, states that:

Refusing to indulge nostalgic reveries or cultural amnesia, the ongoing *This is England* series does not hesitate to interrogate [...] the often brutal social-political schisms of the period; nor does it shy away from drawing explicit parallels between the 1980s and the various social and economic crises of the present (2013: 12).

Although one argues that Meadows has not refused to indulge his nostalgic reveries, he is very much nostalgic for the time in which *This is England* is set. The montages of news footage from the 1980s draws the audience in to first be nostalgic,

but slowly as the footage unfolds, it situates them with the uncanny feeling, of the replication of a time which should have remained repressed. Whilst one might contend that nostalgia can be defined as ‘a state of longing for something that is known to be irretrievable, but is sought anyway’ (Cook, 2004: 3), one too can observe, through the course of this chapter, that due to psychological implications, it is much deeper than a longing for the past. By providing a definition of social realism in Chapter One and exploring the context and discourse of the nostalgic mode in Chapter Two, it allows this thesis to merge the style and the term within British social realism and that of Meadows’ work.

## **Chapter 3: Nostalgic Realism**

The exploration of a definition of social realism in Chapter One, and the investigation of the inner workings of nostalgia in Chapter Two, will serve as the criteria through which the work of Shane Meadows will be measured. Meadows has found himself as the latest in the line of filmmakers including, Ken Loach, Alan Clarke and Mike Leigh who continue to serve as a legacy to the British New Wave of the 1960s.

In his book, *Social Realism: Art, Nationhood and Politics*, David Forrest, suggests that ‘Meadows has been seen to operate within an institutional and aesthetic realm actively facilitated by the approach and work’ of the British New Wave filmmakers (2013:16). This operation of his filmmaking exists at a time when society is beginning to repeat itself. Simon Reynolds suggests that ‘the 2000s have been about every other previous decade happening again all at once: simultaneity of pop time that abolishes history while nibbling away at the present’s own sense of itself as an era’ (2011). Owing to what Reynolds has dubbed, *Retromania*, and the aesthetic style which Higson suggested, it can be argued that the social realist mantle Meadows has taken up is unsurprising. Through returning societal national issues, such as an emergence of a youth subculture and the rise in number of people unemployed that appeared in the 1960s and 1980s, this thesis argues that Meadows has returned to the social realist format through nostalgia. Furthermore, the work of Meadows’ falls alongside the financial meltdown of 2008 and the return of 1980s style of Conservative Party politics. Consequently, John Berger states:

Every time an art needs to revitalise itself after a period of formalism, artists will turn back to reality; but their attitude to reality, and the way they interpret it, will depend on upon the particular needs of their time (Berger, 1957:12).

The formalism in this case being Hollywood's preoccupation with high budget action films, therefore, it is contended that social realism responds with another modern trend which happens to be nostalgia. As explored in Chapter One, the social realistic filmmaking style, which the New Wave existed within, was very much associated with an attitude towards reality. Meadows, Andrea Arnold and Pawel Pawlikowski have taken up the legacy of Loach, Clarke and Leigh. However, it could be argued that rather than commenting on the socio-political landscape, their styles focus more on image-led narratives, reflecting a devotion to aesthetics. Samantha Lay states that 'social realism is still considered to be a 'televisual' mode of expression. However, the hybridity of style is matched at the level of narrative form in some instances' (2002:110). For example, although *The Full Monty* (1997) follows some thematic and stylistic conventions of social realism, the use of montage sequences cut to a musical soundtrack suggests overt stylisation which blends social realism and comedy, thus, relying on other forms of stylistic features which may or may not detract from the sociocultural message.

#### *Somers Town* (2008)

Meadows' *Somers Town* (2008) features a great deal of stylistic manipulation. Although the film focuses on the class and financial situation of Thomas Turgoose's Tomo it is the representation of the heart-warming relationship between him and Marek



that complicates the role of Meadows as a social realist filmmaker. David Forrest states that image-led narrative and ‘manipulations of temporality and narrative – rapidly complicate the sense in which the film can be understood’ (2013: 40). Image-led narration chooses to focus on the aesthetics and the perfection of the image and let that lead the narrative, rather than the characters and issues in the story. Hence, the choice to film in black and white positions the landscape of London within a poetic realm of romanticism. Mark Cousins has argued that,

Cinema became an art in black and white, and its gods were Orson Welles, Charlie Chaplin, Yasujiro Ozu, Carl Theodor Dreyer. To shoot in black and white, even today, still feels, for many film-makers, like being among the gods (Fox, 2017).

Black and white aesthetics are associated with art cinema and consequently seen as an abstraction rather than a reflection of reality, with some filmmakers, such as Noah Baumbach declaring that black and white filming makes a movie almost immediately nostalgic, by inadvertently paying homage to films either filmed in black and white or ones from the past such as Tony Richardson’s *Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962).

However, Meadows uses principles of art cinema to reflect the poeticism of London. The building sites, council flats and littered streets that are common sights in London are manipulated to reflect the landscape of new beginnings for both UK national, Tomo, and Polish national, Marek. The film quickly leaves behind the formative themes and elements associated with the social realist filmmaking tradition,

in favour of updating social realist themes by exploring class as a shared issue for lower class British nationals and migrants.

Another feature that Meadows has used within this film and many others that detract from the traditional social realist style is the use of music. In *Somers Town* Meadows draws upon the musical talents of long-time collaborator Gavin Clark. Clark's upbeat folk soundtrack not only establishes a light tone to scenes in which Tomo and Marek are bonding with each other and other characters in the film, but builds upon the poeticism that has already been created by the black and white imagery of London.

Due to the imagery, music and narrative this thesis contends that no real threat is felt in the film. However, it may be argued that the backdrop of the economic climate is felt throughout, but where it impacted Tomo, living in care and at times on the streets, it has enabled Marek and his father to thrive. Unlike the traditional films of this style such as *Saturday Night*, *Sunday Morning* and Meadows's *Dead Man's Shoes*, *Somers Town* ends with the two boys living harmoniously in the environment in which they find themselves. Therefore, *Somers Town* shows that Meadows' style is not the typical social realist style that was explored in Chapter One, however this does not separate him from the tradition.

### The Beach as a Nostalgic Vehicle

Journeying into the past through aesthetics and mise-en-scène can be seen through numerous films. The last scene in *This is England* (2006) sees Shaun at the

beach standing by the water's edge. Now disillusioned with England, the war in which his father died, and his group of skinheads, he throws the English flag into the water, to show his rejection of what he has come to understand. Furthermore, the last shot of Shaun reinforces the disillusionment he feels. The close up of his face staring at the camera whilst the haunting sombre tone and literal lyrics of Clayhill's cover of The Smiths' *Please Please Please, Let Me Get What I Want* enables this particular reading of the end of the film.

The beach presents itself as a border, not only to the country but to the mind-set of a character, while situating the location within a reality the audience recognise. Roland Barthes has stated that the role of objects in fiction, that are not used up in the narrative, are to furnish the effect of the real (Barthes and Coverdale, 1991: 44). In this case, the real location of the beach adds a layer of reality to Shaun's loss of another family unit and the realisation of the establishment failing the working-class and youth culture. Thus, the use of real locations, the film cites the authorial voice, making the film one of personal expression. Although *This is England* presents the beach as a border connoting the imprisonment of loneliness Shaun feels, Meadows is not the first to use the location as a metaphor.

In the final scenes of François Truffaut's *Les Quatre Cent Coups* (1959), the audience see Antoine escaping a borstal and running away to a beach. The last shot is a freeze frame of him, zooming in from a long shot to an extreme close up of his face. Richard Neupert claims that Truffaut's freeze frame in *Les Quatre Cent Coups* 'stops the action of the scene, much like a photographer's camera would, helping foreground the emotions of his character while isolating specific moments in time' (2009: 203) This

claustrophobic editing connotes the feeling of entrapment by the governmental system and the establishment's neglectful behaviour, a feeling of suspension in time is present, not having any certainty to what the future holds, very similar to those of Meadows in *This is England*. In addition, a sense of irony is produced by the space which is open and free. The beach seals Shaun's loneliness as an imprisonment, the beach in *Les Quatre Cent Coups* provides emptiness, allowing the audience to produce their own negotiated reading of the film and the fate of Antoine, thus it is argued that the beach provides potential for the character.

Similarly, the final scene of Ken Loach's *Sweet Sixteen* (2002) sees protagonist Liam seeking solace at the beach after having killed his mum's boyfriend. The final shot is used as an opportunity for reflection, not only for the main character but for the audience to understand the reasons behind his actions, and that he is no different from the other young people the establishment has failed. Despite the similarity of location, the final shot contrasts with Shaun and Antoine's close-ups. The audience see a long shot of Liam's back, facing out to the sea, and then fades to black. In both instances, the fate of the characters is left ambiguous. Much like Truffaut's techniques and aesthetics, Loach uses the beach as a tool for reflection for both the character and the audience. Where the beach posed as a prison for Shaun in *This is England* and emptiness in *Les Quatre Cent Coups*, the beach in *Sweet Sixteen* is used as a mirror for the actions of the character and the film's narrative.

Before *This is England* and *Sweet Sixteen* nostalgically referenced a style of filmmaking, Tony Richardson's *Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962) featured similar imagery that paid homage to Truffaut's aesthetic. Although the final

scene does not end on the beach like the previous examples, the camera work used to show the films' protagonist, Colin, running throughout the film mirrors Truffaut's use of tracking shots. In both narratives, the boys escape their incarceration at a borstal, and, although Colin never reaches his beach moment, he still experiences a moment of personal tranquillity by losing the race on purpose, as he does not want to become a part of the institutionalised system. Long pensive tracking shots are used in both films to illustrate the imprisonment felt by Colin and Antoine. Like Loach using the beach as a mirror, the tracking shot provides a reflection on the narrative for both characters and the audience. Incarceration is a theme that not only chimes with *Les Quatre Cent Coups* and *Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* but can be seen throughout both *Sweet Sixteen*, particularly towards the end of the film as Liam waits for his imprisonment, and in *This is England* as Shaun serves a personal, introverted sentence for his affiliation with Combo.

### New Wave, Old Problem

As one can observe that through the brief analysis of the four films above, a similarity can be strongly identified. It is no coincidence that three social realist films have paid homage to similar scenes that began with Truffaut. As stated in the previous chapter, the audience are aware that films exist within the media through intertextual references and replication. Moreover, despite narrative elements being unable to be transposed from France to the North of England, the films that have followed *Les Quatre Cent Coups* demonstrate filmmaking beyond intertextuality. One can argue that Tony Richardson, Ken Loach and Shane Meadows not only recognise the cinema of Truffaut but are, more significantly, nostalgic for his filmmaking style, or what

Reynolds calls, *Retromania*. Furthermore, these filmmakers include elements of Truffaut's work in theirs to comment on the social climate of the present and on the landscape of filmmaking.

Echoing Berger, whenever a period of formalism is over, be it the Ealing comedies of the 1950s, or the Hollywood blockbuster films of the 1980s, the film industry seeks out inspiration to comment on the socio-cultural climate. Although Tony Richardson uses elements of Truffaut's *mise-en-scène*, Richardson produced his own film in 1962, only three years after *Les quatre cent coups*. It can be argued, that the period of three years is not enough amount of time for one to feel nostalgic, although one can observe that the *Nouvelle Vague* had a great impact on the New Wave filmmakers. Consequently, rather than being described as nostalgic filmmaking, John Hill suggested that, 'It has often been noted how such British films (especially *Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*) were indebted to the French *Nouvelle Vague* (which provided the shorthand title by which the British films became known)' (1986: 134).

Despite claims of nostalgic filmmaking, cinema and other strands of the arts develop through innovation, repetition and influence, furthermore, in contrast to this, Truffaut himself stated that 'there is a certain incompatibility between the terms cinema and Britain' (Hitchcock and Truffaut, 1969). This thesis argues that Richardson's work and the British New Wave, served as giving a voice to Midland and Northern working-classes and to break away from traditional Hollywood imagery. In contrast, Meadows and Loach find themselves nostalgically replicating the *mise-en-scène* and imagery used by Truffaut and Richardson to not only pay homage to, but to recreate something that

has been lost in the forty years between the films. In a *Guardian* article titled ‘*New Wave, Old Problem*’ Gavin Lambert stated that:

Loach is perhaps the most direct link to the past. It was Richardson who helped him secure (American) finance for one of his early films, *Kes*, and Loach sees himself as developing and politicising what *Saturday Night* and the others started - the use of "the working-class as a location" (Lambert, 2016).

By positioning Meadows, Loach and many of their contemporaries within the New Wave lineage, one can establish the changing nature of the British social realist tradition. John Hill states, ‘Realist innovations thus take place in a kind of dialectic with what has gone before, underwriting their own appeal to be uncovering the reality by exposing the artificiality and conventionality of what has passed for reality previously’ (1986: 127). Consequently, owing to the nature of the changing political and socioeconomic landscape, the very limits of social realism may change, reinforcing Hill’s argument, for Meadows and his contemporaries developing an evolved tradition to contrast one that may no longer be applicable. These contemporary filmmakers have explored the evolution through depictions of modern issues that may change the nature of what social realist filmmaking is.

### British New Wave Legacy

In Chapter One, this thesis stated that social realism is the creative treatment and respect for reality featuring episodic narrative structures, combined with observational camerawork, and a focus on the individual’s relationship with the environment, society

and family. Although this definition will still be used to identify what initially qualifies as social realism, many of the films explored provide an extension of that. One in particular is one of Meadow's contemporaries, Pawel Pawlikowski, and his film *Last Resort* (2000). The film sees a Russian mother and her son seeking asylum in Britain. To survive, the mother quickly turns to internet pornography. The tower of flats in the run-down seaside resort of Margate in Kent provides the conventional environment with which the character has a relationship. The handheld documentary like camera work that follows scenes of asylum seekers is cut with scenes of beautiful landscapes, providing a juxtaposition with the isolated individuals staring out at a strange land from the bars of their windows in the tower block. This, combined with scenes of underage drinking, violence and the illicit sex acts, helps identify traditional themes featured in social realist texts, such as, class and sex. Although the codes and conventions of social realism are at the surface, issues such as the internet and modern technology are depicted, extending the tradition beyond the criteria given above. Samantha Lay suggests that, '*Last Resort* is the first social realist film to explore the new, privatised world of cyberporn, a social problem for the twenty-first century' (2002: 121). The contemporary nature of border crossing, asylum seeking and cyberporn is an issue that is becoming forever present in the media, thus not only updating features associated with the lower classes but updating the narrative of social realism that extends the filmmaking tradition beyond the parameters of its predecessors

For this reason, as society develops, new concerns such as online safety and poverty forcing individuals into the sex work industry, contemporary social realist filmmakers reflect the changing landscape. A good example of this is Loach's recent film *I, Daniel Blake* (2016), which sees struggling mother Katie turn to prostitution to



cover the cost of living expenses. Like the British New Wave being extremely modern when it began, it is argued that social realism is extremely contemporary due to its reflective nature, therefore updated social realist narratives are expected. Updating the narrative of social realism is illustrated by the work of Loach, beginning with hard hitting drama, *Cathy Come Home* (1966) which explores the role of homelessness in the 60s, to juvenile delinquency in the Scottish suburbs in *Sweet Sixteen*, and now the woes of benefit Britain in *I, Daniel Blake*.

Additionally, Andrea Arnold and her feature, *Fish Tank* (2009) also reflect the changing landscape of social realism but extend nostalgia for the New Wave from which it descended. *Fish Tank* follows the journey of Mia, a fifteen-year-old girl living on an Essex council estate. She has been expelled from school, and constantly fights with her mum. She begins a tricky friendship with her mum's new boyfriend, Connor, who encourages her to pursue her interest in dancing. The fluid motion of the handheld camera paired with the exclusion of non-diegetic music, while focusing on the damaged family unit, suggest a more traditional social realist style and nostalgic nod to the films of the British New Wave. The lack of music within the film provides a hardened look at the inner working family unit, and adds a further layer of realism for the audience to identify with. The representation of Mia's isolation associated with the role of new media and the pursuit of fame of any kind, positioned against the environment that surrounds her, exposes a more evolved set of themes. Furthermore, the plot and the character of Mia could be likened to that of Arthur Seaton in *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* (1960). Although Mia is some years younger than Arthur, she understands her place in society, thus fights against the conformity that her mother represents. To escape that, she seeks fame, by auditioning to be a professional dancer. However, she later

learns that the audition is for erotic dancers, shattering her dreams and instilling the realisation she must accept the life laid out for her. The final shot of the film is filled with a proportion of ambiguity to what will happen immediately next. Mia is seen driving away to Cardiff with traveller Billy to begin a new life that will inevitably leave her with an existence resembling her mother's.

*Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* (1960)

*Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* follows a similar journey. The film begins with Arthur stating, "don't let the bastards grind you down", a reference to the government and establishment of the time. Arthur's biggest fear, like Mia, is to conform and end up like his parents before him. The final shot of *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* sees Arthur upon the hill with Doreen, looking at the new houses into which he will inevitably move. Alexander Walker states that Arthur 'embodied what was happening in England: he was a sad person, terribly limited sensibilities, narrow in his ambitions and a bloody fool into the bargain' (2006: 119). Like Mia, he ends up conforming to what he was fighting against all along. This social realist narrative began in the 1960s with stories, much like *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning*, *Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* and *This Sporting Life* (1963) citing the tales of angry young men. This narrative has extended into the twenty-first century, and has been interpreted by many social realist filmmakers, such as Arnold, Pawlikowski and ultimately Meadows. However, due to the critiquing of their forbearers and evolving the tradition, the way Meadows utilises the narrative could be attributed more towards a poetic realist nature, more so than a social realist one.

### Ken Loach

Ken Loach is another filmmaker that has ventured into image-led poetic narrative. For example, in *Kes* (1969), one can observe the shots of Billy Casper flying his kestrel over the backdrop landscape of Barnsley as poetic in nature; however, at the heart of the imagery, 'Loachian' themes are communicated to the audience. The shot of Billy in the field is not only showcasing the freedom Billy has in that moment, but it reflects the entrapment he feels in the current socio-political environment. Loach continues to make films that are dedicated to reflecting the socioeconomic climate, such as, *I, Daniel Blake* (2016) that focuses on the current broken benefit system, and the adverse effects on the individuals in need of it in contemporary Britain.

Like *Kes*, certain mise-en-scène throughout the film does beg a poeticism surrounding the imagery and composition of shots. In a scene where Daniel vandalises the walls of the job centre, the camera pans to document the gathering crowd that is witnessing his stand against the system. Although an evident poeticism can be seen through the support from the crowd as Daniel becomes emancipated from the establishment but, it also carries a serious sociocultural message of the lengths an individual must go to be heard in the current climate. Furthermore, it can be argued that *I, Daniel Blake* takes a step further than *Kes*. through its reflection of the sociocultural climate of the time. At its heart, *Kes* is a story about the harmonious relationship between two free spirited individuals, whereas *I, Daniel Blake* is an obvious statement protesting the current government, like *Cathy Come Home* in 1966. In the film, the poeticism of the images rarely leads the narrative allowing the dialogue and events to create a greater discourse surrounding the serious issues of benefits. For example, a

scene in the film follows Daniel discovering Katie has turned to prostitution, through the reaction and dialogue facilitated by the actors, it represents the true gravity of the seriousness of the issue.

In addition, through exploring the role of social realism in Britain, Gill Branston and Roy Stafford summarise:

The film-maker is concerned to capture something about the experience of one event, to represent it as faithfully as possible for the audience and to mediate it as little as possible; or the film-maker has something to specific to say about the real world and has developed a specific style, using realist conventions (1996:161).

It is such, that Meadows fulfils the criteria put forward in the latter principle. He has developed a specific style that continues the legacy of the New British New Wave, but the style has been manipulated to extend to a much richer poetic realism within his films. Although, typical social realistic aesthetics are used throughout the film, such as 'longer takes and extreme close ups to create a claustrophobic intensity' (Hallam and Marshment, 2000: 215), in a particular scene, the use of slow motion and montages are used to reflect Shaun's acceptance into the gang displaying a polished spectacle for the audience. Therefore, although Meadows has made films such as *This is England* and *Made of Stone* (2013) that attempt to depict a time period or tackle an event, and represent it in an unmediated way as possible, one can contend that he is devoted to the aesthetics of social realism more than the socio-political and economic themes that dominate the work of Loach.

Despite Meadows' preferred use of image-led narrative, 'it is too extreme to suggest Meadows, for example, rejects the social political potential of his work' (Forrest, 2013: 39). Much of Meadows work can be recognised upon first viewing, that it is preoccupied with the long term adverse effects of the Thatcherite regime on the working-classes in Britain. *This is England* is the obvious example of such themes. Set in the 1980s against the backdrop of Thatcher's tenure in office, the film explores the by-products of the era such as youth unemployment, racism and the 'flag waving' victory in the Falklands.

But for many of his other films, the Thatcherite theme remained in the sub-text and foundations of the film. *Dead Man's Shoes* (2004) shows the effects of Thatcher's regime as images of derelict housing estates, and squalid flats are shown to populate an area of suburban Derbyshire. The characters are preoccupied with drug deals and alcohol, laying waste to their age and displaying symptoms of the unemployment surrounding the country. Even in the less dramatized works of Meadows, the by-products of the Thatcherite government can be seen, such as the alienation from society in Le Donk in *Le Donk & Scor-Zay-Zee* (2009) and the rise of youth culture in the 1980s and 1990s documented in *Made of Stone*.

#### *Dead Man's Shoes*

Additionally, the evolved social realist themes mentioned above are not primarily concerned with social issues, such as the effects of Thatcherism, and the effects on the working-class communities, but preoccupied with personal issues such as

loss, family and disillusionment, rather than the political note it once was. In *Dead Man's Shoe* the dialogue throughout the film between Toby Kebbell's character, Anthony, and Paddy Considine's character, Richard not only address issues of urban decay through Thatcherism, but focuses on more personal issues such as those mentioned above. Furthermore, this dialogue that is exchanged exhibits an air of nostalgia as they discuss the past and their school days. After a visit to the town, Anthony says, "it was weird in town today, want it? It's not changed, has it?" To which Richard replies, "No, it's still a shithole." Anthony and his simple nature wistfully remembers the town despite its flaws, illustrating the nostalgia one usually holds for a location, whereas; although Richard is remembering the town as it was, the nostalgia he has for it is very different from that of Anthony's. The dynamic between the two characters seeds for what will later come. Another instance of nostalgia fill quiet parts of the film through wistful reminiscing.

Anthony: Do you remember when you came to our school and did that run  
Richard?

Richard: I do yeah.

Anthony: Good day that was, wasn't it?

Richard: Hmmm

Anthony: You was the best. You earned the most money didn't you?

Richard: About three hundred quid I think.

These light scenes of wistful nostalgia, not only elucidate the relationship between the two characters, but serve as break in the narrative to establish a softer space for the film to exist outside of the violence and revenge. In his chapter '*Now I'm the monster*': *Remembering, Repeating and Working Through in Dead Man's Shoes and TwentyFourSeven*, Paul Elliott states that, 'Freud termed these 'screen memories'

consoling images that shield us from pain and loss. Like Richard, we draw on them to get us through' (2013: 87). It is understandable that these moments in the film disappear as the audience learn the true extent of Anthony's fate. The conversations and the appearance of Anthony slowly fade away as Richard reaches his goal of revenge. It is only at the end of the film that the audience realise, the sweet moments of dialogue between Richard and Anthony only take place within Richards mind, sullyng the previous pieces of wistful nostalgic dialogue with morbidity and sorrow.

The exploration of distant memories and figures from the past that is present in this film can be seen in later pieces of work by Meadows. It is through this technique that Meadows is able to create an air of morbid nostalgia. In her journal article, '*Stick that Knife in Me: Shane Meadows' Children*' Vicky Lebeau states that, '*Dead Man's Shoes* begins in the image of the infant, the child, the family. The grain of these shots – so vital to the idiom of Meadows' *oeuvre* – is familiar' (2013: 878-879). It is argued that the use of the old reel, Super 8 footage evokes typical wistful nostalgia for old technology and its involvement in capturing cherished family memories. Times spent with family enjoying days out, birthdays and other familiar past times that members of the audience may recognise, fill the screen in a warm sepia nostalgic glow. However, when this is cut with footage of dull open plains of English countryside from the main narrative of the film, it produces a melancholic atmosphere across the entire opening sequence. The wide angle shot of Richard and Anthony walking across these locations gives insight to their relationship. One more dominant than the other prepared for things to come with his rucksack over his shoulder, whereas the other staggers behind in a simple tracksuit. It is argued that there is a certain uncomfortableness felt through the

opening sequence because of this strange pairing of warm footage with the cold sparse nature of the English countryside, illustrating the morbid nostalgia.

Furthermore, although *Dead Man's Shoes* is filled with remembrance throughout, the Super 8 footage at the beginning of the film is the first and the last time that memory is associated with happiness rather than a traumatic event. Paul Elliott further states that *Dead Man's Shoes* spans three distinct time frames,

[A] distant past, which is symbolised by childhood memory, a longed-for innocence, more recent past that is often violent and shocking, and a meaningful present that attempts to come to terms with the pain and the anguish of the encysted trauma' (2013: 84).

The three parts that Elliott describes are separated through the use of aesthetic, camera and soundtrack. The Super 8 footage as mentioned above, is filled with a warm hue that reflects the nostalgic tones. The children in the footage are smiling and enjoyment is felt throughout. The second part, a more recent past, is characterised by a similar stock footage aesthetic, but is black and white which reflects the visceral memories of trauma and pain, relating to the morbid nostalgia that the film is situated with. The last part, a meaningful present, reflects what one commonly associated with the social realist tradition, citing the main narrative of the film. The latter two parts form the majority of the film, flicking between the two to inform the audience why Richard is seeking revenge.



This thesis contends that Meadows uses the audience's compulsion to repeat and to journey into the past to reclaim or recapture forgotten youth; however, once Hallam and Marshment's *mise-en-scène* of memory comes into play, such as stock footage within the film and discussions of familiar locations, it creates the feeling of uncanny within the audience. 'A feeling of something that should have remained hidden and has come into the open' (Freud, 2003: 148). Richard's journey of revenge leads to an un-repression of memories for the central characters in the film and the audience, as the main narrative of the film unfolds and Anthony's demise is revealed. It is argued that this is the very nature of the uncanny happening in front of the audience's eyes. Parts of the past are slowly revealed as if they were being un-repressed each time. The very nature of the uncanny and un-repression grants this thesis to provide a link between Meadows and morbid nostalgia

Due to the biographical nature of Meadows's work these themes are ones that he has experienced first-hand and understands that such concepts are more culturally understood through image-led narratives and poetic representation. Thus, by depicting a relationship between the psychology of the protagonist and the environment, it allows an accessible reading of the characters and issues, whilst reflecting the nostalgic intentions of Meadows as a filmmaker. Hence, by Meadows and Loach using the beach as a part of image-led narrative, they are nostalgically referencing Truffaut's form whilst critiquing the possible out-dated idea of social realism.

The exploration of Meadows and his contemporaries exhibiting a new mode of reality in social realism through a move towards more image-led narrative, that focuses on aesthetics and composition of a shot as a signifier of meaning rather than the

socioeconomic background of the protagonist, has resulted in nostalgic filmmaking while integrating such styles. Image-led narrative is a product of Griersonian filmmaking that was eventually passed down and pioneered by Jennings for the GPO and then further passed down to the Free Cinema filmmakers. The Free Cinema Manifesto asserts the importance of people and in the significance of the everyday (Hedling, 1998: 41-42). Therefore, the poeticism of Jennings and the Free Cinema filmmakers nostalgically replicated brought a certain beauty to the working-classes through the manifesto they followed. It is observed through the films explored in this chapter and throughout the thesis, there is a continued reflection of the manifesto in contemporary social realist films. However, the likes of Loach, Alan Clarke and Meadows, although in some parts of their work a beauty is found in the environment which extends to its characters, most representations of location are not beautiful and are not represented as such. A perfect example is Clarke's *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1986) which makes no attempts to beautify the tower blocks or council flats and the squalor in which Rita and Sue are living. It is only when the characters' venture to a middle-class area of living that beauty starts to be seen.

Therefore, this thesis affirms that although Meadows aesthetics suggest a poeticism towards space and place in films such as *Somers Town*, others like *Dead Man's Shoes* reflect the poverty through squalid depictions of environment and the character's psyche. Thus, the Free Cinema Manifesto situates the likes of Loach, Clarke and Meadows as true social realist filmmakers, due to their ability to provide a nostalgic poetic ideology of the tradition, but to represent the social classes and their environment as they are perceived to be. Furthermore, what becomes clear from this critical analysis is what Higson argues to be the organisation of aesthetic pleasure and visual pleasure of

location, stating that ‘as spectators we can feel secure in our admiring gaze at these images because of the morality of their commitment to a particular subject matter’ (Higson, 1984). It can be reasoned, therefore, that if filmmakers such as Loach, Clarke and Meadows are committed to their representation of a certain subject matter, image-led narrative does not present itself as problematic for the creation of meaning. This will be explored in greater depth when the next chapter interrogates *This is England* through closely analysing it.

## **Chapter 4: *This is England* (2006) - A Case Study**

In the previous three chapters, *This is England* has been explored in terms of its nostalgic referencing of other films and how it fulfils the social realist filmmaking tradition. This chapter seeks to build upon prior knowledge of the film and closely analyse the marrying of nostalgia and social realism. By marrying the two terms and drawing from McRobbie and Thornton's theoretical framework, it will be argued that *This is England* constructs a collective memory that appeals both to contemporary youth's overwhelming nostalgia from days when youth culture was transgressive and to Meadows' generation, who, as the reception material suggests, saw the film as reflecting their own personal experiences of youth (1995: 559). In addition, this chapter seeks to explore the role nostalgia has within social realism by focusing solely on *This is England*. A primary method, through which this chapter will look at the film, is through what Melanie Williams describes as 'morbidly nostalgic' (2013: 10). *This is England* is filled with the romanticism of remembering, but fuelled by issues which are far from romantic. By using close analysis and decoding of mise-en-scène, it will provide a stronger base of contention when marrying the social realist style and the nostalgic mode.

The film begins with a montage of the 1980s, to position the audience in the past. Tim Snelson states, 'Meadows thrusts the spectator into the political and cultural milieu of the early 1980s through an eclectic montage of 1980s popular culture' (2013: 122). The montage mediates the time-period through nostalgic readings of subculture coupled with musical cues. This framework and the montage style can be seen

throughout the film until the very final sequence. The opening montage sequence begins with iconic imagery from the 1980s such as the children's character Roland Rat, exercise videos, Rubik's Cubes and arcade machines. Hallam and Marshment argue that, when the audience 'respond emotionally to a text, they are treating it as a catalyst [...] it enables a release of emotion comparable to that experienced in real life situations.' (2000: 124). The iconic past images may spark a nostalgic feeling in certain members of the audience, forcing them to remember things from their childhood.

Furthermore, the use of stock newsreel footage evokes a documentary realism style, providing a canvas onto which the social realist style of filmmaking can be painted. As the montage sequence progresses, the nostalgic images become visceral and begins to feel hard and uncomfortable in keeping with the social realist tradition, such as, squalid council houses, the mining riots, the emergence of youth subcultures and Margaret Thatcher. Tim Snelson and Emma Sutton suggest that, 'the juxtaposition of these images with the soundtrack, '54-46 Was My Number' by Toots and The Maytals, serves to build a complex and at times conflicted picture of British national identity' (2013: 122). This juxtaposition is multi-layered, providing an ironic comment on the reggae song and later adopted skinhead hit, and the subculture which comes into play in the second half of the film. The irony comes from the cultural route of the song, being adopted by a far right militant group. The nostalgia is at first delivered through rose tinted spectacles, prompting the audience to wistfully remember days gone by through the images on the screen and the soundtrack, which recounts an autobiographical story. However, as soon as the negative images are shown, a sense of Freud's the uncanny is felt. The negative images of the time-period were lost, forgotten and repressed, but, as Meadows shows them, the feeling of uncertainty and discomfort associated with the

period is brought back, producing this morbid nostalgic feeling. Snelson and Sutton further state that,

Music in *This is England* is used to elicit emotion and conjure nostalgia while providing a shorthand for the era as shaped by Meadows' 'memories' of his youth. (2013: 120)

Therefore, one can understand a relationship between the use of music, meaning and nostalgia in not only *This is England*, but many other films by Meadows. Another example in *This is England*, similar to Toots and the Maytals being used to contribute meaning to British identity at the start of *the film*, during the final act a slower and a sombre version of the Smiths' *Please, Please, Please, Let Me Get What I Want* is played to mirror the yearning for normality Shaun and Meadows feels at that point of the film. The music paired with the imagery of Shaun tossing the Union Jack into the ocean, connotes a rejection of the system he has been inducted into, and the wanting of an England he wants to see. Cinema and music is a pairing that has been used since the birth of the former, and often aids the narrative and thematic structure of the film.

Soon after the musical opening sequence of *This is England*, Thatcher's remarks about the 1983 Labour manifesto are heard on a radio alarm clock: "They think it's attractive to offer to the young a future wholly controlled by the operation of the socialist state.". Already, Meadows has set the stage for the subject of youth culture and a leftist political and classist slant by foreshadowing such themes with the voice of Thatcher. A range of wide voyeuristic shots of Shaun walking among the suburban and rural areas, paired with intimate and claustrophobic ones, are used to introduce him,

connoting the loneliness and disenfranchisement he feels. The bare and drab nature of Shaun's room reflects the bare and *drab* psychology of his wellbeing. The décor is poorly painted, pieces of peeling wallpaper fill the entirety of the shot, with the framed picture of his late father becoming the focus. Immediately, the ideologies that preoccupy Meadows are established: the role which Thatcherite politics have played in impacting the working-classes, and how the Falklands War affected the English people. It was stated in a *Guardian* article in 1982 that:

Patriotism has worked its old magic with the working-class and trade unionists; skilled workers and young people have rallied to the flag and the Conservative Party. The prospect of a "new majority" - a patriotic majority, a moral majority - presents itself through the smoke of war (2017).

Therefore, one contends the working-classes became blind and disillusioned by the efforts of an unnecessary war. The far right grew through nationalism, but the economic welfare of the working-class fell, resulting in run down council estates. Thus, by decoding the *mise-en-scène*, it reveals that at the heart of *This is England*, Meadows shows how the Thatcherite government of the 1980s affected the youth of the time. Furthermore, by allowing the audience to observe the damaging nature of Shaun's father's passing, it foreshadows his rejection of the establishment during the film's conclusion.

The nature of loneliness and confusion is something that is commonly found in social realist texts and was capitalised on by the British New Wave directors, and later Ken Loach. Loach is a committed socialist filmmaker who uses social realist and,

similar to the opening of *This is England*, uses documentary styles to capture the intricacies of everyday injustices. By using the idea of the 'angry young man' of the 1950s as a gateway character from which the audience can create an emotional attachment to begin their journey with, it allows said audience to experience the social inequalities outlined throughout the film. In an article for the British Film Institute Michael Brooke states that:

Although not an organised and ideologically coherent artistic movement as such, the work of the 'angry young men' was characterised by outspoken dissatisfaction with the status quo, particularly the so-called Establishment. [...] Reacting against stifling class distinctions, their work championed the working-classes (2017).

Characterising Meadows' protagonist as an angry young man helps the audience identify unease and contempt for the establishment. This results in the angry young man often feeling lost and not having a rightful place, regardless of whether this is owing to the Thatcherite government or to the loss of his father. Furthermore, the lonely shots of Shaun exploring suburban England, in addition to these 'angry young man' characteristics, are reminiscent of not only the films of the British New Wave but that of François Truffaut's Antoine Doinel series. In *Les quatre cents coups* (1959) Antoine, much like Shaun, is being failed by the system. School is alienating and his parental unit at home is far from the nuclear 1950s family one would expect in a western society through its dysfunctional representation, therefore, when he becomes aware of his situation, he rebels. Antoine plays truant from school, he commits petty theft and nearly has relations with a prostitute which eventually leads him to the French equivalent of a



borstal. The rebellious characteristics found in Antoine are similar to those of Shaun. Similarities can be drawn between the two characters, the composition of the shots and indeed, at times, the narrative. Meadows, in addition to nostalgically placing his narrative in the past, is also using elements of iconic filmmakers of the tradition. Thus, the nostalgic filmmaking helps contextualise the narrative and style in the lineage of the tradition.

Due to the loss of his father, Shaun's mother, Cynthia, is now acting as both father and mother. For this reason, the care and emotional and social development which Shaun needs at the age of twelve is not being fully provided. Thus, when Woody and his gang of skinheads present Shaun with the opportunity of a strong relationship and replace the absent father figure, he seizes it. For Richard Hoggart, working-class communities were 'traditionally bound together by material hardships from which emanated a shared culture of resistance and a palpable sense of class division in terms of "us" and "them"' (Hoggart, 1957). What Hoggart defines as 'material hardship', the youth culture of the time bonded over this shared opinion of hardship caused by the Thatcherite government and consequently formed a family unit within their own subcultures, such as the skinheads, the new romantics, goths and punk rockers.

The forming of this youth culture family can be observed in *This is England* in the scene in which Shaun meets Woody and the gang for the first time. Shaun is walking through a short, graffiti covered tunnel when he first meets the gang. Not having gained his skinhead status yet, Shaun is wearing clothes that perhaps were not the height of fashion in the eighties, such as flares which Shaun takes a dislike to wearing. The clothing that he is wearing connotes the lack of money Cynthia has, in an

exchange later in the film she says, “There’s nothing wrong with them, your dad bought you them. [...] If you didn’t want to wear them you should have put your school trousers on”.

That Cynthia does not offer other items of clothing for Shaun to wear suggests that he does not have many pairs of trousers, and is finding it hard to financially support him. This is reinforced through her only working part-time shifts at a low paying job throughout the film. Furthermore, the loss of the Shaun’s dad has not only had a detrimental effect on his development, but on Cynthia’s role as a parent. It is suggested throughout the film that Shaun and his family moved around a lot due to the nature of his dad being in the forces, but now he is gone, it has left Cynthia and Shaun in a derelict council house and resulting in them not quite fitting in to the area. Jill Steans argues that ‘Meadows can scarcely shoot his subjects in rural settings without including some industrial vestige within the frame’ (Steans, 2013: 78). Meadows illustrates the landscape with run-down houses adorned with politically fuelled graffiti messages. Graffiti such as ‘Maggie is a twat’ can be seen throughout the film, reflecting the political unrest felt by all whom inhabit said area. The barren and visceral nature of the environment allows the audience to understand the psychological impact felt by Shaun at this point in the film. Nevertheless, despite the nature of Shaun’s home life, the moment Woody and his gang of skinheads start to initiate him within their gang, his family dynamic shifts and Woody and his girlfriend, Lol, become a surrogate father and mother. This is positively reinforced to Shaun, and for the audience, when the Gang buy him clothes despite not having much money themselves. This is displayed as Shaun is crafting the iconic skinhead look.

Although the social realist style begs a grim aesthetic, this particular scene has a nostalgic glow as Meadows is trying to show the audience, who are from that time, what it was like, prompting a reminiscence. The retrospective thinking shows the romanticism Meadows holds for the subculture and that specific time in his life and reinforces the autobiography featured in his work. In a *Guardian* interview Meadows stated:

It was the skinhead movement that enamoured me the most. [...] to be a skinhead, all you needed was a pair of jeans, some work boots, a white shirt and a shaved head. [...] Skins appealed to me because they were like soldiers: they wore their outfits like suits of armour and demanded respect (2007).

However, although Meadows is nostalgically exploring the fashion and culture of the time by displaying this militarised look including the shaven head, the Ben Sherman shirt, braces and Doc Martin shoes, he interrogates the subtext of the scene by demonstrating that Shaun is honouring his Dad's memory as this uniformed dressing is taking place. The scene is also an example of the social realist style Meadows has developed. Notwithstanding the fact that social realist techniques are used, such as naturalistic dialogue and close up angles connoting claustrophobia, the atmosphere of the scene does not reflect the tension and claustrophobia one usually has when watching a social realist film, as in *Look Back in Anger* (1959), *A Taste of Honey* (1961) or *Kes* (1969). The substitution of these techniques in the scene described above is down to Meadows preoccupation with nostalgia and the polished aesthetics of the film.

This is seen further in the perhaps misplaced montage in the film. The establishing of the family unit culminates with the montage scene of the gang taking Shaun out in his new clothes for the first time. In addition to the montage scene showing a passing of time, it is also used to show the new bond Shaun has, and the new family unit he is part of. However, although the montage scene, coupled with the skinhead music, effectively contextualises the narrative, the technique is not something that is often featured in the social realist film and similar to that of *Fully Monty*'s overt stylisation which relies on musical overtures. This is where the poetic realism that Meadows has developed comes into play. The poetic nature of the narrative, such as family, closeness and companionship needs to be reflected in such a way, for when the family unit crumbles it is all that more emotional and makes a bigger social statement. The nostalgic glow from the previous scene continues to follow through into the montage sequence, citing long days out with friends. A number of audience members may have experienced similar sort of experiences within their youth, thus recognising and remembering said experiences. Furthermore, the montage is linked to memory and time passing, thus evoking nostalgia. Meadows uses nostalgia to pull in its audience and promote empathy for its characters. Nevertheless, nostalgia in *This is England* is not just used to please the audience and fulfil this journey of personal exploration for Meadows. It is used to comment on the socio-economic and political landscape of England of the time and present day. Melanie Williams states that, 'Meadows is a member of the generation known as Thatcher's children. Meadows' would-be nostalgic interventions are thus both timely and symptomatic in an era of neoliberal consensus' (2013: 11-12).

A year before the film was released, Tony Blair's Labour government had just secured a third term in the 2005 general election. An article on the BBC website states,

‘The result writes a new chapter in British political history, with Margaret Thatcher the only other post-war prime minister to have won three successive general elections.’ (2005) Although securing an historic third term, the period which became known as ‘Cool Britannia’ was beginning to show cracks. Lowenstein, providing a definition for social realism, states that it is ‘bound up with moments of contemporary crisis’ (2000: 221). After 9/11, Islamophobia was starting to increase, which led to tensions between communities and eventually providing a path for the British National Party to gain popularity. In addition, British troops were deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan to combat the rise of the terror threat to Western civilisation. Much like the Falklands war in the 1980s, the Iraq/Afghanistan war was controversial. Tony Blair stated in an interview that, "I know too that Iraq has been a divisive issue in this country but I hope now that we can unite again and look to the future - there and here." (Blair, 2005).

Therefore, owing to the nature of the feeling, by the general public, the response was to ultimately look back at better days. Television dramas such as *Life on Mars* (2006) and *Ashes to Ashes* (2008) all debuted around the same time period as *This is England*, however, where the former chose to romanticise the past and feed on the feeling of a yearning for something that is lost, Meadows sees that ‘memories of Thatcherite 1980s continue to serve as ‘traumatic flashbacks’ to an era which continues to haunt the present’ (Fradley et al, 2013: 12). Meadows does not hesitate to draw specific parallels between 1980s and the socio-economic and political landscape of the present. Popular memory and nostalgia have become integral codes and conventions in understanding Meadows’ films. As mentioned above, Williams et al describes the film as ‘morbidly nostalgia’ (2013: 10) which supports the claim above.

Despite social realist traits being present within the first half of the film, such as the use of natural locations and unknown actors, the tone is relatively light, seeing the humorous nature of Shaun's adventures with his new gang. Nevertheless, the tone quickly changes to the typical hard and uncomfortable nature associated with the tradition, particularly when Stephen Graham's character, Combo, is introduced. Combo's character is part of the vast unemployed and disenfranchised youths created by the Thatcherite government that left England with an 'assorted bunch of youths and men, all of whom seem to be drifting aimlessly, with no real sense of purpose: nothing to believe in' (Steans, 2013: 76). When confronted with a war, notions of sovereignty and nationalism were strongly felt by those looking for something to believe in. In the film, Combo cites his lack of direction in life through an absent father and strong ruling government, which inevitably leads him to adopt a far-right stance when an assertive authority arrives.

The subcultural identity is transformed from being a community of lovable rogues that Meadows recognises, to a group of hostile youths and adults driven by disillusioned Thatcherite politics of nationalism. Nick Knight, in his book *Skinhead* (1982) suggests that these working-class youths and adults were 'denied any useful role in the present. So instead they turned to the past, to an idea of what an unspoiled working-class community might have looked like' (1982:30). The skinhead nationalist community, that Combo was very much a part of, were using their nostalgic tendencies for the good old days. In his edited volume, *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, Stuart Hall stated, 'culture of a complex society is never a homogeneous structure. It is layered, reflecting different interests within class containing different traces from the past, as well as emergent elements in the present'

(2006: 6). By combining the struggles of the working-class, and the good old days of the skinhead culture with the hostile nature of Thatcherite politics focusing on ‘the enemy within’, almost radicalised this group to become hostile themselves and project their unemployed insecurities on to marginalised minorities, like themselves. Thus, causing a state of racist aggression against anyone who was not English. This analysis is articulated in Combo’s speech when rallying his troops:

That’s what this nation has been built on. Proud fucking warriors. Two thousand years this little tiny fucking island has been raped and pillaged, by people – two fucking world wars. Men have laid down their lives for this. For this... and for what? So people can stick their fucking flag in the ground and say, yeah! This is England. And this is England, and this is England.

Combo’s speech provides Shaun with the call to arms and the cause that he has been searching for. Although only a child, he reasons that he can no longer let his dad’s actions go unrecognised and is able to, although only temporarily, understand his death. Thus, he begins this journey of mislead nationalism with Combo and his gang. The clothes he wears no longer reflect the working-class subculture it means to Woody, Lol and their gang, but now connotes militarised uniformity ready to combat diasporic working-class communities. In terms of the psychology linking both audience and filmmaker, Meadows has lured the audience in with nostalgia-tinted spectacles, but, as the tone shifts, the audience is left with a sense of the uncanny, remembering something which should have perhaps remained repressed. This period may have been filled with youthful joy for some members of the audience, perhaps forgetting the fractured state of the political and economic landscape. Although, on the other hand, if members of the

audience are not working-class, their views may be different and consequently happy with the repression. Therefore, this sense of the uncanny becomes prominent through the use of social realist techniques. The use of intimate camera angles, run-down locations and racist themes become uncomfortable to watch, perhaps opening the eyes of certain members of audience to what certain parts of England in the 1980s were like.

The most powerful scene of the film, which brings together these elements discussed above, provides the morbid nostalgia which Williams observes in the work. Here, Shaun's new gang visit a National Front (NF) rally to support and raise awareness of its cause. Although the party was and still is a legitimate political party, it often attracts individuals disillusioned with nationality and sovereignty, such as Combo. Their website states that:

The National Front is a political movement seeking deep and fundamental changes in British society. Unlike many other radical parties, particularly those of the past, we do not seek to impose our views on the population (National Front, 2017).

In addition to this sentiment, this thesis argues that Meadows uses the National Front's ideologies to frame his characters. For example, scene opens with Combo's gang driving towards the NF rally, paired with the non-diegetic soundtrack of 'Warhead' by UK Subs. The lyrics warn that everyone is getting ready to fight and stand for the incoming war. Although the song is about the threat of nuclear war between America and Russian, the call to arms and getting ready mirrors the call to arms Combo proposed in his speech to Shaun, Woody and the others. Moreover,



stylistically the UK Subs were similar to that of the Oi! Bands of the 1980s, whose music was associated with violence and far-right extremism. Although the lyrics of *Warhead* beg a call to arms, Tim Snelson argues that the song ‘indicates Shaun’s departure from the affable Woody’s ‘rude boy’ gang listening to Toots and The Maytals into the menacing Combo’s neo-Nazi mob’ (2013: 121).

Shaun and the group’s transition is illustrated further through the mise-en-scène. At the rally, the use of an old English pub provides the backdrop from which old English values can be drawn from or painted on to. The location is littered with the St. George’s Cross, but is inevitably subscribed an alternate meaning throughout the film by acts of racist aggression. The rugged landscapes that once begged a poeticism displaying a harmonic relationship between the people and environment has now soured, and shows a beaten Britain. Williams’ idea of ‘morbid nostalgia’ is explicitly shown through these sequences and thus the marrying of social realism and nostalgia. Gone are the warm glowing images of forgotten youth in the opening montages, the images Meadows remembers from his youth and the point he is trying to illustrate now exist.

The uncertain feeling caused by this uneasy vision of a period of youth that many people hold dear continues through to the conclusion of the film. Having witnessed Milky’s death, Shaun heads to the beach with the St. George’s flag from the National Front rally. In a moment of clarity, realisation, and finally, coming to terms with his father’s passing, Shaun hurls the flag into the ocean, marking simultaneously both the end of the film and the skinhead chapter in his life. Interviews with Meadows suggest the film was a personal retrospective venture, regaling a lost youth and reclaiming the skinhead brand. He stated,

[N]owadays when I tell people that I used to be a skinhead, they think I'm saying I used to be racist. My film shows how right-wing politics started to creep into skinhead culture in the 1980s and change people's perception of it (2007).

At first glance, one observes the negative side of the culture, a perspective driven by racism and by fear. However, a negotiated reading of the text explains that this culture helped Meadows come of age and provided closure for his grief. The audience experience the film through the eyes of Shaun, witnessing the effects of Thatcherism on youth culture. The journey he takes sees Shaun suffering the loss of a family member, being accepted into a marginalised social group, influenced by a disillusioned ideology and finally understanding the notion of nationality, sovereignty and establishment by rejecting far-right ideologies and the hegemonic system. By using this narrative technique of following the events of story through the eyes of a young protagonist, a key realist trait, it allows the audience to understand the socio-economic landscape of the time, in order to understand the present. Present issues such as the Iraq war and the governmental conflicts.

By marrying nostalgia and social realism, one can understand the political and socio-economic landscape of the present, through formal social realist stylistic features. Meadows has capitalised on the contemporary culture's need for nostalgia. He has used it to draw the audience in, with a promise of a chance of reliving past experiences through his own, and then changes it by representing the effects of the Thatcherite hegemony. Although this is illustrated in *This is England*, nostalgia and the role of social realism in British cinema is key to understanding the work of Shane Meadows.

Even in his exploration of different formats, such as the mockumentary, *Le Donk and Scor-Zay-Zee* (2009) or the more customary documentary, *Made of Stone* (2013), his works always possesses some form of nostalgic and social realist qualities. Like the British New Wave, Meadows uses the character of ‘angry young man’ to comment on the contemporary landscape. This distinct ‘angry young man’ which Meadows explores, holds different values to that of a character found in a film made in the 1960s, and nevertheless, by using this archetypal character, Meadows posits the disenfranchisement of an individual or group. Meadows continues to use these nostalgic elements, themes and techniques of the social realist style in the *This is England* sequels, which he subsequently made for television.

## **Chapter 5: Tracing Social Realism and Nostalgia through Television**

Samantha Lay states that ‘social realism is still considered to be a ‘televisual’ mode of expression’ (2002:110). Therefore, this chapter will seek to interrogate said mode of expression and social realism’s place in the medium of television. This interrogation will not only add context to the social realist style, but it will help this thesis’ overall argument regarding Meadows as a filmmaker whose work refers back to previous trends to evoke ‘morbid nostalgia.’ This chapter will revolve around an argument made by Samantha Lay. She asserts, ‘to understand social realism in Britain without consideration of the influence and parallel developments in television at certain crucial times, is all but impossible’ (Lay, 2002: 21). One will rationalise Lay’s argument by understanding the journey that Meadows makes from one medium to another, and the continued exploration of ‘morbid nostalgia’ in continuing existing storylines from the film. In his journal article, *Jim Allen: Radical Drama Beyond Days of Hope*, Andy Willis suggests that, due to a desire to establish television as a serious media, writers used dramas as a forum to experiment (2008:300). By experimenting with much darker and grittier storylines that reflected society at the time, it allowed writers, such as Jim Allen, Dennis Potter and Trevor Griffiths, to build upon the social realist tradition within the environment of television and allowed the directors, such as Ken Loach, to bring those ideas to life. Furthermore, in a journal article in 2001, *Television Drama and Social Change: Jim Allen in the 1960s*, Willis also stated that:

Writers and critics often talk of television drama in Britain during the 1960s going through some sort of ‘golden age’. [...] The aesthetic codes and

conventions of the late 1950s were replaced by new, more vibrant set of production techniques, many based around newly developed lightweight camera equipment. [...] For the first time, a more authentic-feeling version of social reality hit the screens. (2001: 30)

Due to newly developed techniques in the 1960s, it allowed for a broadening of television's world view. It can be argued that television pioneered the social realist tradition that exists today. This chapter will focus on the presences of social realism on the medium of television. Aspects of chronology in relation to development of the social realist style will be interrogated to provide a working knowledge of how the tradition may be suited to the medium. Moreover, an application of nostalgia will be applied to the work of Meadows' to observe if the same process occurs outside his content.

### A New Start

Once the relatively short-lived British New Wave ended with *This Sporting Life* (1963), and the withdrawal of American finance at the end of the 1960s, many of these filmmakers and writers were left to explore and continue the social realist trend through the medium of the already established theatre and, also, the newly experimental format of television. That is not to say that television is more experimental than theatre, one could argue that due to TV still being a relatively new invention, much of the content that was commissioned was experimental in nature. It was the BBC and ITV that produced drama films for television, while the film industry focused on making film adaptations of popular sitcoms, such as *On the Buses* (1969), alongside Bond and

Hammer horror films. Ken Loach, Jim Allen, Tony Garnett, Alan Bleasdale and Alan Clarke are a few who understood the nature of social realism, and were responsible for continuing the filmmaking tradition into the 1970s, 1980s and into the new millennium.

*Armchair Theatre* (1956-1974), *The Wednesday Play* (1964-1970) and *Play for Today* (1970-1984) continued the social realist and kitchen sink style that had been popular with the Free Cinema movement. Through a continuation and understanding of the style, such television programmes were able to draw in mass audiences. The television format served as a vehicle for new writers and directors to gain recognition. Throughout its six-year run, Ken Loach produced ten plays for *The Wednesday Plays*, his most popular being *Cathy Come Home*, which gained critical acclaim for its dedication to the issue of homelessness and resulted in the charity Shelter being established.

#### Jim Allen & *Coronation Street* (1960)

Many individuals who were passionate about television drama, such as Tony Garnett, Ken Loach and Trevor Griffiths, were all involved to some degree with *Armchair Theatre*, *The Wednesday Play*, and *Play for Today*, however, it was the work of Jim Allen that understood the inner workings of the style. Willis has stated that ‘one such approach might be to consider how his career intersects with, and reacts to, some of the most significant shifts within British television and film from the 1960s to the late 1990s’ (2009). Like Meadows, Allen’s personal experiences of growing up (in Manchester) informed his writing material. Before Allen came to be a writer, he spent much of his adolescent years working in varying trades, in a sheet metal shop, a fish

market, builder and miner. These professions allowed Allen to understand the working-class and their plight. In his book chapter, *Jim Allen in British Television Drama*, Paul Madden suggested that:

[T]he majority of Allen's plays have their roots in a reality directly experienced by the writer, constructed as they are from the working lives of working men [...] more often than not politically involved at the raw end of industrial relations in strikes, occupations and picket lines (1981: 36).

Before collaborating with the likes of Tony Garnett and Ken Loach, Allen began writing on *Coronation Street* (1960-). The nature of Allen's class climbing in terms of education and career can be likened to Richard Hoggart's representation of the displaced working-class individual in his book *The Uses of Literacy*. Richard Dyer identifies media appropriations of Hoggart's book that are apparent in *Coronation Street*:

Four aspects of *The Uses of Literacy* – the emphasis on common-sense, the absence of work and politics, the stress on women and the strength of women, the perspective of nostalgia – inform *Coronation Street* and indeed come close to defining its fictional world (1981: 40).

The media appropriations that Dyer illustrates, are key to understanding the narratives that are frequently used within the soap. The perspective of nostalgia becomes appropriated through the writers venturing into their own past to create content for the series. The nostalgia and content formed the success of the show by representing

the traditional ideals of family life that were beginning to broaden due to the rise of youth culture. Terry Lovell states that:

*Coronation Street* had to capture the interest of a broad spectrum of viewers. Although it has been argued that the conventions of realism in use in the series draw on the pleasures of recognition, it was essential in those early episodes to find ways of also drawing in the viewer who would not be able to see herself in this 'landscape' because it was *not* like her own. (1990: 376)

Due to the perspective of nostalgia and drawing of pleasures of recognition, in her book, *Heading North: North of England in Film and Television*, Ewa Mazierska asserts that *Coronation Street* 'plays an important part in the culture and economy of the North of England due to its sheer longevity and persistent presence in the TV schedules' (2017: 28), which is why the show stands as the longest running Soap opera in the world. The medium of television allowed for filmmakers to develop storylines over many episodes and let natural situations that reflect contemporary society, such as financial struggles, take place. It allowed for the audience to build a relationship with the characters. Hallam and Marshment stated that, 'realism articulates a relationship between the conscious, perceiving individual and the social world activating a mental *mise-en-scène* of memory, recognition and perceptual familiarity' (2000: 123). Moreover, this thesis asserts that it was through the relationship to the characters, situations and location that aided the success of the show as it could be seen to reflect



the lives of certain members of the audience and activating their mental mise-en-scène of memory.

After the popularity of *Coronation Street*, other television programmes began to appear that followed the kitchen sink soap opera style format, such as *Emmerdale* (1972-) in the 70s and *Eastenders* (1985-) in the 80s. Despite the former's northern setting, due to the nature of storylines and multi-camera studio set up, it opposed the social realist style, that *Eastenders* and *Coronation Street* were using. However, despite the show's success, Allen found the soap opera formula restrictive so moved on. Willis writes:

[O]ne oft-repeated story suggests he offered a storyline for the soap that involved all the cast boarding a bus for a day out in the Lake District only for the bus to crash off a cliff, killing all the occupants. Unsurprisingly, after this suggestion it was not long before he left Granada to pursue more politically charged projects at the BBC (2008).

### Social Realist Television Drama

The soaps and the BBC dramas of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s continued to document the political and social change of the times. Despite the British New Wave ending and the directors moving on to pursue other subject matters, the televisual social realism continued to respond to the socio-economic climate, featuring such storylines as, illness, drugs and sex. Examples of the latter include, *Cathy Come Home* (1966), *The Spongers* (1978) and *Made in Britain* (1982). In addition to writers using their talents to

devise great pieces of social realist dramas for television, individuals taking a directorial role also received great praise. In his book, *Alan Clarke*, Dave Rolinson argues that, 'television studies approaches tend to emphasise the medium's collaborative nature, placing the central 'authority' figure within networks of multiple authorship' (2011: 6). Thus, this thesis argues that whereas film is a director's medium, television is very much a writer's one. Films such as *Scum* (1978) and *Made in Britain* informed the authorial voice and style that Clarke adhered to in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Similar to the politically charged scripts of Allen, Clarke's work of the 1980s endeavoured for an aesthetic and political response to Thatcherism.

#### Channel Four

The continuation of documenting and reflecting reality within social realist television drama has become something that has strongly influenced Britain's writers and filmmakers. Their deference for the format and social commitment allows for growth and development within the medium of television. In 1982, Channel Four began to broadcast. The channel's remit was, and still is, to provide alternative viewing from that of BBC and ITV. It provides more representation of minorities and under-represented groups in society. In her work, *Channel 4 and British Film: An Assessment of Industrial and Cultural Impact, 1982-1998*, Laura Mayne quotes the Annan report for a decision for a new channel:

Our society's culture is now multi-racial and pluralist: that is to say, people adhere to different views of the nature and purpose of life and expect their own

view to be expressed in some form or other. The structure of broadcasting should reflect this variety (2014:6).

The report recommended that the creation of a fourth channel would focus on innovation and experimental forms of television that would function as a voice for those who had been marginalised by the BBC and ITV. In addition to having a remit that accounts for the marginalised individuals in society, Samantha Lay states that, 'Channel Four was also committed to feature filmmaking through its commissioning of new British films, as part of its Film on Four series' (Lay, 2002: 78). By focusing on British films and up and coming filmmakers such as Mike Leigh, Stephen Frears, Alan Clarke and later Shane Meadows, it allowed the channel's public service remit to be extended to the big screen. Thus, the films that Channel Four produced, and still produce, could be described as what Giles illustrates as public service cinema (1996:70), that serves the general public of the time, rather than serve a commercial company. Furthermore, at the Edinburgh Television Festival in 1979, Jeremy Isaacs stated his intention to 'make or help make, films or feature length for television here and for the cinema abroad' (1989: 147). However, despite Channel Four establishing itself as a low budget platform for budding filmmakers, many of those new social realist films did not see a big screen release, thus not gaining much profit. However, despite a lack of profit, Lay further states that, 'While the films rarely made substantial profits, they did have an advance promotional effect, attracting greater numbers to a television premier' (Lay, 2002: 80).

Lindsay Anderson disagreed with the symbiotic relationship that Channel Four was creating between television and cinema and argued that there seemed to be a 'certain restriction of imagination or idea and if you make a film for television, you

have to restrict it in terms of technique or style' (Anderson in Nichols 2001: 66). Despite a responsibility for an emerging British art cinema in 1960s, Anderson's assertion makes him sound elitist and out of touch with cinema. Furthermore, the films produced within Channel Four's remit were committed to serve minority audiences and to allow new voices to be heard, therefore, in that context, social realism fits with anti-establishment sentiment that runs parallel with similar opinions of Channel Four. Therefore, one claims, that when Channel Four was developed and created, it permitted individuals who were from working-class backgrounds, such as Shane Meadows and Paul Abbott, to write and direct films and serials that represented the nature of their environment rather than serving as 'cultural tourism' (1984:16) for an elite audience.

Furthermore, this thesis claims that television provides a much freer space for developing characters and their relationship with the audience, allowing social realism to capture reality as authentically as possible in a longer format. In addition, the longer format and delivery of entertainment and information allows for greater dissemination than that of cinema. Gerald Cock (quoted in Giddings and Selby, 2001) argued that 'television is, from its very nature, more suitable for the dissemination of all kinds of information than for entertainment' (2001:4). One can compare *This is England* with its subsequent television sequels. While the film disseminates a range of information and entertainment regarding the Thatcherite government, the working-class and subcultures, one argues, that the longer format allows for the series to explore, build upon and then disseminate the same themes but in greater depth to a wider audience. Due to television being able to deliver more to the masses, when popular trends begin to present themselves in popular culture, the medium can be fast to respond. When discussing the *Wednesday Plays* of the 1970s, Robert Murphy has claimed that the television show's

‘dramas ripped stories from headlines, and made television seem the natural place for the airing of social issues’ (Murphy, 2009: 33).

Paul Abbott & *Shameless* (2004 – 2013)

Before Shane Meadows released both *This is England* the film and the sequel television series, Paul Abbott’s *Shameless* (2004-2013) took advantage of the longer format of television while responding to the nostalgic trend of the time. Reynolds argues that ‘the 2000s have been about every other previous decade happening again all at once: simultaneity of pop time that abolishes history while nibbling away at the present’s own sense of itself as an era’ (2011). Therefore, due to the recent nostalgic trend that has befallen popular culture, film and television has responded by creating content to cater for the trend, therefore, reboots, remakes and heritage dramas preoccupy the nations screens. *Shameless* epitomized the very definition of social realism through nostalgically thematically referencing old story lines from television programmes such as *Coronation Street* (1960- ) and *The Play for Today* (1970-1984). *Shameless*, similar to the popular comedy, *The Royle Family* (1998-2012), revolved around a working-class family who experienced all aspects of everyday life in the community of a council estate in Manchester. The opening monologue of the television show contextualised its content within contemporary culture:

“Anyone watching thinking we know fuck all about knowing fuck all about owt needs to watch their backs. So, you’ve had your Labour reclassifying scum sending prices sky high... literally... LITERALLY... taking the grass from its own roots. Now you’ve got your Con-Dem-Nation. Liberals noshing Tories like

Alter Boys picking dim sum. Have we had a national fucking' stroke or what? Is revolution a word? Or was it never? Anybody watching needs to know we cope better than average with irony in Chatsworth. Well for fuck's sake – we live in Manchester! And they charge us for water. I wandered lonely as a cloud... necking mushrooms rarely found. This green and pleasant land and ancients are yak yak yak yak yak... It's not theirs anymore! This is our England now! PARTY!"

The above monologue found during the opening sequence of the 8<sup>th</sup> series of *Shameless* in 2011, delivered by everyone's favourite poetic drunk, Frank Gallagher, illustrates the distaste felt across Britain at the imposed austerity implemented by the Conservative Part and Liberal Democrats coalition government. The country was already struggling under the climate of a recession due to the collapse of the sub-prime mortgage market in the US, therefore, the fall in bank lending resulted in smaller businesses failing, which affected the rise of unemployment. A bid to attempt to reverse the recession and unemployment was to reduce the countries deficit. The new coalition government and the previous Labour government shared a commitment to Neoliberalism, which 'advocates a free market approach to policymaking: promoting measures such as privatisation, public spending cuts, and deregulation' (Stone, 2016). In addition, one argues that due to the public spending cuts left many impoverished families without the right amount of money to live, which resulted in a growing national average of the use of food banks. To support this further, in their book *Sociology and Social Work*, Jo and Steve Cunningham asserted that 'the number of people dependent on food banks had tripled in the last 12 months, evidencing a clear relationship between recent welfare cuts and absolute poverty' (2014: 29).

Due to Paul Abbott's experiences in the 1980s, when similar constraints were put on the less fortunate, he saw all too clearly what was happening in the country and used every series of his show to reflect the climate. Unlike the Free Cinema and British New filmmakers, Paul Abbott writes as an insider on the social experiences, rather than an observer looking on from the outside. A criticism Anderson received when making films under the Free Cinema Movement and British New Wave, is that he was a Cambridge graduate who came from a wealthy family, resulting in only a representation from an observed opinion, whereas, the likes of Paul Abbott had grown up in a dysfunctional family unit in Burnley. Abbott's experiences from childhood allowed him to understand the nature of socio-culture that occurs in and around council estates. In her book, *Paul Abbott*, Beth Johnson states that: Abbott's politics and emotions regarding his formative experiences are relayed in the series through his ability to draw on his memories indirectly, reimagine, reflect and refurbish his history (2013:110).

Like Jim Allen before him, Abbott had experienced living in a working-class household, which later informed his work. In addition, similar to Allen, Abbott also worked on *Coronation Street*. Many themes present in the soap, such as community relationships, family life and ultimately working-class life, appeared in his own drama. Consequently, Beth Johnson affirms that Paul Abbotts 'writing, his distinct intention plus the recurrence of specific themes' (2013:7) demonstrate the nostalgia for past subjects from past television shows he has worked on. Thus, due to his experience working with the popular soap, his involvement in council estate culture and understanding of contemporary society, *Shameless* became a beacon of community spirit by nostalgically using thematic structures borrowed from *Coronation Street* of the

1980s. Therefore, it is evident that the thematic structures present in 1980s were the same as the ones present when Abbott created *Shameless*, and continued to exist throughout the series. Unemployment, welfare and issues around youth, family and community are present in *Shameless*, but like the documentaries made by the Free Cinema movement and the films of British New Wave, the protagonists are more concerned with rejecting the system by having a good time rather than let the serious issues cripple them under the hegemonic system. Parallels can be drawn between films such as *We are the Lambeth Boys* (1959), *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* (1960) and *This is England*. The subjects of the former and the protagonists of the latter, are seen to be working throughout the films but do not let the system and workload ‘grind’ their sense of leisure. *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning*’s famous diatribe, “Don’t let the bastards grind you down”, is very much the attitude of *Shameless*, *This is England* and social realist films and television of the new millennium. Despite the nature of the content seen within both texts, *This is England* and *Shameless* share the celebration of commonalty and togetherness within a deprived area. Beth Johnson argues that, ‘rather than focusing on the Chatsworth as a space of social exclusion and depravity, the estate is represented as a space of internal belonging.’ (2013:127). Frank’s repeated monologue at the beginning of each episode reinforces the internal belonging felt by the residents of the estate:

A few things, see, are vital to a half decent community – space, yeah, you need wide-open spaces where everyone goes mental and neighbourliness, fantastic neighbours, Kev and Veronica; lend you anything, well, not anything, but all of ‘em, to a man, know first and foremost one of the most vital necessities of in this life is, they know how to throw a party.



The wide angle shot of the estate shows tall high-rise buildings towering over the residents in the foreground, who are drinking and watching a car burn. This thesis contends that the warm glow of the embers floating off the bonfire reflect the warm but often fiery relationship of the community within the estate feel for one another. The images of derelict buildings and crude graffiti are forgotten, once the camera mediates the joyful party taking place at the nucleus of the estate.

### *This is England* '86, '88 & '90

Similarities can be drawn between the opening sequences of *Shameless* and certain scenes within Meadows' *This is England* series. In the second episode of *This is England* '86, the gang drive through a silent sink estate on a golf caddy drinking cans of lager, in a bid to convince Shaun to return to the group. The intimate positioning of characters and their facial expressions reflect the community associated with impoverished places. This is reinforced further when a tired and disgruntled resident shouts his distaste for the song for Shaun. Johnson argues further, that this occurrence is a 'repeated vision of togetherness, of a community functioning in opposition to controlling state' (2013:126). Fulfilling the name it was given, *Shameless* is defined by the drinking, sex and gossip in the face of adversity and pressures imposed by the ruling state, whilst extending the social realism found in the work of Loach, Clarke and the New Wave. In support of this thesis's claims, Beth Johnson argues that:

[T]hrough the camera's mediation of space within the series [...] aids intimate thematic tropes positioning [...] the ordinariness and commonality of the actions

serve to encourage a realist and invariably domestic reading of the series (2013:112).

Through Paul Abbott's experience working in soaps and *Meadows*' tendency to turn to autobiography, they both present a nostalgic representation of contemporary society, similar to the New Wave predecessors before them. One debates that the televisual format and the backing of Channel Four allowed *Meadows* to experiment with storylines and the inclusion of serious issues throughout its time on air. Issues such as, rape, child abuse, unwanted pregnancy and drug addiction are all explored in '86 up until '90.

The discourse of suffering in deprived areas within *This is England* and *Shameless* has added to the canon of British social realism. Johnson adds that the theme of suffering 'communicates social concerns through scopic impact – through its instance on showing that which is ugly and agonising' (2013:113). In *This is England '90* and *Shameless* the mediation of drug abuse is represented through its ugliness. In *Shameless* the psychology of addiction is cited through Paddy Maguire's (Sean Gilder) struggle with heroin. The dark mise-en-scène, such as décor in the setting, dark lighting, and unclean clothes reflect contemporary society's heroin problem in working-class environments. Parallels may be drawn with scenes from *This is England '90*; the imagery shown when Kelly Ball (Sally Carman) injects heroin in a similar sort of setting is represented through the familiar mise-en-scène. Despite *This is England '90* following *Shameless*' theme of overcoming addiction, the fact that the same subject matter featured in a show that is set in the past and one that is set in modern day suggests that the problem still exists. Therefore, it can be observed that *Meadows* has

fled to the past to assess today's problems. Furthermore, Johnson has argued that agonising and ugly imagery, such as the imagery of heroin addiction, adds to the social realist style that has been used in both television programmes. Furthermore, in a review for *This is England '90* (2015) Sam Parker argues that:

*This is England's* boldest and greatest achievement - its willingness to explore the ways in which childhood trauma shapes and distorts a person adult relationships and life (2015).

The characters in both *Shameless* and *This is England* present childhood trauma in a manner of different ways, such as, the dysfunctions and gaps presented in the Gallagher family through the neglect of their parents, or Lol, experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress from childhood abuse. As much as social realist films, such as *Sweet Sixteen* (2002) and *Fish Tank* (2009), attempt to represent an unmediated view of reality, according to Jonathan Bignell, realism within television genre 'depends not only on construction and form but also on the discourses generated around them' (2004:190). Thus, the discourse surrounding abuse and childhood reflects the idea of Melanie Williams's 'morbid nostalgia'. In agreement with Bignell's statement, these examples demonstrate that the discourse of nostalgia has been integrated into both television shows through traumatic and ugly childhood experiences, better blending social realism and nostalgia itself. Therefore, this thesis contends that through exploration of the televisual format and the interrogation of nostalgia throughout this chapter, the medium of television also allows the social realist element to mix with Meadow's preoccupation with nostalgia. Julia Raeside stated in a *Guardian* article in 2013 that:

To the commissioning bods it seems all we want now is a bit of comfort, definitely an opportunity to regress and for someone with a soothing voice to tell us it's going to be OK. And as is usual when things get tough, TV has given itself repetitive strain injury with all the looking back (2013).

*This is England* is hardly the soothing voice telling you it's going to be okay. The film and the episodes often begin with wit but towards the end, they take the warm feeling of nostalgia and replace it with morbid nostalgia. This allows the audience to understand that seeking comfort from the painful present in the past is futile in nature due to the socio-political landscape of the country. Furthermore, one claims the opportunity to make the television series allowed Meadows to build upon the already established storylines, and how the changing political landscape affected the characters. Beth Johnson argues that 'the tensions of realism are not, however, limited to the look of television but relate to what is being revealed rather than only to how something is revealed' (2013:11). In terms of the TV format Meadows and many other social realist filmmakers have utilised, the longevity of the medium allows the attention to focus on what is being revealed in terms of storyline and subject. In television programmes such as *Coronation Street* and other soaps, the medium allows for longer and complicated storylines to slowly reveal themselves to the viewing audience. Therefore, through the inclusion of increased complex storylines within *This is England* '86, '88 and '90, Meadows takes full advantage of the medium. An example of this is Milky's character arc. This is a character who experiences a vicious attack in the film, has an affair with his best friend's girlfriend in '86, enters fatherhood in '88 and ultimately achieves revenge on his attacker in '90.

Due to the extended format of television that has been covered at length throughout this chapter, Meadows has been able to get to that point where a character who was beaten senseless in the film is now the villain in the eyes of the audience. Combo has now been rehabilitated and is remorseful of his actions in the past. The mortality of the series is more complex. The bravado, arrogance and aggression that were his defining features in the film have long been forgotten, along with the shaven head and Doc Martens. However, the change that he has gone through is not enough to convince Milky, who has organised for members of his family to kill Combo. As Combo rides in the van with members of Milky's family, flashbacks from the moment Combo beat Milky senseless in the film are cut back to, to show the audience that Combo is remembering and repenting on his way to his death. The flashback also injects morbid nostalgia into the scene, for those audience members who have seen the film, it provokes them to remember how they felt the first time they saw this scene and compare it to the version of Combo they have now come to know. Paired with a melancholic piano score, the voice of Hugh Gaitskell can be heard giving a speech from an anti-apartheid rally in the 1960s, in which he says:

The purpose of this... is for the people of Britain to register on the widest possible scale, their passionate protest against an evil and repulsive doctrine, which says that a man's legal status, a man's political rights, a man's economic opportunities, a man's social position shall depend solely on the colour of his skin.

In addition to the images of Combo being carried to his death, scenes of skinheads Nazi-saluting are seen, followed by images of black children. It could be

argued that Meadows is outlining that it was not the members of Milky's family that killed Combo, but the white individuals of the National Front. Although racism plays a heavy part in Combo's character arc, he was not racist out of hate for the black communities coming to England, it was the broken system and lack of parental figures that drove Combo to a racist institution that, in the words of Hugh Graitskell, was evil and repulsive doctrine. The full circle nature and history repeating itself is presented through Milky's decision for revenge. The film is nostalgic in the sense that it allows the audience to see what it was like back then and this feeling continues through the three following series, but the series are also nostalgic for storylines that have come before. Thus, the repetitive and cyclical storyline that *This is England '90* presents and illustrates the futility of nostalgia that Meadows has captured with the entire series, and indeed so pervasively elsewhere in his work.

### Conclusion

This chapter has explored social realism within the medium of television and how it is framed in relation to past moments of history and styles of previous shows. The existence of a chronological list of social realist television shows, such as *The Play for Today*, *Coronation Street*, *Shameless* and Shane Meadows' *This is England* series, proves Samantha Lay's contention that 'social realism is still considered to be a 'televisual' mode of expression' (2002:110) is correct. In terms of its use of the nostalgic mode, this chapter has explored how television is able to adapt and reflect societal trends, such as the preoccupation with nostalgia. Like film, this thesis argues that, television uses the nostalgic to comment on the socio-political and economic landscape, informing the social realist style it uses. However, despite claims throughout

this chapter and thesis, that nostalgia is used to escape a painful present, Tony Garnett has suggested that ‘our motive for going into the past is not to escape the present; we go into the past to draw lessons from it. History is contemporary’ (Bennett et al 1985:302). Through an exploration into the psychology of the audience and filmmakers regarding nostalgia in chapter two, this thesis argues that, the audience not only flee to the past as a form of escapism, but in line with Garnett’s contention, go into the past to draw lessons for it. Although, it can be observed that the examples used throughout the course of this thesis suggest that society has yet to learn from the lessons of the past.

In addition, cited in *The Cinema of Ken Loach: Art in the Service of the People* Loach has stated, ‘we want anybody who feels themselves to be suffering from crises today, people who are caught by prices rises, inflation and wage restraint, to watch the films and realise that all this happened before’ (Lyndon 1975:69). Due to the very nature of the social realist style reflecting society, and the medium of television responding quickly to events and delivering to them to the masses, filmmakers such as, Jim Allen, Ken Loach, Alan Clarke and Paul Abbott have been granted the opportunity to make programmes and films that reflect the past in some form. Be it through aesthetics, themes, ideas or simply placing the narrative in the past, all the latter individuals, through personal experience or a dedication to social equality, continue to use the past to reflect contemporary society. This chapter and the entirety of this thesis have observed and explored how contemporary social realist texts are framed by the past. This has been illustrated further through close analysis of the filmmaking style of Shane Meadows and his work with the nostalgic mode.

## **Conclusion**

In setting out to examine contemporary social realist texts in both the cinema and on television, the main objective of this thesis was to determine why contemporary social realist dramas are framed by their own relations with the past, as opposed to simply confronting their present directly. Following a thorough contextualisation of these texts, in addition to close-analysis of Meadows' work, The British New Wave directors, and their instigation of the filmmaking style, and by exploring the context of the filmmaking style of social realism and the psychology of nostalgia. This thesis has discovered that through society's preoccupation with nostalgia, and the poor landscape of the socio-economic climate, Shane Meadows and his contemporaries are thematically and stylistically framing their work in terms of the past. Despite Tony Garnett asserting that the reason we look to the past is to learn from it, this thesis claims that, in addition to his assertion, filmmakers, such as Meadows, are escaping the present to seek comfort in the past, to only discover it was just as bad then as it is in contemporary society. Therefore, after the journey into the past, the only way to frame it is, in terms of what Garnett states, as a lesson.

Meadows does indeed play 'on the gaps between representations of the past and actual events'. However, while, however, whereas traditional nostalgia films display 'a collective wish fulfilment, and the expression of a deep, unconscious yearning for a simpler and more human social system' (Jameson, 1992: 283), it has been contested that Meadows uses it to highlight a clearer nature of the past and to demonstrate why the audience should not, in fact, yearn for it. It has been argued that Meadows then uses the gap between representation of the past and actual events to pass judgement and make



comment on present day proceedings. Pam Cook suggests too that nostalgia provides 'an opportunity to reflect upon and interrogate the present' (2004: 11). Due to the very nature of social realism being a style that is habitually associated with unpleasant subjects, the very fact that nostalgia is present alongside this style illustrates a negative reading of the present.

Ultimately, all of Meadows' endeavours, be they through film, television or documentary, might arguably present a 'longing for something that is known to be irretrievable but sought anyway' (Cook, 2004:3). What is a more significant discovery, however, is the simple fact that for Meadows, this nostalgia runs contrary to conventional wisdom in that it is not, for him, a heartening and hopeful feeling, but one which has led him to present what has been quite effectively termed a morbidity of nostalgia.

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## **Filmography**

*Ashes to Ashes* (2008 - 2010) [TV]. London. BBC. 7<sup>th</sup> February

*Brassed Off* (1996) [DVD] Directed by Mark Herman. UK. Channel Four Film.

*Cathy Come Home* (1966) [TV]. UK. BBC. 16<sup>th</sup> November

*Coronation Street* (1960 - ) [TV]. UK. ITV. 9<sup>th</sup> December

*Dead Man's Shoes* (2004) [DVD] Directed by Shane Meadows. UK. Big Arty Productions.

*Fish Tank* (2009) [DVD] Directed by Andrea Arnold. UK. BBC

*Kes* (1969) [DVD] Directed by Ken Loach. UK. Woodfall Film Productions

*Ladri Di Bicicletta* (1948) [DVD] Directed by Vittorio De Sica. Italy. Ente Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche

*Last Resort* (2000) [DVD] Directed by Pawel Pawlikowski. UK. BBC

*Les Quatre Cent Coups* (1959) Directed by François Truffaut. France. Les Films du Carrosse

*Listen to Britain* (1942) [DVD] Directed by Humphrey Jennings. UK. Crown Film Unit

*Life on Mars* (2006 - 2007) [TV]. London. BBC. 9<sup>th</sup> January.

*The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962) [DVD] Directed by Tony Richardson UK. Woodfall Film Productions.

*I, Daniel Blake* (2016) [Film] Directed by Ken Loach. UK. BBC Films

*Made in Britain* (1982) [DVD] Directed by Alan Clarke UK. Central Television

*Made of Stone* (2013) [DVD] Directed by Shane Meadows. UK. Big Arty Productions

*Mama Don't Allow* (1956) [DVD] Directed by Tony Richardson, UK. BFI

*Nanook of the North* (1922) [DVD] Directed by Robert Flaherty USA. Pathe Exchange

*The National Anthem* (2011) *Black Mirror* [DVD]. UK. Channel Four



*Pride* (2014) [DVD] Directed by Matthew Warchus. UK. BBC Films

*Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1986) [DVD] Directed by Alan Clarke. UK. Channel Four

*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960) [Film] Directed by Karel Reisz UK. Woodfall Film Productions

*Saving Private Ryan* (1998) [DVD] Directed by Steven Spielberg. USA. Amblin Entertainment.

*Shut Up and Dance* (2016) *Black Mirror* [DVD]. UK. Netflix

*Somers Town* (2008) [DVD] Directed by Shane Meadows. UK. Big Arty Productions

*Shameless* (2004 - 2013) [TV]. UK. Channel Four. 13<sup>th</sup> January

*Sweet Sixteen* (2002) [DVD] Directed by Ken Loach. UK. BBC Films

*A Taste of Honey* (1961) [DVD] Directed by Tony Richardson. UK. Woodfall Film Productions.

*This is England* (2006) [DVD] Directed by Shane Meadows UK. Warp Films. Film Four Productions

*This is England '86* (2010) [TV]. London. Channel Four. 7<sup>th</sup> September.

*This is England '88* (2011) [TV]. London. Channel Four. 13<sup>th</sup> December.

*This is England '90* (2015) [TV]. London. Channel Four. 13<sup>th</sup> December.

*This Sporting Life* (1963) [DVD] Directed by Lindsay Anderson UK. Janus Films

*We Are the Lambeth Boys* (1959) [DVD] Directed by Karel Reisz. UK. BFI

*The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (2006) [DVD] Directed by Ken Loach. UK. Sixteen Films.