Working class in British films 1950s-2000s: identity, culture, and ideology.

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WORKING CLASS IN BRITISH FILMS 1950s-2000s: IDENTITY, CULTURE, AND IDEOLOGY

By

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B.A., Beijing Foreign Studies University, 1984
M.A., University of Warwick, 1991

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Humanities
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

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A Dissertation Approved on

October 14, 2011

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father.
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This dissertation could not have been finished without the help and support of many people who are gratefully acknowledged here.

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ABSTRACT

WORKING CLASS IN BRITISH FILMS 1950s-2000s:
IDENTITY, CULTURE, AND IDEOLOGY

Tongyun Shi

October 14, 2011

Britain was the first country to industrialize with the Industrial Revolution and therefore had the world's first industrial working class. In the 20th century, the traditional British working class went through many social and political changes, represented especially by the post-war "rise" and a lasting "decline" since the 1970s, a fate which is worth academic study.

Class matters not only in sociological sense, but also in cultural sense. This dissertation, through close text analysis of seven British social realist films--two New Wave ones, Room at the Top (Jack Clayton, 1959) and Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (Karel Reisz, 1960); three bleak ones by independent directors, High Hopes (Mike Leigh, 1988), My Beautiful Laundrette (Stephen Frears, 1985), and Sweet Sixteen (Ken Loach, 2002); and two commercial comedies, Brassed Off (Mark Herman, 1996) and The Full Monty (Peter Cattaneo, 1997), explores major themes in the screen representation of British working class from the 1950s to the present and analyzes the changes from the theoretical framework of British Cultural Studies, probing into the relationship between identity, power, the impact of ideology and
cultural resistance behind the working-class identities. It also adopts an interdisciplinary approach to the understanding and evaluation of the cultural identity of British working class, with sociological and historical understanding of the issue of class and working class provided.

The dissertation concludes that the British working class screen identity has transformed from an image of masculine energy, pride and dignity of the 1950s and 1960s to "underclass" collective shame and loss of respect in the 1990s and 2000s. The shift reflects changes in fundamental attitudes in British post-war society from welfare egalitarianism to the neo-liberal enterprise culture. The cinematic representation has reflected and reinforced dominant ideological position, but at the same time conveyed more left-wing progressive views. The dissertation therefore calls for cultural policy support for socially purposive British national cinema to keep social realism as a democratization of representation of national cultural life as well as a sustained concern for working-class dignity.

**Key Words:** working class; films; Britain; cultural studies; identity; ideology;
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Research Significance and Issue of Study

Britain was the first country to industrialize with the Industrial Revolution and therefore had “the world’s first industrial working class” (Roberts, 2001, p. 81). At the beginning of the 19th century four-fifths of its population lived in rural areas; by the end, four-fifths lived in towns and cities. Briggs argues that the term “social class” started to be used in the country only after the Industrial Revolution (as cited in Reid, 1998, p. 8) and Thompson believes that the English working class was originally formed during 1780 and 1832 when they “came to feel an identity of interests” as between themselves, and as against their rulers and employers (1963, p. 11). “Class consciousness” or “awareness” was of marked significance for the Victorian age, for which reason Marx chose England as the model on which to base the development of his ideas. The 20th century witnessed the British labor movement developing into “one of the strongest bulwarks of Britishness,” fortressing working-classness as one essential ingredient of British identity (Kumar, 2003, p. 169). However, the traditional British working class has gone through many social and political changes, especially a lasting “decline” since the 1970s after the post-war “rise” (Hopkins, 1991), leading to
the rhetoric of the "end of class" (Kirk, 2007, p. 2). Working class is deemed to have departed the social scene, either as an economic entity, as a distinct cultural formation, or as an agent of political change or action. Looking back in time, it is fair to say that the politics of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century was largely about the achievements and failures of working class power.

Does this imply that class no longer matters? The 20\textsuperscript{th} century witnessed drastic capitalist development from Fordism to Post-Fordism, greatly raising people's living standard and relieving the hardship of the working class. However, despite the embourgeoisement cry since late 1950s, sufficient statistics on economic inequality prove that class is the major influence on the distribution of income and wealth in modern societies. The pivotal role of class described by Marx and Weber is still of importance to the analysis of social equality today. Though not the only factor which shapes people's social and political life, class is "arguably the most fundamental" (Edgell, 1993, p. 115). After years of research on British postwar class transformations, Gordon Marshall concluded in 1988 that "class is by far the most common and seemingly the most salient frame of reference employed in the construction of social identities" (as cited in Reid, 1998, p. 35). In the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, Gerdinand Mount argued that there is a new class divide in Britain "as vicious...as the old one" (2004, front cover 2). Therefore, the issue of class is still of essential significance and should be a worthy topic of academic concern.

Class matters not only in sociological sense, but also in cultural sense. As Andrew Sayer claims in The Moral Significance of Class, "class matters to us not
only because of differences in material wealth and economic security, but also because it affects our access to things, relationships, experiences and practices which we have reason to value, and hence of chances of living a fulfilling life” (2005, p. 1).

It is absolutely true that class involves not only our relations to the means of production, but also our behavior, our expectation from ourselves and others, and our feeling of cultural dignity. In this aspect, it is more worthy of concern as “the gradual decline” of working class culture has been “one of the most powerful, telling developments in British society” since the early 1980s (Charlesworth, 2000, p. 2) and with the new class divide, “the worst-off in Britain today are more culturally deprived than their parents or grandparents” (Mount, 2004, front cover 2). The ultimate deprivation as a consequence of all the other deprivations is “the deprivation of respect” (Mount, 2004, p. 108) with the gradual loss of reverence for the working class people, their effort and values. As a result of the destruction of Britain’s traditional industry and trade unionism in the past 3 decades, the working class identity has shifted from the Victorian notion of the “deserving poor” and the “affluent workers” of the 1960s to the present notion of social “waste,” particularly the underclass. Hence, a cultural analysis of the working class would meet the challenge of the changed focus of the issue of class.

In Britain, there has been an extraordinary preoccupation with class. The Observer Magazine issue for 11 September 1988 had “Class: The British Obsession” as its front cover headline (Marwick, 1990, p. 1). The UNESCO Tension Project survey recorded 60 per cent of the British identifying themselves as working class,
revealing that “the British had among the highest levels of working-class consciousness” (Mandler, 2006, p. 206). It needs to be noted here that although class has long been a focus of the British, it is not thought a fit subject for public discussion. The Establishment has spared no effort in cheering the post-war classlessness progress. And the priority of social class as a way of interpreting society has been sidelined in today’s postmodern society, replaced by issues of gender, race, and etc. Charlesworth points out that while universities celebrate ethnic diversity, “class as a topic has sunk to the bottom of the hierarchy of intellectual objects” (2000, p. 14), signifying a cultural decline and political abandonment of the working class. In the 18 years of Conservative rule from 1979 to 1997, the life of the unemployed received little publicity as life on the dole was despised and ignored. The transformed significance of class suggests that “having once been the fundamental source and subject of conflict in the political culture of capitalism, class inequality is now the problem that dare not speak its name” (Sayer, 2005, p. 224) and to reopen the whole question of class in Britain is to “blunder into a minefield” (Mount, 2004, p. 11). Class has obviously lost popularity, though it is still being talked about. And because of the silences that shadow the speaking of class, works that do exist become even more precious. Therefore my study of British working class from a cultural perspective bears considerable academic as well as practical significance.

The reason that I choose an art form of film representation as my research object is that social class and artistic representation have a natural bondage for over a century. Marwick (1990) holds that to have a fully rounded understanding of class and
its significance, not only official and academic hard statistics (such as census reports, sociological surveys) of occupational distribution and economic and political inequality should be studied, but also those private and informal perceptions or images (in letters, diaries, autobiographies, interviews, etc) as well as fictional and media images (in novels, films, plays, photographs, etc.) need to be considered. For Marwick, the fictional and media images are “quite illuminating when studied in a comparative context” from which one can derive further insights into assumptions about social structure, though they need “to be handled cautiously” (2005, p. 76).

Media representation is also crucial to the construction of class identity. Skeggs in *Class, Self, Culture* suggests that class “is dynamic, produced through conflict and fought out at the level of the symbolic” (2004, p. 5). She affirms that “[u]nderstanding representation is central to any analysis of class” and that the popular media is the site where the symbolic battle of representations can be demonstrated most visibly (2004, p. 117). For Stuart Hall, there is no understanding of identity outside of culture and representation, and representations “are not reflexive but *constitutive* and therefore have a real, material impact” (as cited in Procter, 2004, p. 125).

Coming down to film representation, any film is part of the society which produced it, and must “bear traces of some of the basic assumptions of that society” (Marwick, 1990, p. 300). Besides, films do more than just “reflect” reality; they “actively explain and interpret the way in which the world is to be perceived and understood” (Hill, 1986, p. 2). In Britain, arguably, one medium in which the issue of class is still alive is film (Bromley, 2000, p. 52). Therefore, studying how images of
the working class have been conceived in British cinema not only makes sense, but also can enlighten us with vital clues for understanding people in the ever-changing British society.

One clear advantage of using feature films as evidence about class is that the signifiers of class are never ambiguous. Social stratification can be vividly displayed on the visual and aural screen through housing, décor, clothing, food, speech, lifestyle, and etc. Gillette argues that “social values exist in the mind as much as in their outward manifestations” (2003, p. 16). The screen is most powerful in these outward manifestations—the externalizing of the subjective awareness of being different experienced by the working class.

Finally, class is an ever changing social and cultural existence. Frow invites us to view class as a set of contestable relations with due attention on “processes of class formation ... played out through particular institutional forms and balances of power ... through desires, and fears, and fantasies (1995, p. 111). Therefore, class is “not a given, but a process,” and it is “the process of evaluation, moral attribution and authorization” that is “central to understanding contemporary class relations” (Skeggs, 2004, p. 117). My study of the screen representation of British working class identity over different decades will explore the process that is fundamental for understanding working class identity.

I would add that the feasibility of my research is greatly enhanced by the existence of the social realism film tradition in Britain focusing on the exploration of working class life and feelings.
Thesis Statement

This dissertation aims to explore the cultural condition of the working class through reviewing the representation of working class identity in British films from the 1950s to the present. I examine the major themes of social realist films of different decades, compare and contrast continuity and change in the representation of identity on screen, and finally analyze the transformation pattern from British cultural studies perspective, probing into the ideology and resistance behind the working-class identities. The dissertation argues that there has been a changing perception of working class on screen and it reflects the changing prevailing ideology. From “pride” to “shame,” the shifts in images reflect changes in fundamental attitudes in British post-war society from welfare egalitarianism to the neo-liberal enterprise culture.

Class is the major concern for this study with due attention paid to gender and race for their crosscut influence. While acknowledging that women and minority ethnic people tend to be marginalized in academic debates on class which oversimplifies the class identity formation, this dissertation is not intended to offer a balanced account due to its limited space and priority concern.

Identity is an important matter as individuals and groups want to be seen and considered as possessing cultural significance and dignity. Therefore this dissertation ends with calling for cultural policy support for socially purposive British national cinema to keep social realism as a democratization of representation of national cultural life.

British Social Realism Tradition
In Britain, there has been a rich tradition of social realist film-making from the documentary movement in the 1930s, the New Wave in the late 1950s and early 1960s to the contemporary scene. This social realism has been characterized by Raymond Williams, when talking about theatrical representation, as a “conscious movement towards social extension” (1977, p. 63) to cover the under-represented or marginalized groups, specifically to bring “working class to the center of dramatic action” (1977, p. 67). Within the British cinematic tradition, this has involved “the making visible of the working class” (Hill, 1999, p. 135) at moments of economic and social change. As Brown notes, “Realist characters in British films wear cloth caps, not top hats” (2009, p. 30). In her 1999 article “Reality Bites (Again)” commenting on the Cannes Festival, the journalist Vanessa Thorpe saw in the recent trends of British film-making a return “to the hard-bitten tradition of social realism” and traced the lineage back to the British New Wave’s kitchen sink cycle of films (Thorpe, 1999). This acknowledgement of the enduring relationship between British cinema and social realism is also widely shared by scholars in film studies, e.g. John Hill (2000b, p. 249), Samantha Lay (2002, pp. 1-2), Geoff Brown (2009) and Julia Hallam (2000, p. 261). Social realism is “generally acknowledged to be a vital component of British cinema” (Hutchings, 2009, p. 304) or “a major mode of expression in British screen culture” (Lay, 2002, p. 2), constructing one of the three key genres of British national cinema.1

1 The literary heritage genre and social realist genre form two most important traditions of British national cinema, enjoying both box-office success and generous praise from film critics. They have been regarded as “quality” films because of their commitment to the portrayal of the authentic and indigenous “British way of life” and have been promoted in terms of their cultural values. Therefore, the pursuit of a quality cinema was the pursuit of a national cinema, distinct from Hollywood or European counterparts. The third kind is the comedy genre, dating from Ealing comedy of the 1940s and 1950s. Brian McFarlane and Robert Murphy in *British Cinema Book* point out that the three genres were the most influential in the 1990s.
The representation of British working class before the Second World War was far from fair. Feature films of the 1930s tended to "portray working class caricatures rather than full-bodied characters in their own right, and as plot ancillaries rather than as the central focus" (Lay, 2002, p. 40). The documentary movement in the 1930s led by Grierson "represented the first attempt" to portray the working class as real human existence (Higson, 1995, p. 197), promoting social reform and cohesion through objective and positive images and stories of working-class individuals and communities. It was highly valued due to its infusion of social responsibility into British cinema. Andrew Higson thus comments, "[i]n the case of British cinema, if one movement has pride of place, it has been the documentary movement" (1995, p. 22), and for some writers, "the realism associated with the documentary movement constitutes the only authentic national cultural tradition" (1995, p. 23). Second World War films in the 1940s brought this tradition to a new height, largely increasing working class representation, although they focused more on the loyalty of the working class to the nation and social harmony in the special time of war and were criticized as attempting to "flatten out the cultural and class differences" (Lay, 2002, p. 48). Then for a long time afterwards, it was hard to find films on working-class life in British cinema. "The number of British films ... with working-class characters all through, can be counted on the fingers of one hand," observed Lindsay Anderson in 1957, who viewed this rejection of three-quarters of the national population as "ridiculous" and "characteristic of a flight from contemporary reality" (Hill, 1986, pp. 127-8).
This phenomenon was changed by the New Wave films of the late 1950s and early 1960s, which placed industrial working-class characters at the center of their narratives. The tendency was influenced by realistic Angry Young Man novels and plays and was greatly helped by the efforts of cultural studies scholars like Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson to inspire people to broaden their notion of British culture and show their concern about ordinary people’s life. The films unfailingly demonstrated the “authenticity” and “realism” of the working-class experience and inspired a new interest in the regional and class base of Britishness. Represented by Room at the Top (Jack Clayton, 1959), Look Back in Anger (Tony Richardson, 1959), Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (Karel Reisz, 1960), The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner (Tony Richardson, 1962), This Sporting Life (Lindsay Anderson, 1963), and etc, the New Wave films focused on working class male protagonists, displaying to full extent their masculine energy and sexuality, class pride as well as anger, confidence in change for the better, and resistance as well as conformity to consumerism. New Wave director Lindsay Anderson sought to emphasize the urgency and importance of providing convincing representations of working-class life. However, the New Wave “failed to sustain a renaissance” (Quart, 1993, p. 16) and social realism was to great extent only alive on the small TV screen for almost two decades afterwards.²

The 1980s saw a renewed interest, or rebirth, in social realism, in response to

² 1970s was a hard decade regarding film finance and many directors of New Wave films emigrated to Hollywood. Ken Loach, who began his television and film career in the 1960s (famous for TV film Cathy Come Home, 1966), provided something of a bridge between the New Wave working class films of the early 1960s and the films of the 1990s, being almost single-handedly responsible for sustaining social realism.
the harsh economic conditions of Thatcherism and greatly helped by the funding from Channel 4. Working-class films of the decade can be easily defined by its anti-Thatcherism, with the focus on the exploration of the damage brought by de-industrialization, mass unemployment and poverty, severe cuts in welfare benefits, leading to the statement that “some of the most potent political opposition to the Thatcher government, therefore, appeared in the movie theatres rather than in the House of Commons” (Friedman, 1993, p. xix). Films such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Stephen Frears, 1985), *A letter to Brezhnev* (Chris Bernard, 1985), *High Hopes* (Mike Leigh, 1988), *Riff-Raff* (Ken Loach, 1990) showed life as a difficult struggle in a society dominated by social injustice, greed and racism; little sense of the corrupting effects of affluence or embourgeoisement of the 1960s appeared in these films. With the fragmentation of the traditional working class and the changing concern of identity politics, films of the 1980s witnessed the polarizations along lines of gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, apart from class. More working-class women, gays, blacks, and Asians began to occupy central focus.

Working class representation was carried more strongly into the 1990s when the economic and social damage brought by globalization, local industrial decline and the restructuring of the labor market led to the redefining of British traditional working class as non-working “underclass” in a post-industrial context. Similar to the New Wave but different from the 1980s, the 1990s’ films were more characteristically “men’s films” with an obsessive focus on white, non-working class, projecting pessimistic images of alienation and masculine anxiety and a world of disintegration.
Stylistically they can generally be divided into 3 groups (Murphy, 2009a, p. 357). The first group had directors like Ken Loach and Mike Leigh, who produced a large number of films which dealt with the life of the poor and oppressed, projecting critical images of contemporary life in post-Thatcherite Britain to international audiences. These films include, for example, the bleaker films of Ken Loach’s trilogy—*Raining Stones* (1993), *Ladybird, Ladybird* (1996) and *My Name is Joe* (1999), Mike Leigh’s *Naked* (1993), Gary Oldman’s *Nil by Mouth* (1998) and Lynne Ramsay’s *Ratcatcher* (1999), all are somber work that has been hailed as reascent “British grit” (Thorpe, 1999). The second group, represented by *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996), *Twin Town* (Kevin Griffith, 1997), dealt with young people accepting drugs, crime and violence and bearing their hardship with hedonism. The third group was the feelgood comedies represented by *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, 1997) and *Brassed Off* (Mark Herman, 1996), in which the Sheffield steel workers regained self-respect through collective stripping and Grimethorpe miners through their brass band performance. The first group aimed at a minority audience and was generally exhibited in art-house cinemas. The second, the petty crime genre, aimed at primarily the young “core” audience and the third, social realist comedies, by contrast, intended to catch a non-niche mainstream audience broader in terms of age and gender and nationality. John Hill identified two kinds of endings: failure with the first group and utopianism with the third group (2000a, p. 178). Loach and Leigh’s works used class in an explicit political sense and were regarded seriously in mainland Europe, but have limited distribution in the UK and the US.
The tradition of social realism continued into the 21st century. Films like *Billy Elliot* (Stephen Daldry, 2000), *Sweet Sixteen* (Ken Loach, 2002), *Vera Drake* (Mike Leigh, 2004), and *This is England* (Shane Meadows, 2006) were all well received, suggesting that the national cinema has a genuine and vital commitment to the life of ordinary British people.

Samantha Lay points out that there are three thematic concerns in contemporary social realism: the crisis in masculinity, the de-politicization of the working class through a shift in emphasis from production to consumption, and the prevalence of a therapeutic discourse from the public to the personal (2002, pp. 104-106).

In conclusion, from statements, such as, “I’m working class and proud of it” in *Room at the Top* (1959) to “We’re obsolete. Dinosaurs. Yesterday’s news.” in *The Full Monty* (1997), the working class experienced heartbreaking transformation from an identity of masculine energy, pride and dignity to “underclass” collective shame and loss of respect. Such identity transformation and its cultural significance is the major concern of this dissertation.

**Research Methodology**

This dissertation is mainly a textual interpretation and ideological analysis of British working-class films. The discussion of films is analytic rather than evaluative, paying more attention to ideological attitudes than artistic merits. In exploring working class identity traits, general comprehensive illustration is always accompanied with detailed case studies of certain films involving hermeneutic close text analysis. And the exploration of identity will focus around the economic status,
political consciousness, masculinity as well as personal values of the British working-class on screen. The nearly 20 films discussed in the dissertation fall into the period stretching between the 1950s and the 2000s, while emphasis is given to two New Wave films—*Room at the Top* (Jack Clayton, 1959) and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz, 1960), three serious social criticism films—*My Beautiful Laundrette* (Stephen Frears, 1985), *High Hopes* (Mike Leigh, 1988) and *Sweet Sixteen* (Ken Loach, 2002), as well as two mainstream commercial comedies—*The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, 1997) and *Brassed Off* (Mark Herman, 1996) as weighty research objects. This selected focus is largely based on the combinative concern of the artistic honor and commercial success won by the films, as well as their different focus for the broad range of themes, e.g. *High Hopes* is chosen for its anti-Thatcherism, *My Beautiful Laundrette* for race and class, and *Sweet Sixteen* for its concern on underclass youth.

The dissertation adopts an interdisciplinary approach to the understanding and evaluation of the cultural identity of British working class. It provides a sociological understanding of the issue of class and working class, explores the historical development—the rise and fall—of the working class, and finally analyses the cinematic representation of working class identity, with an obvious emphasis on the last approach as the topic of this dissertation fully displays.

Theoretically, the analysis of the identity transformation pattern is approached from British cultural studies perspective, taking serious concern of the ideology
behind. The study of relationships between class, culture, and film is an area of interest within cultural studies.

**Literature Review**

There is quite some literature on British working class as well as its cinematic representation.

Books dealing with class from sociological and historical perspective generally offer sociological theoretical understanding or social survey analysis of the issue of class in Britain, and account for the changes in the collective experiences of the working class.

*Class in Modern Britain* by Ken Roberts (2001) is marked by its clarity or user-friendliness. Using sociological theory and class schemes and drawing on a range of research evidences, the author identifies and analyses the main classes in contemporary Britain, namely the working class, the intermediate class, the middle class, and the upper class. The book also explores key debates about economic change, globalization, changing gender roles, the ethnic composition of the nation, social mobility and the relationship between class and politics. Roberts argues that Britain is far from being a classless society and demonstrates that "class still permeates virtually every part of its inhabitants lives, though there are important and fascinating changes occurring to the size, character and composition of all the main classes" (2001, back cover). In other words, class origin continues to be as important as ever in determining people's life-chances. *Class in Britain* by Ivan Reid (1998) is also an empirical research of class, with chapters on life-chances, income, employment and
social mobility, education, leisure, and etc. What is especially impressive is its conclusion entitled “Class in a Classless Society,” in which he states that class is still “a meaningful and useful concept” in Britain (p. 238) with “relative differences hav[ing] resolutely remained, and in some cases widened” (p. 234); Britain is far from a classless society based on free mobility by talent; and there is “little evidence” that the Major Government in the 1990s provided the help which the Prime Minister saw as necessary for all to achieve the maximum of their ability (p. 236).

Eric Hopkins’s The Rise and Decline of the English Working Classes 1918-1990 (1991) is a social history examining the social, political and cultural changes that have happened particularly to the working classes from 1918 to 1990. It deals with such basic aspects of working-class life as working and living conditions, the standard of living, trade unionism, health, poverty, family, education and leisure activities. The political history of the Labor Party and Labor governments is also substantially covered. Hopkins argues for the post-WWII “rise” of the working class, with full employment, increasing standard of living and political activities, and for the “decline” since the 1970s to the present, with “the reduction in working-class political and industrial authority, the changed patterns of employment and economic status, the new instability of family life, and the change of image” (1991, p. 278). The traditional working class has evolved into an underclass; working-class solidarity has become a thing of the past; and the image of the working class has been defamed with the propaganda of aggressive Conservatism, all of which contributing to the decline of identity of the working classes as a whole.
On British Cultural Studies, Barker's *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (2000) is a very comprehensive survey of all aspects concerned, such as key concepts and methodology, culture and ideology, Fordism and post-modernism, media and audience, youth style and resistance, cultural politics and cultural policy. Turner's *British Cultural Studies* 2nd edition (1996) has a better focus on the British Cultural Studies tradition--the Birmingham School--and ideology and politics of British context. I benefited more from analysis of cultural politics and cultural ideology of Barker's writing and of Birmingham School of Cultural Studies in Turner's work. Kirk's *Class, Culture and Social Change: On the Trail of the Working Class* (2007) has an informative chapter entitled "In Search of the Working Class: The Rise of British Cultural Studies." Besides, sensing the poverty of representation of contemporary working-class culture, authors for the introduction and first two chapters of *Cultural Studies and the Working Class* (Munt, 2000) expressed extreme sadness that class is in so many ways "the 'lost identity' of identity politics" (Medhurst, 2000, p. 29) and strongly argued for cultural studies to continue to have as one of its chief objectives "a concern to illuminate the present" (Munt, 2000, p. 7).

Books simply on films can be divided into two kinds—those purely on social realism of working class representation and those doing general survey of British cinema or focusing on a particular period or a specific decade with certain chapters on social realism films.

Of the first kind, Samantha Lay's *British Social Realism* is a general investigation of the realist genre. Lay begins by defining the term "social realism,"
tracing its historical development, and examining the term through a consideration of practice, politics, form, style and content. Then the chapters review the rich tradition of social realist film-making in British from its beginning in the documentary movement of the 1930s to the more hybrid contemporary forms, with reference to social-historical contexts and with brief case studies of key texts. In so doing, Lay reviews some relevant key publications and analyses the key themes and differences in forms and practice. She affirms that there are three thematic concerns in contemporary social realism: the crisis in masculinity, the de-politicization of the working class through a shift in emphasis from production to consumption, and the prevalence of a therapeutic discourse from the public to the personal (2002, pp. 104-106). The text brings out the concern that the focus on the private and the personal “undermines the ‘social’ message and meaning as we focus on the individual or family and their struggles without making connections to wider political, economic and social factors” (2002, p. 121). Due to the limited space and the length on social realism styles, the book only does brief case studies of 3 films.

John Hill’s “From the New Wave to ‘Brit-grit’: continuity and difference in working-class realism” in British Cinema Past and Present surveys the continuities and changes in the tradition with more focus on a range of realist films from the 1980s and 1990s--particularly works of Ken Loach, Alan Clarke and Mike Leigh, depicting the polarization of British society and the fragmentation of a traditional working class. Hill points out continuous trends such as downplaying of collective conditions and actions in favor of the individual and personal, and a reconfiguration of public and
private spaces. Hill’s work is significant here in noting the common historical association made within British cinema between social realist mode and the representation of previously socially-marginalized and under-represented groups, most specifically the working classes (2000b, p. 250).

Geoff Brown’s “Paradise Found and Lost: The Course of British Realism” in *The British Cinema Book* is a brief, general survey of British social realism from the Documentary Movement to the 21st century. The history of British screen realism is persistent and convoluted from the Documentary Movement, WWII films, the New Wave, Ken Loach, Mike Leigh, the 1980s, 1990s right to the 2006 *This is England*. Brown argues that the late 1970s saw rebirth of the Hollywood escapist spectacle attracting young people into the cinema to be amazed by special effects and the unreal. Despite Ken Loach and Mike Leigh’s realism, cinema of the 1980s was weighted toward “fantasy, the surreal, and period nostalgia” (2009, p. 35), though realism was much alive on television. Realism of the 1990s was more marked by a feel-good mood and stereotyped representation. So, according to Brown, in present British cinema’s commercial sector, “Grierson’s concern for ‘recording...the real world’ finds scant reflection” (2009, p. 37) and realist tradition was a “paradise lost—or at least mislaid” (2009, p. 35). Brown concludes that with such diverse films and film-makers “the Griersonian paradise may remain a conscious memory, and may even be glimpsed form afar; but it is unlikely even to be regained” (2009, p. 37).

John Hill’s book *Sex, class, and realism: British Cinema, 1956-1963* is an authoritative book and key reference in my analysis of New Wave films. Covering the
years 1956-63 when films dealt genuinely with sexual themes, working class aspirations and problems, the book explores the social problem films and the New Wave films, offering valuable discussions of extensive filmography centering on sex, class and realism. Hill prioritizes their thematic concerns, pointing out that in dealing with the working class, there is the emphasis on “individual rather than collective situations,” on “interpersonal rather than socially structured conflicts” and on “cultural attitudes rather political and economic relationships” (1986, p. 173). Hill sees the New Wave films as presenting “a striking riposte to any complacent ideology of ‘classlessness’” (1986, p. 174). The book is also wide in its scope, surveying social history, the film industry and introducing theories of realism in the first few chapters.

John Hill’s *British Cinema in the 1980s* deals with the cinematic production of the decade through a number of themes and issues closely related with the social, economic, and cultural circumstances characteristic of the period. In discussing working-class films, the analysis of class extends substantially to class and gender and class and race, which is a unique contribution of the book. In Chapter 8 “Class, gender, and Working Class Realism,” Hill looks at class and masculinity and class and femininity, seeing the loss of masculinity, community and collective action of working-class heroes as a result of the harsh economic realities of the Thatcher era, and identifying a new kind of working-class heroine in some “woman’s films” which deliberately play with class and gender roles for comic effect. The heroine’s desire for individual escape, from class and from traditional gender roles, is seen as a key theme. Chapter 9 “Class, Politics, and Gender: *High Hopes* and *Riff-Raff*” takes the two films
by two important British directors as case studies. It discusses class politics, anti-Thatcherism, and cultural barbarianism associated with the economic beneficiaries. Chapter 10 “‘Race’ and Cultural Hybridity: My Beautiful Laundrette and Sammy and Rosie Get Laid,” again case studies of the two films, explores the way in which the directors challenge traditional conceptions of race and cheer hybrid identities—“living with difference” (1999, p. 208). The characters’ identities are constructed across different axes—black/white, male/female, and gay/straight.

British Cinema of the 90s edited by Robert Murphy contains two valuable chapters: Claire Monk’s “Men in the 90s” and Hill’s “Failure and Utopianism: Representations of the Working Class in British Cinema of the 1990s.” Monk looks at the changed images of men in general in the 90s’ films, identifying the emergence of “new lads” as well as growing masculine crisis. The part on working class male violence in Naked (1995) and Nil by Mouth (1997) and on male insecurity and fears in The Full Monty (1997) and Brassed Off (1996) is very inspiring. Coming up with such impressive terms as “post-industrial male trauma,” “post-patriarchal masculinities” and “post-feminist male panic” (2000a, p. 157), Monk argues that British cinema’s preoccupation with men’s self-scrutiny in the 1990s largely resulted from a perceived crisis in male economic power and gender privilege. She takes “the self-consciousness,” the “confessional and therapeutic impulses” and the “attentiveness to men and masculinity as subjects-in-themselves” (2000a, p. 157) in this preoccupation with men as something new or unprecedented. John Hill examines class conflicts in Loach’s films and the more populist films such as The Full Monty.
He points out two kinds of endings for them: failure with the bleaker films about the very poor working class and utopianism with the feelgood comedies (2000a, p. 178). Both Monk and Hill stress films' representation of the masculinity crisis of working class, who are nostalgically patriarchal, jobless, impotent, and eager for respect.

Claire Monk's "Underbelly UK: The 1990s underclass film, masculinity and the ideologies of 'new' Britain" in British Cinema Past and Present examines the underclass films in terms of what they say about gender, class and national identity in the context of the culture and politics of contemporary Britain. Monk argues that the success of Brassed Off and The Full Monty appears "superficially—but deceptively...to mark the return with a vengeance of the class-consciousness and sense of collectivity and community repressed in the 1980s" (2000b, p. 275). With obsessive focus on white, non-working masculinity, these films transform underclass material into an appealing, profitable and exportable commodity, which manifests the abandonment of a socially committed British cinema and plays a paradoxical role in New Labor's "re-branding" British national identity.

Paul Dave's Visions of England: Class and Culture in Contemporary Cinema is a provocative exploration of class in relation with national identity in contemporary cinema, especially during the 1990s. Focusing on such themes as "class, capitalism and nation" (2006, p. xv), the book studies the influence of ideologies of neo-liberalism on the representation of class across a wide range of films. While the book is on all classes, it has two key chapters on the working class: "The Working Class: Elegies" and "The Underclass: Fantasy and Realism," in which Dave addresses
the themes of the “disappearing” working class in *Brassed Off*, *The Full Monty*, *Among Giants*, *Dockers*, and *Billy Elliot*, as well as youth in crisis in *Trainspotting*, all of which are elegies for an older, industrial, northern working class. The class model Dave uses is one which rejects the “structural location” (Weberian) in favor of class as “social relation” (Marxist). Making substantial reference of Ellen Meiksins Wood’s Marxist political analysis of capitalism, Dave seeks to show how the representations of underclass “reveal more about a complex range of middle-class attitudes towards the working class than they do about any contemporary reappearance of the lumpenproletariat” (2006, p. xiii) and in so doing offers sharp political critique of neo-liberalism.

Much academic work on British working class films is finalized in chapter form edited into film study books. Due to their limited space, the authors can only focus on a few films sharing common themes or films of a particular decade. Lay’s book is a historic survey of British social realism in all decades, yet is more successful in comprehensively reviewing British research achievements on the genre. The authors analyze from a variety of approaches, mainly social/historical and political. This dissertation offers my unique contribution in that it aims to analyze the changing perception and representation of working class identity through reviewing British cinema of over half a century, so as to explore patterns of cultural change to offer a humanities perspective study. To support patterns of cultural change, this study includes an interdisciplinary approach using sociological and historical analysis. Above all, the dissertation has a clear theoretical framework—British Cultural
In the present postmodern world, class has sunk to the bottom in the hierarchy list of oppression. This is largely due to the fact that it is no longer a fresh subject for interest and, according to Munt, poverty is "not sexy enough for the intelligentsia" (2000, p. 7). It is also largely because of the Thatcherite/Blairite campaign to project Britain as a classless society, making upward mobility connected to dreams of class escape. Naturally, the result is a lack of representation and a shortage of work on contemporary working-class culture. Munt calls for British Cultural Studies to continue to have class as one of its chief concerns to illuminate the present (2000, p. 7). This dissertation of mine is intended as an effort to contribute to the continuation of British Cultural Studies tradition.

**Thesis Structure**

This dissertation is organized into 8 chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction of research issue, research significance, research thesis and content, literature review, methodology, and my contribution. Chapter 2 deals with theoretical framework of British Cultural Studies and key concepts such as culture, ideology, hegemony, class politics, the postmodern "New Times," identity, representation, realism and masculinity. Chapter 3 looks at class and working class in Britain from sociological and historical perspectives. It looks at the sociological understanding of the condition of British class and working class in the 20th century and explores the rise and fall of British working class from post-war affluence to the present decline and fragmentation. A combination of sociological analysis and historical comparative
analysis of working class transformation is used. The chapter illustrates that Britain is still far from a classless society and British working class has experienced massive changes—"rise and decline" or "rise and fall"—due to post-industrial economic development and Mrs. Thatcher's New Right politics. Chapter 4 focuses on working class identity in New Wave films (1950s & 1960s), particularly in Room at the Top (Jack Clayton, 1959) and Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (Karel Reisz, 1960). Chapter 5 focuses on working class identity represented in the serious social criticism films High Hopes (Mike Leigh, 1988), My Beautiful Laundrette (Stephen Frears, 1985), and Sweet Sixteen (Ken Loach, 2002) by independent directors. Chapter 6 focuses on working class identity in the commercial comedies of the 1990s represented by The Full Monty (Peter Cattaneo, 1997) and Brassed Off (Mark Herman, 1996). In dealing with working-class screen identity in these three chapters, identity is explored through themes and representations, and a direct relationship with the broader social and cultural context will be established. Chapter 7 analyses the continuity and change of British working class screen identity from the theoretical framework of British cultural studies. Making wide reference of Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, it probes the relationship between identity, power, the impact of ideology and cultural resistance. The chapter calls for cultural policy support for socially purposive British national cinema to keep social realism as a democratization of representation of national cultural life as well as a sustained concern for working-class dignity. Chapter 8 ends the dissertation with a conclusion of the research issue.
CHAPTER II

BRITISH CULTURAL STUDIES ON CLASS AND WORKING CLASS

Raymond Williams, in his 1986 lecture “The Future of Cultural Studies,” said “you cannot understand an intellectual or artistic project without also understanding its formation; that the relation between a project and a formation is always decisive; and ... the emphasis of Cultural Studies is precisely that it engages with both” (as cited in Munns & Rajan, 1995, p. 1). Therefore, this dissertation takes cultural studies, particularly British Cultural Studies, as the theoretical framework to explore and analyze British working class screen identity.

Cultural studies is a field defined by the international journal Cultural Studies as “dedicated to the notion that the study of cultural processes, and especially of popular culture, is important, complex and both theoretically and politically rewarding” (Turner, 1996, p. 1). This notion is largely indebted to the writings of Raymond Williams (1958), Richard Hoggart (1957), and E.P. Thompson (1963), which greatly extended the meaning of culture to include the culture of the working class. Hoggart’s “personal history of everyday life in prewar Britain,” Williams’ “strategic reorientation of the definition of culture towards the anthropological ‘whole way of life,’” plus Thompson’s “recovery of ‘history from below,’” all placed class at
the centre of cultural studies by directing fresh attention to the culture of the working class (Turner, 1996, p. 217). Their writings were seen as founding work of cultural studies.

The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham, also referred to as the “Birmingham School,” is commonly regarded as the birthplace or institutional origin of British Cultural Studies and had a pivotal role in the later development of the theory. Richard Hoggart established the center in 1964 and was its Director during 1964-1968; then Stuart Hall replaced as Director during 1968-1979. “It is during the period of Hall’s Directorship that one can first speak of the formation of an identifiable and distinct domain called cultural studies” (Barker, 2004, p. 21), for which Hall was called “a ‘founding father’ of cultural studies” (Procter, 2004, p. 141). The Centre developed many typical subject-matters as well as the techniques of analysis of cultural studies. Greatly influenced by Althusser’s analysis on ideology and Gramsci’s hegemony theory, the center’s research priority shifted from an initial interest in the “lived” culture of working class to the centrality of the mass media, youth subcultures, race and gender.

Cultural studies rejects elitist notions of high-low culture or the critiques of mass culture, holding that “the symbolic experiences and practices of ordinary people are more important analytically and politically than culture with a capital C” (McGuigan, as cited in Barker, 2000, p. 47). Instead of making judgment on the formally and aesthetically “good” or “bad,” it evaluates on political values and ideological construction. There has been a conscious and consistent effort to prioritize
marginalized social groups, from underprivileged working class to those disempowered on the basis of gender, race, age, sexuality, geopolitical location or colonialism. The focus has been on popular culture and oppositional subcultures, seen as capable of resisting the hegemonic modes of capitalist domination. This preoccupation positions cultural studies to the left of the political spectrum.

What differentiates cultural studies from other subject areas is its connections to matters of power and politics and in particular to the need for social and cultural change. Take the article “Putting Policy into Culture Studies” by Tony Bennett (1992) as an example, cultural studies practitioners see themselves not just as detached observers of cultural practices, but also as having a political obligation to promote cultural change through providing useful tools for cultural/political activists and policy makers.

This chapter surveys the theoretical framework of British Cultural Studies on class and working class and defines certain key concepts such as culture, ideology, hegemony, class politics, the post-modern “New Times,” identity, representation, realism and masculinity.

Culture: From Elitism to “A Whole Way of Life” of People

The concept of culture is central to cultural studies, yet this is a word open to all kinds of explanations. Raymond Williams in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* took it as “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (1983, p. 87), and defines culture as having three broad active categories of usage: the noun which “describes a general process of intellectual, spiritual and
aesthetic development;” which “indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general” and which “describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity,” with the third meaning in most widespread use (Williams, 1983, p. 90).

The original meaning of the word “culture,” according to Williams, is “cultivation,” which is linked to growing crops or rearing and breeding animals. Later, the concept was extended to take in the active cultivation of the “human mind” (Williams, 1981, p. 10), hence the idea of the cultivated or cultured person. Since the late 19th century, culture has referred mainly to the arts. Culture carrying the meaning of aesthetic privileges was dominant until the mid-20th century.

In the 19th century, English writer Matthew Arnold, in his famous book Cultural and Anarchy, published in 1869, described culture as “the best that has been thought and said in the world” and acquiring culture as the means toward moral perfection and social good (as cited in Barker, 2000, p. 36). Culture is thus contrasted to the “anarchy” of the raw and uncultivated masses. In this way, Arnold offered justification for aesthetic and political preference of “high culture.”

In the 20th century, conservative literary critic F.R. Leavis shared with Arnold that culture is morally and aesthetically the “best” of human creativity. F.R. Leavis held that high or literary culture within the reign of an educated minority is to keep alive and nurture the ability to discriminate between the best and the worst of culture. For followers of Leavis, it was their duty to define and defend the best of culture and
criticize “advertising, films and popular fiction, the worst of mass culture with its ‘addictions’ and ‘distractions.’” (Barker, 2000, p. 36)

These approaches were commented on by Turner as “unashamedly elitist” and by Bennett as a discourse of the “cultured” about the culture of those without “culture” (Turner, 1996, p. 40). It was against such definitions of culture that cultural studies struggled and through which it defined itself.

Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society* (1958) and *The Long Revolution* (1961) applied the anthropological understanding of culture to post-WWII British society and developed an understanding which stresses the everyday lived character of culture as “essentially a whole way of life” (1958, p. 325). He actually formulated this idea in his 1958 essay, “Culture is Ordinary.” “We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life - the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning -the special processes of discovery and creative effort. Some writers reserve the word for one or other of these senses; I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction...Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind.” (as cited in Laing, 1968, p. 201) This famous notion that “culture is ordinary” legitimated the serious study of working class life and of popular culture. Working-class contributions to the construction of culture through their experience was given due value, revealing the democratization of culture and politics.

This effort directly resulted from postwar radical changes, which entitled the working class to welfare, health, employment and education, building a sense of pride and hope for a fairer future into the social identity of working-class people. Munt
emphasizes that "the principle that working-class identity emerged into a new self-consciousness after the war is pivotal to comprehending the eventual consolidation of working-class cultural studies" (Munt, 2000, p. 2).

Hoggart's* The Uses of Literacy,* published in 1957, explores the widespread changes with English working-class life and culture from the 1930s to the 1950s. In the first half ("An 'Older' Order"), which is more autobiographical, Hoggart gives a sympathetic, humanist and detailed account of the lived culture of the working class in the 1920s and 1930s, which is signified by a deep sense of community feeling. For Hoggart, the working classes value two things above all else: the family and the neighborhood. The neighborhood is where "one knows practically everybody" (1998, p. 39) and its grip is strong. In the second half ("Yielding Place to New"), Hoggart gives a rather acid account of the explosive development of mass entertainment directed at the new "affluent" working class, expressing anxieties about erosion of working-class values and commercialization of working class culture. For Hoggart, the 1950s sees the shift towards "the creation of mass culture" which is "in some important ways less healthy" (1998, pp. 9-10). The working class, while economically more secure as beneficiaries of the welfare state, stands in danger of losing their self-identity, e.g., the solidarity and collective care of their communities. Hoggart's central legacy to cultural studies is "the legitimacy he accorded to the detailed study of working class culture, that is, to the meanings and practices of ordinary people as they seek to live their lives and make their own history" (Barker, 2004, p. 86).
Raymond Williams was more influential with a more enduring legacy than Hoggart and Thompson. His *Culture and Society*, published in 1958, is a cultural history focusing on great cultural thinkers and literary writers between 1750 and 1950. He established himself with the enlightening opening account of the four meanings of the word “culture”—as “a general state or habit of the mind,” “the general state of the intellectual development, in a society as a whole,” “the general body of the arts,” and “a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual” (1958, p. xvi). The long and heavy conclusion chapter deals with mass communication and working class culture formation, which, according to Williams, should be viewed in a positive light. He sees the concept of “mass” as carrying an elitist disdain and suspicion signifying an older word “mob,” and famously declares that “[t]here are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses” (1958, p. 300). He developed a notion of “common culture” or “culture in common” which he saw as inspired by the radical postwar socialist changes and would enable the many not the few. A common culture is not an equal culture, yet equality of being is essentially necessary to it. Inequality which denies the essential quality of being is “evil” and intolerable as it “rejects, depersonalizes, degrades in grading, other human beings” (1958, p. 317). In *The Long Revolution*, published in 1961, he reaffirms that “culture is a description of a particular way of life which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behavior” (1961, p. 41). In dealing with the history of mass education, the reading public, the popular press, the realist novel, which involves wider public participation, the book argues that this expansion of
culture simply forms part of the long revolution towards a more democratic society. In this process, society should provide “the skills of literary and other advanced communication, to all people rather than limited groups” (1961, p. xiv). This “cultural redistribution” is crucial for Williams in the development of his conception of a common culture (Kirk, 2007, p. 43). Williams continued to study the mass media, publishing *Communications* in 1962 and *Television, Technology and Form* in 1974, both being taken up as much with intervening in cultural policy as with any form of ideological or semiotic analysis of texts. Unlike Hoggart, who was skeptical of mass culture, Williams trusted working-class potential autonomy to make sound judgment and choices in a consumer society. From the 1970s, Williams shifted his earlier concern for a democratic theory of culture to his engagement with Marxism and consequent analysis of the political role of culture in class-divided societies.

E.P. Thompson, a social historian, published *The Making of the English Working Class* in 1963--a “history from below” (Barker, 2000, p. 38) about the lives, beliefs, attitudes and practices of working people during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Like Williams, Thompson conceives of culture as lived and ordinary, and he is concerned with not only the cultural but also the socio-economic aspect of this history. Attacking ruling class history for leaving out the working class, with “[t]he blind alleys, the lost causes, and the losers…forgotten” (1963, p. 12), Thompson aims to rewrite the history of working class culture in order to redress the imbalance of its representation in “official” histories to “rescue” the casualties of ruling class history--“the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the ‘obsolete’ hand-loom
weaver...from the enormous condescension of posterity” (1963, p. 12). Thompson stresses the active and creative role of the English working class in bringing themselves into being as the title suggests that “[t]he working classes were not simply made by history but took part in its making” (Procter, 2004, p. 38).

Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson were the forefathers of cultural studies initiating this decisive turn in post-WWII Great Britain. Working-class academics such as Hoggart and Williams—the scholarship boys—began to speak for themselves, exploring working-class cultures “from within,” and “focused on working-class culture as a point of origin for the first time in British intellectual life” (Munt, 2000, p. 4), shedding light on the ordinary experiences of those traditionally excluded from the analytical gaze. Thus, British working-class culture became “the text, as well as the theory” for cultural studies (Munt, 2000, p. 4). Their way of studying working class culture was coined by Richard Johnson (director of CCCS after Hall) in 1979 as “culturalism” (Procter, 2004, p. 38). This “culturalism” is a form of historical cultural materialism, favoring the exploration of the meanings of lived culture within the context of its material conditions, as well as “humanist” as it places human experience and agency central to the formation of class and culture. In short, it is a less exclusive, more democratic understanding of culture, examining the place of culture in class power.

Althusser on Ideology and Gramsci on Hegemony

Turner takes ideology as the most important concept in the foundation of British cultural studies, quoting James Carey to affirm his position: “British cultural
studies could be described just as easily and perhaps more accurately as ideological studies for they assimilate, in a variety of complex ways, culture to ideology” (Carey, as cited in Turner, 1996, p. 182). While Marx defined ideology as “the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group” (Althusser, 1971, p. 107), the concept is later understood as “ideals, meanings and practices which, while they purport to be universal truths, are maps of meaning which support the power of particular social groups” under the influence of Gramsci (Barker, 2004, p. 97).

British cultural studies in its early years was clearly marked by “an extremely close relationship” with Marxist ideology and the centrality of class (Lacey, 2000, p. 40). Marxist ideology holds that “the ideas of the ruling class are, in every age, the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the dominant material force in society is at the same time its dominant intellectual force” (Marx, as cited in Barker, 2000, p. 49). Consequently, culture is political as well as ideological. To be more specific, in capitalist society it is in the interests of the bourgeoisie to promote the notion of the social world as highly individualistic and competitive. By covering “the genuinely social and collective nature of human life” believed by Marx, the bourgeoisie can largely minimize the possibilities of effective proletarian resistance to capitalism (Edgar & Sedgwick, 1999, p. 190). To great extent, the failure of proletarian revolutions to materialize is due to the fact that the working class suffers from “false consciousness”—the mistakenly bourgeois world view serving the interest of the capitalist class represented by the ethos of the free market of “equality” which
obscures the true nature of exploitation. For Marx, there is a direct causal relationship between the economic base and the cultural superstructure, a stand which has been termed as “economic determinism” or “economic reductionism.” However, such Marxist account of ideology was challenged and underwent two important revisions in the 20th century, one being Althusser’s structuralist approach to ideology and the other being Gramsci’s theory of hegemony.

Althusser was the most influential structuralist imports to the CCCS, with his re-readings of Marx in texts such as For Marx (1965), Reading Capital (1968) and Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays (1971) and his famous notion of the “Ideological State Apparatuses” (ISAs). In his essay “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses” (ISAs), he argues that “[i]deology is a ‘representation’ of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (1971, p. 153) and is a far more effective means for maintaining class power than physical force of the State. Ideology masks the real exploitative nature of capitalism by displacing the emphasis of thought from production to free labor exchange and by stressing the character of people as individuals to fragment the vision of class. The ideology of the ruling class becomes the ruling ideology through the installation of the ISAs, which he designates as family, religious institutions, the education system, the system of law, the media, political parties, etc. ISAs “function ‘by ideology’” (1971, p. 149) and is “secured...by the ruling ideology” (1971, p. 142); hence, the ISAs are “the site of class struggle, and often of bitter forms of class struggle” (1971, p. 140). For Althusser, ideology “hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects”
(1971, p. 162) and “has the function of ‘constituting’ concrete individuals as subjects” (1971, p. 160), which represents a kind of anti-humanism as the subject (person) is seen not as a self-constituting agent.

Althusser in *For Marx* raised the notion of “over-determination” to mean that there are other determining forces—the ideological and the political—than just the economic, which breaks with the mechanistic Marxist base-superstructure version. Althusser also argues that ideology is not an illusory veil (false consciousness), but “a system (with its own logic and vigor) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts)” (as cited in Barker, 2000, p. 56), stressing ideology’s semiotic character.

In short, Althusser made unique contributions in revealing the way in which ideology works through material practices and institutions (ISAs) and that “there is no ‘real’ uncontaminated by signification and ideology,” which implies that “ideology becomes the very site of struggle,” rather than a false consciousness to shrug off (Procter, 2004, p. 45).

An important legacy of Althusserian structuralism for Hall is its move beyond the humanism of the culturalists. Hall saw that Althusser viewed “experience” “not as an authenticating source but as an effect: not as a reflection of the real but as an ‘imaginary relation’” (as cited in Procter, 2004, p. 45). Yet Hall felt that Althusser overemphasizes the system or structure of signs and representations. Ideology is seen as directly imposed from above, which denies agency and the possibility for resistance or active struggle. To compare and summarize, classical Marxism was flawed in “its emphasis on the determining role of the economy,” Williams’
culturalism was flawed in "its emphasis on the determining role of human experience," and Althusserianism was flawed in "its emphasis on the determining role of language and ideology" (Procter, 2004, p. 46). And it was through Gramsci that Hall and the CCCS were able to address the limitations of Althusser and structuralisms.

The theory of hegemony was developed by Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci in the 1920s and 1930s to explain the popularity of fascism in Italy despite its restrictions on people's liberties. Since the first publication of Gramsci's works in the English language in the late 1960s and helped by Stuart Hall's promotion, the theory has played a significant part in the development of British cultural studies, with hegemony becoming a core concept of the field during the 1970s and 1980s, for which Turner defines British cultural studies as "neo-Gramscian" (1996, p. 210).

Hegemony deals with the nature of authority in social relations and has been defined as the process of "making, maintaining and reproducing" the "authoritative set of meanings, ideologies and practices" (Barker, 2004, p. 84). The essence of Gramsci's hegemony is that the ruling groups (class, sexual, ethnic, etc) in democratic societies exercises social authority and leadership over the subordinate groups through various forces, but essentially "consent." As Gramsci argues, in the liberal-capitalist state, "consent is normally in the lead, operated behind 'the armour of cohesion'" (as cited in Hall, 1977, p. 332). So for Gramsci, social power is not a simple matter of domination on the one side and subordination or resistance on the other. Hegemony resists revolutionary resistance by working through negotiation, incorporation,
concession and consent rather than by simple oppression. In this hegemonic leadership, the subordinated groups consent to the “common sense” view offered by the dominant group because they are convinced that this will do them good. For Gramsci, common sense is the most significant site of ideological conflict and in the struggle to forge “good sense” the class character of capitalism can be recognized. In short, Gramscian hegemony describes “the process of establishing dominance within a culture, not by brute force but by voluntary consent, by leadership rather than rule” (Procter, 2004, p. 26).

The consent from the people is largely achieved with the help of intellectuals sympathetic to the ruling class who will offer justifications of the domination persuasively, and through such institutions as the media, school, church, and family. Hegemony is temporary and unstable as it needs to be constantly re-won and re-negotiated, which makes culture a terrain of conflict and struggle over meanings and opens up the possibility of challenges to it. Power is not something that can be secured once and for all.

In comparison with the theories of Marx and Althusser, Hall points out that a weakness of the Marxist account of ideology is its failure to account for the “free consent of the governed to the leadership of the governing classes” (as cited in Turner, 1996, p. 192). Althusser’s assessment of ideology also could be accused of a rigidity that discounted any possibility of change. Hegemony theory manages to explain both processes of maintaining the cultural power of the ruling minority as well as the active or inactive consent of the powerless majority and is able to concentrate on explaining
the process of change. Thus, it is “a more sophisticated and fluid paradigm of social critique” (Mikula, 2008, p. 85).

Hegemony theory carried long-lasting influence in cultural studies because of its emphasis on popular culture as a site of ideological struggle, with the ruling class trying to win hegemony but resisted by marginal and disempowered groups. Popular culture was thus seen as “a conduit” which could both “promote hegemony” and “prompt resistance to it” (Mikula, 2008, p. 86); in other words, popular culture is “both dominated and oppositional, determined and spontaneous” (Turner, 1996, p. 196). Due to this open possibility of political intervention, Hall takes popular culture very seriously. He argues that popular culture is a “contradictory space,” a site of continuous negotiation: “we should always start from here: with the double stake in popular culture, the double movement of containment and resistance” (as cited in Procter, 2004, p. 25). Hall also challenges the notion that the popular is an authentic, pure expression of the working class, believing that there are no popular cultural forms that “‘belong’ to a particular class and whose meaning can be guaranteed forever;” rather, the struggle “depends upon the success or failure in giving popular culture ‘a socialist accent,’ not as class versus class but the power bloc versus the people” (Procter, 2004, p. 29).

The theory of hegemony was of central importance to the development of British cultural studies. It facilitated analysis of “the ways in which subordinate groups actively respond to and resist political and economic domination” (Edgar & Sedgwick, 1999, p. 165). This emphasis on resistance is significant for British cultural
studies, which became more interested in the resistance to, rather than the reproduction of, dominant ideologies. This can be seen in the study of the “rituals of resistance” associated with a range of working-class and youth subcultures as well as the emphasis on agency within audience studies in exploring popular culture and media.

**Stuart Hall and the CCCS**

Hall’s major concerns and profound influence mainly lie in 4 areas: the analysis of the media, the practices of subculture resistance, the construction of political power, and diasporic hybridity studies, the first three all being closely related with class. Gramsci has had a greater influence than any other intellectual on Stuart Hall.

As having been mentioned earlier, with the contribution of Hoggart, Williams and Thompson, British cultural studies was working class cultural studies. This preoccupation with the working class culture continued into the 1970s with publications such as the CCCS collections *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (Hall & Jefferson, 1976), *Learning to Labor: How Working-Class Kids Get Working-Class Jobs* (Willis, 1977), *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Hebdige, 1979) and *The “Nationwide” Audience* (Morley, 1980) (Kirk, 2007, p. 45). For the writers, the cultural field bears all the marks of unequal power relations. The cultural became the key arena for contestation or discursive struggle if the political and the economic had appeared settled. Gramsci’s influence of hegemony theory allowed writers to celebrate agency of the subordinated in their subcultures. This preoccupation “revolutionized the study of popular culture from the
mid-1960s to the mid-1980s by dismantling the orthodox critiques of mass cultural forms and practices” (Turner, 1996, p. 217). It was a rediscovery of working class with the agency of struggle.

Mass media analysis came to dominate the CCCS’s research from the 1970s and has been its longest-running focus, overtaking Hoggart’s concern of studying the everyday “lived” cultures of the working class. The Center approached the media as ideological and hegemonic institutions. Seeing the media as having “progressively colonized the cultural and ideological sphere” (Hall, 1977, p. 340), Hall tried to investigate the relations between media and ideology, namely structures of power and politics of the media, the ideological effectiveness, through textual analysis of signifying systems. In other words, Hall is more interested in the political rather than the linguistic implications of media messages.

In his renowned essay “Encoding and decoding in the media discourse” (1973) and “Encoding/decoding” (1980), analyzing television discourse, Hall raised a new theory of communication, which challenges the traditional linear model and suggests a circuit, in which receivers become active consumers leading to the reproduction of meaning. For Hall, the “message form” encoded by the sender might or might not generate the designed and expected meaning as the audience are not passive recipients. It is at the moment of decoding, that the television message acquires “social use or political effectivity” (as cited in Procter, 2004, p. 65). So the connotative level is a significant site of ideological intervention and contestation because its “fluidity of meaning and association can be more fully exploited and transformed” for production
of hegemony (as cited in Procter, 2004, p. 66). Hall also addressed political ideology through his notion of dominant or “preferred meaning:” though encoded meanings might be “accepted” or “rejected” by the viewing audience due to their diversified lived experience, institutionally shaped discourses strive to make hegemonic codes of dominant elites more effective to promote preferred readings. So, tevisual language “constitutes rather than reflects the world” with systematic distortions (Procter, 2004, p. 71). To summarize, “Encoding/decoding” argues that televisual discourse plays a key ideological role in securing the values and meanings of the dominant cultural order through “consent.” However, these dominant or preferred meanings are always open to contestation and transformation. In this sense, the media is not just a vehicle for selling ideology, but more a site of ideological struggle.

David Morley’s *The “Nationwide” Audience* represented a productive shift of CCCS to reception studies. It is an empirical research to test Hall’s encoding/decoding theory carried out by Morley, one of Hall’s former students. The research is a media group project at the CCCS (1975-7) on the British television show *Nation-wide*, a popular early evening magazine program broadcast by the BBC. Morley tested the hypothesis of dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings by screening an episode of the show to different audiences grouped in terms of class, occupation, race, and etc. This “ethnographic” approach revealed that “audience responses are highly contradictory and are not rigidly determined by class or social position” (Procter, 2004, p. 71). So class does not directly determine audience responses. Morley’s work was soon followed by numerous studies of soap opera and
the significance to popular audiences of mainstream film and television genres. In these works, Hall’s renowned “encoding/decoding” principle provides a key mode for understanding the reception of media texts.

On subcultures resistance, much attention was on British postwar urban youth subcultures—their rituals and practices that generated meaning, resistance and pleasure. In *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain* (1976), Hall et al. read British postwar change as from hegemonic consent to “law and order” coercion based on Gramsci’s theory of “hegemony.” Hall et al. analyzed ideology in the early postwar years through the key terms of “affluence,” “consensus” and “embourgeoisement” and challenged the idea that so-called affluence, combined with the political consensus around welfare state, produced a classless society. For Hall, affluence and classlessness are myths or “full-blown” ideologies, discourses which work to “cover over the gaps between real inequalities and the promised utopia of equality-for-all and ever-rising consumption to come” (Hall and Jefferson, 1976, p. 37). So, affluence, consensus and embourgeoisement, while embodying evident postwar social change, were by no means innocent, descriptive terms but “ideological onslaught” (Hall and Jefferson, 1976, p. 25) used to “dismantle working-class resistance” by generating “spontaneous consent” (Hall and Jefferson, 1976, p. 40). Such ideological hegemonic myths exploded in the 1970s with rising unemployment, freezing wages and youth cultural revolts. All over the decades, deep-rooted and strong was “the stubborn refusal of class - that tired, ‘worn-out’ category -- to
disappear as a major dimension and dynamic of the social structure" (Hall and Jefferson, 1976, p. 25).

Resistance through Rituals proclaims the presence of class, especially the working class, not as a political force, but as a cultural presence activating symbolic refusal or resistance of dominant value systems through marginal youth sub-cultures. Sub-cultural styles came to embody expressions of collective identity. Style is crucial here and style, or ritual resistance, is about using and adapting cultural signs. Hall et al. argue that “Commodities are, also, cultural signs,” which “have already been invested, by the dominant culture, with meanings, associations, social connotations” (Hall and Jefferson, 1976, p. 55). Through the adoption and adaptation of particular styles, spaces and objects (e.g. the safety pin of the punk), signs are re-signified and a subversive style and collective group consciousness come into being. So, through stylization, things are “disarticulated from their dominant meanings, and rearticulated in new contexts” (Procter, 2004, p. 92).

Hall et al. made it clear that hegemony is not “given” (guaranteed once and for all), but a site of continuous struggle: “It has to be won, worked for, reproduced, sustained” (Hall and Jefferson, 1976, p. 40). This unique feature grants youth subculture resistance an important role to play. However, sub-cultural styles and rituals can only be used to resist, negotiate or live through subordinate class experience; they cannot provide a solution to crisis. In other words, the subcultural resolution is a highly “symbolic” struggle “fated to fail” (Hall and Jefferson, 1976, p. 47). Though the symbolic acts of ritual resistance are seen as tragic in the sense of
being empty of any political or institutional effect, Hall et al.'s study conferred a kind of dignity on their subjects. The seriousness of concern to the sub-cultural identities is quite absent in the mainstream media which delivered simply scare stories of youth delinquency. Hall et al. suggest that it is through moral panic that “dominant culture ... seek[s] and find[s], in ‘youth’, the folk-devils to people its nightmare” (Hall and Jefferson, 1976, p. 74). In *Policing the Crisis*, Hall et. al. further denounce the labeling of “moral panic” as being used by the establishment as a convenient means of legitimating authoritarian exercise of control and maintaining state hegemony: it “provide[s] the basis ... for cross-class alliances in support of ‘authority’”, particularly when the state is in “crisis” (Hall et. al., 1978, p. 177).

Dick Hebdige’s *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) sees “style” as the essence of sub-cultures and attempts to “discern the hidden messages inscribed in code on the glossy surfaces of style” (Hebdige, 1979, p. 18). For Hebdige, the central point behind sub-cultures lies in the “communication of a significant difference” (Hebdige, 1979, p. 102). Through analyzing the British post-war subcultures such as the Teddy Boys, the Mods, the Punk, the Reggae, the Skinhead, etc, Hebdige explores their semiotic resistance to the dominant culture. Marginalized subcultural groups gained symbolic solidarity and independent identity through the fusion of fashion and musical styles.

Paul Willis’s *Learning to Labor: How Working-Class Kids get Working-Class Jobs* aims to expose the reasons or logic which constrain or determine working-class kids getting working-class jobs, through analyzing the cultural and economic modes
of reproduction that make this possible. It focuses on “the determinants of a social class base out of which a particular class habitus shapes the trajectory of the lives lived” (Kirk, 2007, p. 49). Willis argues “that it is their own culture which most effectively prepares some working class lads for the manual giving of their labor power. We may say that there is an element of self-damnation in the taking on of subordinate roles in Western capitalism” (as cited in Kirk, 2007, p. 49). Willis explains that the working-class kids intentionally refuse to follow school discipline or study hard. They are not impressed by the common belief of self-salvation/upward mobility through educational success. They do not even care the practical need that successful school learning can possibly lead to some type of more decent and meaningful work. They are very pessimistic about what they can target. The boys’ resistance and struggle is “a curious kind of hubris” (Kirk, 2007, p. 49); it seems that these working-class kids blindly “attempt one heroic last stand to define themselves, their autonomy and agency” (Kirk, 2007, p. 50). But it is highly tragic and hopeless that such defiance can bring nothing except harm. Through mocking the ideological interpellation of the school system and celebrating agency, working-class kids are more firmly fixed in the relationship of production they resist in the first place (Kirk, 2007, p. 50). They can get no more than repeating the low-technique jobs of their parents.

Finally, Hall’s effort in combining Althusser’s ideology and Gramsci’s theory of hegemony as analytical tool led Cultural Studies after the 1970s to divert its attention to studies on power.
The winning of consent can be typically exemplified by British working class voting so many times for Margaret Thatcher (Prime Minister 1979-1990), who is a right-wing Conservative liberal, yet seen as identified with their interests. In her first prime ministerial term (1979-1983), Britain’s Gross Domestic Product fell by 4.2 per cent and unemployment rose by a record 141 per cent to over three million (Procter, 2004, p. 97). By the end of her second term, large scale de-industrialization reshaped the landscape of class formations, forcefully eclipsing those working class in the former industrial heartlands. The trade union power and labor movement as well as the Labor Party itself were profoundly weakened. Nevertheless, the Conservative Party secured a third term in office, making Thatcher one of the most popular leaders of the postwar period. Such unmatched outcome inspired Hall to develop a theoretical analysis which could explain the reasons for the continued electoral success of Mrs Thatcher’s neo-liberal, right-wing Conservative Party and explore what the Left might learn from those reasons. In so doing, Hall coined the term “Thatcherism” (Procter, 2004, p. 98), which he felt was hegemonic ideological interpellation based on such images as nation, family, neo-liberalism, competitive individualism. He also raised the notion of “New Times,” a project Hall and some other Left intellectuals launched between 1988 and 1989 through Marxism Today—to force the Left to “move with the times” (Hall and Jacques, 1989, p. 14). Theorists of “New Times” state that Western capitalism is witnessing the emergence of a “two-thirds, one-third society” (Hall and Jacques, 1989, p. 17), implying that two-thirds of the population are relatively well off with “rising expectations” while one-third are either engaged in de-skilled
part-time work or become the jobless underclass that is “left behind on every significant dimension of social opportunity” (Hall, 1989, p. 118). The postmodern New Times in Britain is characterized by the diversity of social and political upheavals including “the success of ‘Thatcherism,’ the decline of traditional working-class politics, the emergence of a politics of identity and consumption, and most importantly the challenge these represent to the left” (Turner, 1996, p. 219).

Hall’s study of the 1980s produced an ongoing critique of Thatcherism, which was first published as a series of essays in the socialist monthlies *Marxism Today* and *The New Socialist* and subsequently collected in two books: *The Politics of Thatcherism* (1983) and *The Hard Road to Renewal* (1988).

For Hall, the uniqueness of Thatcherism lay in its capacity to “identify itself with ‘the people’” (Hall and Jacques, 1983, p. 10) and to “construct around itself an active popular consent” (Hall and Jacques, 1983, pp. 22-23), securing hegemony even among the working class whose economic interests was hardly the concern of Thatcher Governments. Thatcherism cut across divides and conflicting interests, including class interests, by deploying “the discourse of ‘nation’ and ‘people’ against ‘class’ and ‘unions’” (Hall and Jacques, 1983, p. 27). And this political hegemony is distinctly featured as “authoritarian populism:” “[f]ree market, strong state, iron times” (Hall and Jacques, 1983, p. 10), a successful combination of “populist” appeal with the imposition of authority and “law” and “order.” To be specific, by “populism,” Hall means something more than the ability to secure electoral support, but “the project, central to the politics of Thatcherism, to ground neo-liberal policies
directly in an appeal to ‘the people;’ to root them in the essentialist categories of commonsense experience and practical moralism - and thus to construct...classes, groups and interests into a particular definition of ‘the people’” (Hall, 1988, p. 71). By “authoritarian,” Hall means the arousal of populist sentiment must be transformed into “the identification with authority, the values of traditionalism and the smack of firm leadership” (Hall, 1988, p. 72). As a matter of fact, Thatcherism was only committed to rolling back the state for free market; in all other aspects she is always prepared to strengthen state power and control for national recovery and social order.

Hall argues that this hegemony of the right, which destroys the post-war political consensus of social democracy, proves the success of ideological interpellation, as the consent was structured around the ideological mobilizations across class lines around “the resonant themes of organic Toryism -- nation, family, duty, authority standards, traditionalism, patriarchalism--with the aggressive themes of a revived neo-liberalism--self-respect, competitive individualism, anti-statism” (Hall, 1988, p. 157). For Hall, it is imagery--ideological representation--as opposed to policy that “Thatcherism” secured its political success in the 1980s. In “Gramsci and Us,” writing in the aftermath of Thatcher’s third election victory in 1987, which is about Thatcherism’s success and challenge and the Left inability to cope with the changing world, Hall explains, “People don’t vote for Thatcherism, in my view, because they believe the small print. People in their minds do not think that Britain is now a wonderfully blooming, successful, economy. Nobody believes that, with 3 3/4 million unemployed, the economy is picking up...What Thatcherism as an ideology
does, is to address the fears, the anxieties, the lost identities, of a people. It invites us to think about politics in images. It is addressed to our collective fantasies, to Britain as an imagined community, to the social imaginary. Mrs Thatcher has totally dominated that idiom, while the left forlornly tries to drag the conversation round to ‘our policies.’” (Hall, 1988, p. 167)

In “The Empire Strikes Back,” Hall took the Falklands War (1982-3) as an example to illustrate how Thatcherism, in constructing the war into a populist cause, built its success partly in making people think politics in images. Thatcher’s first term did not achieve much, but was saved by the War. The War, which cost a fortune, was largely fought on the grounds of moral principles, articulated through a series of images, such as Winston Churchill and Britain’s imperial greatness. The nostalgic language of empire was enormously popular with the British electorate, with “52 percent of manual workers” and “more men than women” prepared to vote Mrs Thatcher according to an opinion poll (Hall, 1988, p. 69). Mrs Thatcher made full use of the war to glamorize Englishness, imperial nostalgia, patriotism and patriarchy, traditional (moral) values – Thatcherism’s ideological imagery. Hall sees this project of ideology as one of “regressive modernization” or even “reactionary modernization” (Hall, 1988, p. 164), by which he means that Thatcherism’s vision of the future is founded upon and legitimated through a backward looking, nostalgic turn to the past, e.g. combining liberal free market discourses with conservative themes such as nationhood and empire.

*New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s* (Hall and Jacques,
1989) was written near the end of Thatcher's reign to draw some conclusions about the deep political, economic, social, and cultural changes now taking place in western capitalist societies. Hall identifies "a qualitative change" (Hall and Jacques, 1989, p. 12) in advanced capitalist countries increasingly characterized by "diversity, differentiation and fragmentation" (Hall and Jacques, 1989, p. 11). The rapid wave of de-industrialization since the early 1980s has resulted in shift of economy from manufacturing production to a predominantly service sector as well as shift towards a more flexible, specialized and decentralized form of labor process. More people work on flexi-time and part-time base. This has led to the weakening or even the demise of traditional working class, their politics, and their culture. For Hall et al., New Times creates new subjectivities. There is an end of old collective solidarities with the "self" being "more fragmented and incomplete, composed of multiple 'selves' or identities," and hence the subject "is differently placed or positioned by different discourses and practices" (Hall, 1989, p. 120). With the death for good of the working class, agency is sought elsewhere in cultural studies. Hence, the concern with class is shifted to concerns with new social movements and identity politics of the margins.

Hall sees in New Times "a leading role for consumption" with greater emphasis on choice and product differentiation, and on "the 'targeting' of consumers by lifestyle, taste and culture rather than by the Registrar General's categories of social class" (Hall, 1989, p. 118). Characterized by such words as "proliferation," "diversity" and "multiplication," Hall identifies in processes of market expansion "the
opening up of the individual” and “the democratization of culture” (Hall, 1989, p. 128).

Hall also advises that the renewal of the Left had to begin by learning from the lessons of Thatcherism. A decade before Tony Blair became British Prime Minister, Hall was able to predict and warn the danger “that the Left will produce, in government, a brand of New Times which in practice does not amount to much more than a slightly cleaned-up, humanized version of that of the radical Right” (Hall and Jacques, 1989, p. 16). Reality proved that New Labor in office since 1997 under Tony Blair seemed to have learned those lessons only too well. The re-branded, re-packaged Labor Party was fully aware of the importance of entering into the ideological struggle over image and imagery that was central to Thatcherism’s success. Hall’s fear came true as the New Labor’s effort was “less an attempt to re-articulate the new times for the Left, than...to reoccupy the old terrain of the Right” (Procter, 2004, p. 114).

**The Marginalization of Class and the Moral Significance for the Study of Class**

Yet since the 1970s the CCCS gradually began to move away from working-class subjects and youth subcultures to other aspects of identity. From the mid-1980s, in both social science and cultural studies, interest in gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, etc., arose to replace the former interest in class. According to Martin Barker and Anne Beezer, class, at best, “has become one ‘variable’ among many” and, at worst, “has dissolved away altogether” (as cited in Medhurst, 2000, p. 22).
Turner offers three reasons for this change. The first is the challenge from other marginalized groups with rising consciousness; the second, the decline in the influence of Althusserian theories of ideology and the subsequent turn to Gramsci; and the third, Thatcherism, which, with its radical neo-liberal cultural ethos and social reforms, defied any attempt to continue to stick to class interests (1996, pp. 217-218). In essence, the shift is a consequence of the recognition of “the diversification of social struggles” as the “structures of the modern state and society complexify and the points of social antagonism proliferate”—in short, “the proliferation of the sites of power and antagonism in modern society” (Hall, 1988, p. 168), a new cultural trend seen and named as New Times, which I have just mentioned.

Hall was also responsible for “recovering the issue of race” as one key concern of cultural studies, very possibly due to his West Indian background (Turner, 1996, p. 69). From 1980s or early 1990s, Hall spent more time and energy developing his theory on “difference,” celebrating hybridity in today’s globalized culture.

Cultural studies’ gradual withdrawal from a predominantly class-based analysis is read by some critics as “a retreat from politics” (Turner, 1996, p. 220) or “signs of political exhaustion” (Turner, 1996, p. 221). For Kirk, the “displacements” and “forgettings” of class elides domination, subordinating relations of exploitation and “[d]iasporic hybridity cannot stand outside class relations as a mode of cultural identity” (Kirk, 2007, p. 69). Reid sees the situation as “not unlike coal mining, the decline in which is related neither to the lack of coal nor to its utility, but to the changing and comparative attraction of other fuels” (1998, p. xix).
Munt is extremely sad to see that within the hierarchies of oppression, “class has sunk to the bottom because it is not sexy enough for the intelligentsia” and that there is a poverty of representation with few work on contemporary working-class culture (2000, p. 7). In the last two decades, there has been much public call for positive images of women, racial minority, and gays and lesbians, but no such equivalent urge for working-class representation. Academics of working-class background within universities “are encouraged to see ‘others,’ but not themselves” (2000, p. 7). Medhurst shares Munt’s sadness that class is in so many ways “the ‘lost identity’ of identity politics” (2000, p. 29) and that too many academics speak from “a position of ‘class blindness’” (2000, p. 28).

Munt views it “a kind of shame” in cultural studies putting primary interest in audience studies and thus placing “the locus of responsibility onto readers, rather than producers” (2000, p. 8). She strongly holds that cultural studies should continue to have as one of its chief objectives “a concern to illuminate the present” (2000, p. 7). The reality is harsh. With the destruction of Britain’s traditional industry and trade unionism, working class has been perceived from the Victorian notion of the “deserving poor” to the present notion of social “waste,” particularly the underclass. Their production labor, which can be their only social contribution, is now discouraged and lost, making them redundant and useless. Kirk (2007) and Skeggs (2004) in their works also strongly argue for the cultural significance for the study of the post modern working class identity. This is a position widely shared, e.g. by Andrew Sayer (2005), Ferdinand Mount (2004), as I have covered in Introduction
Cultural Studies is the study of everyday life, and the present British everyday life is still saturated with class relations as convincingly illustrated in Reid’s *Class in Britain* and Hopkins’ *The Rise and Decline of English Working Class 1918-1990*, both of which argue against that class differentiation has withered away in contemporary Britain. The fact that not everybody believes this “doesn’t make it untrue,” though the phenomenon displays the success of liberal pluralism ethos (Munt, 2000, p. 10).

Munt suggests that, since working-class studies formed “the backbone” of many disciplines, an “ethical and integral” approach needs to be adopted to combine the study of working-classness with that of gender, race, sexuality, etc. “If you take out ‘class’ from an exploration of gender and so on, you ignore a crucial determining factor of the experience of being a woman, man or transgendered person” (Munt, 2000, p. 10). And some effort has already been made towards this direction, e.g. in Munt’s *Cultural Studies and the Working Class* (2000) and in Kirk’s *Twenty-century Writing and the British Working Class* (2003). Class was what ignited Cultural Studies, after all, and should always bear a mark seriously. Skegges warns that “[w]hen class becomes reduced to a matter of etiquette and taste, we know there is something clearly very wrong and very bourgeois happening” (2004, p. 44).

**Key Concepts**

Having established the theoretical framework of British Cultural Studies, it is necessary here to explain some of the key operating concepts of the study. While quite a few concepts have already been covered in my exploration of British Cultural
Studies, such as “culture,” “ideology,” “hegemony,” “cultural politics,” here I would add four more essential concepts, namely “identity,” “representation,” “realism” and “masculinity.” Four more concepts, “class,” “class consciousness,” “working class” and “underclass,” will be dealt with in Chapter III, which is sociological and historical understanding of class and working class and therefore a more appropriate place for a detailed elaboration of the terms.

The word identity connotes both sameness as well as difference. It comes through identification and differentiation. Psychology and psychoanalysis focus on identity “as a person’s essential self, or the subjective idea of oneself as an individual” while social sciences emphasize “the communal and cultural aspects of identity formation” (Mikula, 2008, p. 92). Identities are socially constructed and “cannot ‘exist’ outside of social and cultural representations and acculturalization” (Barker, 2000, p. 165). It is social and cultural as “there are no transcendental or ahistorical elements to what it is to be a person” (Barker, 2000, p. 167). Identity is an essence which can be signified through signs of taste, beliefs, attitudes and lifestyles. So, Barker summarizes that “identity is concerned with sameness and difference, with the personal and the social and with forms of representation” (Barker, 2000, p. 166). Until the latter half of the 20th century, social sciences interpreted collective identities of social groups related to class, gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, etc. as “relatively stable categories” (Mikula, 2008, p. 93).

The issue of identity is central to cultural studies as cultural studies examines “the contexts within which and through which both individuals and groups construct,
negotiate and defend their identity or self-understanding" (Edgar & Sedgwick, 1999, p. 183). Identity has been a continuous concern of cultural studies, though such concern greatly intensified from the 1990s to the new millennium, making identity politics “the central theme” of cultural studies (Barker, 2004, p. 53) marked with new characteristics. Identity subjects under close investigation shifted from working class people to women, ethnic minority, homosexual groups, etc. and identity within cultural studies has been understood much more through the notion of difference. Besides, identity is not a “fixed ‘thing’ that we possess but an emotionally charged symbolic description of ourselves” and is never stable but “a process of becoming” (Barker, 2004, p. 53).

Identity politics refers to political activities mobilized to struggle for the equal treatment of specific identity groups—usually marginalized social groups. It is concerned with such people making identity claims for maintaining cultural rights within society and culture. Identity politics is “a sub-set of cultural politics” and is thus also concerned with “the ‘power to name’ and to make particular descriptions stick” (Barker, 2004, p. 95).

Identity relies heavily on representations—practices and norms often used in the mass media to present images of particular social groups. Presentations are not “innocent reflections of the real” but are “cultural constructions” (Barker, 2004, p. 177). The representations of identities are “political” in the sense that construction and consequences of representations are closely bound with power and ideology which regulates society through enabling some kinds of identities to exist while
denying others. Therefore, the "politics of representation" is a central concern for cultural studies scholars. For Hall, "there is no understanding of identity outside of culture and representation," for which he prefers the use of "cultural identity;" and "representations are not reflexive but constitutive and therefore have a real, material impact" (Procter, 2004, p. 125).

Class representation is a key concept for this dissertation. Skeggs holds that "[u]nderstanding representation is central to any analysis of class" and that it is "the process of evaluation, moral attribution and authorization" as well as awareness and resistance of such that are central to understanding contemporary class relations (2004, p. 117). In Outlaw Culture (1994), bell hooks denounces the representations of poverty in the mass media and calls for intervention in existing systems for an alternative representation around poverty which would refuse worthlessness, shame, and the idea of perpetual aspiration: "To change the face of poverty so that it becomes once again, a site for the formation of values, of dignity and integrity, as any other class positionality in this society" (as cited in Haylett, 2000, p. 72).

Realism emerged as a mode of oppositional or reform-seeking expression and representation in the 19th century. There is no universally agreed definition for it, but a common understanding is that realism presents life as it really is or shows things as they occur. Williams in "A Lecture on Realism" noted three emphases which are common to all forms of realism, namely, "the secular, the contemporary and the socially extended" (1977, p. 65). The secular means the actions are ruled by reason and logic instead of superstition and mysticism, reflecting the progress of humanity.
The contemporary means the story is set in the present in terms of setting, character, and social issues. The socially extended means “a conscious movement toward social extension” to broaden the range of characters and topics to include marginal or under-represented groups and issues in society, specifically the extension to themes of “working-class life, bringing the working class to the center of dramatic action” (1977, p. 63, p. 67). In addition, realist texts are influenced by the political intent of the artist, carrying “specific ideological features” and offering “a moral lesson” to people (1977, p. 64). Drawing on the work of Williams, Marion Jordan suggests that in social realism, “life should be presented in the form of a narrative of personal events;” that “these events are ostensibly about social problems;” that the “characters should be either working-class or of the classes immediately visible to the working classes;” that “the locale should be urban and provincial;” that “the settings should be commonplace and recognizable;” that “the time should be ‘the present’” and “that the style should be as to suggest an unmediated, unprejudiced and complete view of reality” (as cited in Creeber, 2000, pp. 195-196). In British film criticism, “social realism” is often used interchangeably with “kitchen sink” realism, or “working-class” realism.

Masculinity refers to qualities or appearance traditionally associated with men. As a cultural concept, it is an identity category that refers to “the cultural characteristics associated with being a man” (Barker, 2004, p. 115) or “normative and socially and culturally constructed patterns of manhood” (Mikula, 2008, p. 119). In patriarchal societies masculinity and femininity are set in simple binary opposition and heterosexual masculinity is typically constructed as the normative standard and
the foremost source of empowerment. Masculinity has traditionally valued strength, action, control, assertiveness, work, independence, competitiveness, aggression, camaraderie, and etc. Devalued were relationships, verbal expression, domestic life, tenderness, women and children. Masculinity is “a matter of representation;” it is “constituted by ways of speaking about and disciplining bodies” (Barker, 2004, p. 115). Hence, it is a site of continual political struggle over meaning in the context of multiple modes of being a man. As Cornwall and Lindisfarne point out, “Hegemonic masculinities define successful ways of ‘being a man;’ in so doing, they define other masculine styles as inadequate or inferior” (as cited in Mikula, 2008, p. 119).

Masculinity is not an unchanging given of nature. Since the late 1970s, for the first time some men in the West have seen themselves as experiencing a “problematic” masculinity, or “crisis” of masculinity due to post-industrial social and cultural changes. Cultural critics in the fields of feminism and queer studies have also strived hard to challenge the patriarchal maleness and destabilize normative social roles. To accompany this, there has been an upsurge of interest in the study of men and masculinity. Within cultural studies, critics have focused on “the ways in which media and cultural texts and cultural practices construct and disseminate representations of men and maleness, and on the role these representations play in negotiating notions of the masculine in society” (Mikula, 2008, p. 120). With a substantial number of men implicated in depression, alcoholism, drug abuse, violence and crime and even suicide, it has been argued that the central problems of men’s
lives are “rooted in the adoption of impossible images of masculinity that men try, but fail, to live up to” (Barker, 2004, p. 115).

In this chapter, I have surveyed the development of British Cultural Studies, which serves as the basic theoretical framework for this dissertation in general as well as for my ideological analysis of British working-class identity and representation in Chapter 7 in particular. The next chapter will look at British class and working class from the sociological and historical disciplines to provide contextual understanding of the issue of class and working class.
CHAPTER III

CLASS AND WORKING CLASS IN BRITAIN:

SOCIOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING

Britain is the first country to industrialize with the Industrial Revolution and therefore had “the world’s first industrial working class” (Roberts, 2001, p. 81). By the end of the 19th century, the working class had become a knowable, measurable and organizeable force, potentially powerful. Between the later half of the 19th century and early half of the 20th century, the working class won suffrage, strengthened trade unionism, consolidated the Labor Party, and facilitated community support. New strength was gained in the two postwar decades due to full employment and affluence, from which working class youth benefited most. But the official claim of Britain as a classless society has not been approved by the general public and has been severely criticized by sociologists and cultural scholars. After the Second World War, the traditional British working class has gone through many social and political changes, especially a lasting “decline” since the 1970s after the post-war “rise,” leading to the rhetoric of the “end of class” (Kirk, 2007, p. 2) and the coinage of the “underclass” (working class without jobs). Working class is deemed to have departed the social scene, either as an economic entity, as a distinct cultural formation, or as an agent of
political change or action.

This chapter will look at class and working class from sociological and historical perspective to provide contextual knowledge and arguments for a comprehensive understanding of the issue of class and working class. It will explore the definition and classification of class and working class, assess the class or classless nature of British society and offer a general survey of the rise and fall of British working class conditions. It concludes that British working class is still a substantial social existence whose identity change is worthy of serious concern.

**Defining and Classifying Class and Working Class**

The working people in Britain had been known “as the ‘the lower orders,’ ‘the masses’ or even ‘the mob,’ ‘the rabble’ or ‘the swinish multitude,’ depending on the attitude of the observer” (Hopkins, 1991, p. 2). “Working class” as an identity category was formed and came into popular use in the early years of the 19th century in recognition of their position as wage earners faced with an intensification of capitalist relationships of production. The contemporaries and later historians identified the group as a working class, or more often “the working classes” due to the diverse range of occupations and distinctions of status involved. By the 1840s, then, middle classes and working classes had become common terms. The former became singular first. The latter became singular from the 1840s but still today alternates between singular and plural forms, often “with ideological significance, the singular being normal in socialist uses, the plural more common in conservative descriptions.” (Williams, 1983, p. 64) The single and plural forms have the same signification and
have been used interchangeably, though Marxist historians customarily use the singular to emphasize the economic homogeneity of the workers (Hopkins, 1991, preface vii).

E.P. Thompson chose the singular form for his book *The Making of the English Working Class* as he sees the difference as the following: "‘Working classes’ is a descriptive term, which evades as much as it defines. It ties loosely together a bundle of discrete phenomena. There were tailors here and weavers there, and together they make up the working classes. By class I understand a historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness. I emphasize that this is a historical phenomenon. I do not see class as a ‘structure,’ nor even as a ‘category,’ but as something which in fact happens…in human relationships.” (1963, p. 9)

The definition of working class can be found in some social welfare documents before the Second World War, which at the time concerned only the problems of one social group—the statutory working class or working classes. So the first piece of industrial injuries legislation, the Workmen’s Compensation Act of 1897, and the first legislation on national health insurance and unemployment insurance shortly before the First World War were restricted to those employed “by way of manual labor,” with doubtful cases being settled by the income limit (Marwick, 1990, pp. 61-62). A more detailed definition was provided by the Housing Act of 1925 and 1936: “the expression ‘working class’ includes mechanics, artisans, laborers and others working for wages hawkers, costermongers, persons not working for wages, but working at
some trade or handicraft without employing others except members of their own
family, and persons other than domestic servants, whose income does not exceed an
average of three pounds a week, and the families of such persons who may be residing
with them” (Marwick, 2005, p. 80).

Social scientists have offered two opposing ways of thinking about class. Wood
puts it in Democracy Against Capitalism that “There are really only two ways of
thinking theoretically about class: either as a structural location or as a social
relation” (1995, p. 76). Class understood as a location is Weberian in which class is
imagined in terms of social layers, strata, identities and groupings. Class understood
as a determining relation is associated with Marxism and historical materialism in
which class is understood as the force or relationship which shapes such identities and
groupings.

Marx argued for the polarization of social classes in capitalist societies, with the
bourgeoisie or capitalist class who own the means of production on one side and the
proletariat or working class who have to sell their labor-power on the other. He
claimed in the Communist Manifesto (1848), “Society as a whole is more and more
splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each
other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat” (as cited in Edgell, 1993, p. 2). He forecasted that
conflict between the two classes, due to conflicting economic interests, would lead
eventually to working-class revolutions which bring the downfall of capitalism.
Marxist tradition tends to trace all social inequalities to the root of economic
differences; the economically dominant class is also expected to dominate politically
and culturally. Marx did not foresee that the actual ownership of the means of production may be less important in a modern capitalist society, where ownership may be divorced from effective control by professional managers.

In comparison with Marxist political philosophy, Max Weber’s sociological analysis of class favored a more layered or hierarchical account of social inequality. He attached importance to differences in status between groups, particularly occupational groups. His conception centered on the market—people’s class positions are determined by differential life-chances distributed by the capitalist market (Marshall et al., 1988, p. 17). In other words, classes arose in the labor market based on the various assets or resources (skills, qualifications, ownership of stocks of capital, the ability to labor) that individuals could offer. While both Marx and Weber conceptualized class in economic terms, Weber stressed more than Marx the class advantages which draw from knowledge or skills. Thus the Weberian try to make differentiations within Marxism’s proletariat class, in order to explain the higher levels of material reward and status gained by intellectuals and managers/administrators and the reason why their class interests and cultural identity may accord more closely with those of the property-owning bourgeoisie (Edgar & Sedgwick, 1999, p. 67). So, what was crucial for Marx was experiences at work (relationships to the means of production), but for Weber the process of gaining work (or hiring labor) and the rewards (life-chances) (Roberts, 2001, p. 3). Weber also added analyses of differences in power and social status. Status is the honor or prestige attached to the styles of life of different social positions. So class is also seen

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as a cultural, rather than purely economic, phenomenon.

Max Weber contributed to developing Marx’s theory of class in the broader context of what has since become known as social stratification—the division of a society into hierarchical layers. Social stratification is essentially about groups’ relationships to social wealth, yet it concerns not only wealth and income but also power and prestige, life style, education, values, beliefs, etc. Therefore it is the most all-embracing term used in sociology when analyzing inequalities. Most social analysts see social class, which has an economic basis, as the most important and fundamental form of social stratification. Marwick sees “stratification” as “an ugly metaphor drawn from geology” (Marwick, 1990, p. 4).

Weber’s analysis of social relations in the sphere of the market has been criticized as obscuring the capitalist exploitative nature in the realm of production. The notion of market sovereignty and equality (all are “free” labors and equal consumers) obscures the “real” base of inequality on the level of production (Barker, 2000, p. 49). The Weberian approach can be reduced to an account of class purely in terms of occupational difference. Marxists such as Wood keep writing to expose the exploitative nature of capitalism and for class to be seen as social relations. Yet the Weberian approach to class relationship has been more widely accepted. Reid in his book *Class in Britain,* which concerns the empirical reality of social class differences, defines social class as “a grouping of people into categories on the basis of occupation” (1998, p. 10) for the reason that occupation is “easily collected and simple to treat” (1998, p. 11). Due to its user-friendliness, occupation has been seen as
"the best single indicator" of social standing and socio-economic circumstance of a person or a family in government census, sociological and commercial research concerns despite its limitations (1998, p. 10).

Apart from Marx and Weber, Marwick defines in *Class: Image and Reality in Britain, France and the USA since 1930* that "Class, in the historical and popular usage of this book, suggests overlapping areas of inequality, particularly in power and authority, income and wealth, conditions of work, life chances and lifestyles (1990, p. 170). And E. P. Thompson in 1978 defines class as "a social and cultural formation", one which cannot be "defined abstractly ... but only in terms of relationship with other classes." Class is "a very loosely defined body of people who share the same categories of interest, social experiences, traditions and value-systems, who have a disposition to behave as a class, to define themselves in their actions and in their consciousness in relation to other groups of people in class ways." (as cited in Kirk, 2007, p. 7) So, social classes are seen as economic as well as cultural products within a societal and historical setting. The basic assumption is that "differences between classes and strata are caused by and persist because of their differing access to almost all social resources, to power positions and to opportunities that, in general, are to the decided advantage of some and the decided disadvantage of others" (Reid, 1998, p. 14).

Class is also a matter of perception. Class locations tend to get into people’s heads and influence their minds, their consciousness and unconsciousness. Reid holds that there are two ways of looking at the existence of social class: “objective
existence” and “subjective existence” (Marx had recognized them both). Reid’s “subjective existence” (“to the extent to which people in society perceive, or accept, social class”) (1998, p. 9) equals class consciousness. E. P. Thompson says, “class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences ... feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs ... Class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms,” (1963, pp. 9-10). Here, it is important to note Marx’s distinction between “a class in itself” and “a class for itself.” While the former is a social group that is determined by a common economic position, the latter refers to a group which is collectively aware of that economic determination and consequently of its real interests in social change. In seeking to explain why the working class haven’t become a revolutionary force, Marx believed they were unable to recognize their exploitation and were suffering from “false consciousness” and therefore not a class for itself (Reid, 1998, p. 9). That is to say, a group of genuine class consciousness needs to overcome the illusions of ideology and false consciousness. Faced with the harsh realities and influenced by Gramsci’s theory, present-day Marxists tend to accept that, apart from economic determinants, other factors—capitalist politics, ideology, etc—can play important roles in class formation.

In summary, all the definitions of class have common denominators. Sociologists all agree that classes have an economic foundation and people with common experiences of making their livings are classed together. All class academics
commonly agree that class matters. “Class is related to people’s wealth, health, education, but this is just the beginning of the list” (Roberts, 2001, p. 6). In this aspect, cultural scholars pay more attention to the emotional ingredients of this “long list.” The book entitled Class Matters, edited by Pat Mahony and Christine Zmroczek (1997), deals extensively with the emotional politics of class. Medhurst argues that “Class is felt, class wounds, class hurts, and those of us on a cusp between classes bruise particularly easily” (2000, p. 21).

While defining class is not easy, the classification of class is even more challenging. The difficulty lies in defining appropriate class boundaries for statistical purposes. Clearly there is no single measure of social class in Britain. Historically, there have been schemes of the Registrar-General (1911), John Goldthorpe (1972), and Eric Wright (1980s), representing the official, sociological and Marxist perspectives respectively.

Britain was the first country in the world to institute a national census in as early as 1801, and was the first to introduce by Registrar General in 1911 an explicit class hierarchy as one of the forms in which census data could be presented (Marwick, 1990, p. 56). The five-class scheme of 1911 went as follows: Class I, professional etc. occupations; Class II, intermediate occupations (including proprietors of businesses, managers and bankers, as well as certain professions not considered good enough for Class I—school and university teachers among them); Class III, skilled occupations; Class IV, partly skilled occupations; Class V, unskilled occupations (Marwick, 1990, p. 56). The scheme was also considered to have six classes with Class III subdivided
into Class IIIa comprising lower-level white-collar workers, and class IIIb comprising the skilled manual workers (Roberts, 2001, p. 24).

The Registrar-General's census class scheme is occupational, based on the assumption that society is a graded hierarchy of occupations ranked according to expertise and skill. Besides, the class allocations tend to be intuitive. Despite this, sociologists were generally happy to use the scheme due to its simplicity and clarity. It remained the UK's official (government) class scheme up to 1998, when it was replaced by a new scheme not so much different. The 1998 Office for National Statistics (ONS) official UK class scheme was based on John Goldthorpe scheme which had been used for the large-scale Oxford survey of social mobility in England and Wales in 1972 with only slight modifications. The ONS scheme has eight categories, four of which middle-class, three working-class, plus an eighth category of non-workers and long-term unemployed, which is an addition to the Goldthorpe scheme. The details are as follows: 1.1 Employers (large organizations) and senior managers, 1.2 Higher professionals, 2 Lower managerial and professional, 3 Intermediate (e.g. clerks, secretaries, computer operators), 4 Small employers and own-account non-professional, 5 Supervisors, craft and related, 6 Semi-routine (e.g. cooks, bus drivers, hairdressers, shop assistants), 7 Routine (e.g. waiters, cleaners, couriers), 8 Never worked, long-term unemployed (Roberts, 2001, p. 25).

The need for recognizing the 8th category has intensified since the 1970s due to economic recession, deindustrialization, and cuts in welfare expenditure. Its growth has become characteristic of the class structure of advanced capitalist societies.
Compared with the 1911 scheme, the 1998 scheme continues to measure social class by occupation; but different from the instinctive base for the 1911 scheme, the 1998 one has an explicit theoretical rationale as Goldthorpe had well justified his categorization from a Weberian conception of class. Besides, while the majority categories of the old scheme were working-class, the new one made its majority categories to be middle class for the first time and added a petit-bourgeoisie and an underclass. The Office for National Statistics says: “Definitions like manual and non-manual have stopped being relevant. We have moved towards a service-based economy, and our social classifications have to adapt to that.” (Bromley, 2000, p. 55)

Marxist class schemes can be best represented by the Wright Scheme\(^3\) constructed by Eric Ohlin Wright, an American sociologist. His class scheme has been used in an international comparative research project to which the British contribution was *Social Class in Modern Britain*, a study conducted by Gordon Marshall and his colleagues (1988), all then at Essex University. The Wright scheme classified individuals not according to their occupations but by their jobs. Due to its confusing complexity, sociologists consider it less useful.

In general reading, we more often encounter a system of classification used by Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) and commonly adopted by social scientists and political scientists, particularly in the analysis of voting and party allegiance, which defines as follows: A. Higher managerial, administrative or professional, B. Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional, C1.

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\(^3\) For more details, Roberts (2001) has a table of the scheme on p. 34; Edgell (1993) has 2 tables on p. 19 and 21.
Supervisory or clerical, and junior white-collar workers, C2. Skilled manual workers, D. Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, E. State pensioners or widows (no other earnings), casual or lowest grade workers, long-term unemployed. (Coxall et al., 2003, p. 27)

In general, nowadays, most class theorists have become Weberians. Discussions of capital and labor seem out of date. Yet, occupation is not the same as class. Designating by occupation evacuates structural inequality and exploitation from perceptions of lived experience. Munt sees in it a tendency to “depoliticize class analysis so that it naturalizes social divisions, to take the engine of protest and replace it with a resigned, imperceptible social organicism” (2000, p. 3).

Looking at Class: Britain--A Class or Classless Society?

While on the one hand class has been acknowledged as an important feature of British society and key ingredient of British national identity, on the other hand the enthusiasm for claiming a classless Britain has always been strong after the Second World War among political scientists, journalists, and particularly politicians, such as Conservative prime minister Harold Macmillan (1957-63) and John Major (1992-1997) and Labor prime minister Tony Blair (1997-2007). Yet their optimism met the opposition of sociologists with facts and figures. For a better understanding of the true picture, a close look at the class or classless nature of British society is necessary here.

Before the Second World War, “three-class society held strikingly true for Britain in 1939” as Marwick observes (2005, p. 78). In September 1937, even the
conservative BBC was persuaded and convinced by the Institute of Sociology to hold over its radio a discussion of social stratification and class conflict, which was bravely entitled “Class: An Enquiry” (Marwick, 1990, p. 153). A heart-searching documentary series on “Class” was broadcasted in the autumn of 1938, at the end of which, Prof. T.H. Marshall, sociologist, was again able to “raise the voice of sanity” by claiming that Britain did have an upper class, as well as a working class and a middle class (Marwick, 1990, p. 160). What is essential in the pre-war period is that class differences were sharp and there was an obvious lack of communication between different classes.

Yet the Second World War and the reforms after it became a turning point which permanently disrupted the old pattern. The cruelty of the war pressed for the whole society to unite and fight a “People’s War,” which Churchill worked hard to mobilize with the rhetoric “All are united like one great family; all are standing together…” (Sinfield, 1989, p. 10). For the simple purpose to win the war, politicians promised a vision of drastic postwar social reform to bring true democracy and social justice to its people. At the same time, forceful state intervention was practiced in organizing wartime production and living, which immediately helped toward the direction.

Class integration and equality was greatly facilitated by the common war effort. Through conscription and war production, men and women from different class backgrounds were thrown together in the armed forces, in factories and offices, serving the national needs. In this, there was an unprecedented mobilization of the
working class. In return for their endeavor and sacrifice, the government guaranteed workers and their families a real improvement in their living conditions through such paternalistic measures as food rationing and subsidies, higher nutritional standard, and etc. On the other hand, war integration greatly aroused the working class consciousness as well as the sympathy from the middle class. As George Orwell observed in 1944, "a considerable growth of political consciousness and an increasing impatience with class privilege" was to be found among the manual working class (Taylor, 2005, p. 371). The war greatly increased the bargaining power of the working class: their labor was earnestly sought for and they had their representatives in the seats of power. Out of this grew a sincere sense of pride and self-confidence as well as high expectations with the working class. The temporary social mix caused by large scale evacuation awakened middle class families and aroused their genuine concern about the appalling conditions of the slum children. So the common war effort mobilized middle-class understanding of and sympathy for the working class. The middle class were more willing to support improvements in working-class conditions.

The Conservative Churchillian government won the war, but lost the election immediately followed in 1945. By voting the Labor Party to form "the people's government," the British people voted for change and for social inclusion. The working class had done their bit. Their war contribution was crucial to the saving of their country in its hour of need. Ernest Bevin, leader of the Transport and General Workers Union and Minister of Labor and National Service in Churchill's wartime coalition government, so acknowledged in 1940, "Without our people this war cannot
be won nor can the life of the country be carried on” (Taylor, 2005, p. 371). Now, if their war sacrifice were to be remembered, the working class should become the beneficiaries of a grateful nation.

In 1942, the Beveridge Report was produced by a government committee setting out a system of national security aiming to provide for all an egalitarian “safety-net” below which nobody would be able to fall. Between 1942 and 1944, the government published a series of white papers such as Social Insurance, Employment Policy, A National Health Service, and The Public Schools and the General Educational System which made places in British public schools (privately funded) available to suitable children whose parents could not afford the high fees. The Butler Education Act 1944 made secondary education compulsory and free for all children, and allowed a whole new generation of able working class children to move up the educational ladder, many of them as far as university. The Labor Government of 1945-50 put welfare state into effect with the passing of National Insurance Act (1946) (on social security benefits), National Health Service Act (1946) (on free medical treatment), and some minor acts such as The National Assistance Act and Family Allowances Act. So the world’s first comprehensive state welfare system looking after people “from the cradle to the grave” came into being in Britain.

Yet reforms in the 1940s could not play immediate magic. Austerity and rationing continued until the late 1940s F.M. Martin’s investigations, conducted in Greenwich and Hertford in 1950, came to such a conclusion, “The great majority of our subjects thought in terms of a three-class system, and most of them described
these classes by the same set of names—upper, middle and working” (Marwick, 1990, p. 268). The Glass Survey of 1949 brought out the extreme immobility of the British occupational structure (Marwick, 1990, p. 284).

The two postwar decades was from poverty to affluence in the narrating of class, represented in the wide use of three key terms—affluence, consensus, embourgeoisement. From 1951 to 1964 there was full employment, sharp increase in productivity and income, and the wide availability of new technologies. Statistics showed that “total production (measured at constant prices) increased by 40 per cent, average earnings (allowing for inflation) by 30 per cent, while personal consumption, measured in terms of ownership of cars and televisions, rose from 2 ¼ million to 8 million and 1 million to 13 million respectively” (Hill, 1986, p. 5). The welfare benefits were not targeting the working class only, but all citizens of the nation. Politically, the Conservatives had controlled the government most of the years since 1951, whose election victories were much based on working-class votes; they largely followed the welfare state, mixed economy and educational reforms put in place by the Labor Party in the period 1945-51. The success of welfare capitalism with mixed economy appeared to negate the need for Labor’s continuing commitment to public ownership. At the 1959 Labor Party conference, Gaitskell, the Labor leader, even proposed to remove the Clause 4 of the Party constitution concerning the public ownership, though failed to do so. The Party also began to woo the new and rapidly growing white collar, scientific and technical classes. Consensus was a dominant political practice and discourse until 1979 when Mrs Thatcher came into power with
her neo-liberalism right-wing politics. Both parties shared a political commitment to welfare state, which aroused a great deal of national pride.

The working class naturally benefited tremendously from such changes. Academics (mainly political scientists and journalists) began to speak of an affluent "new working class" (Roberts, 2001, p. 89), or "affluent worker" (Goldthorpe et al., 1969), who, through gradual embourgeoisement, was being assimilated into the middle-class economically, culturally and politically. Market researchers discovered the new "teenage consumer" with his commitment to style, music, leisure and consumption (Abrams, 1959). With the relative classless nature of the youth culture, youth became a "new class" (Clarke & Hall, 1976, p. 22). Hence the talk of Britain as a classless society emerged from the late 1950s, with the belief that capitalism was undergoing fundamental changes, equality had gone as far as necessary, and the old class divisions were in the process of being dissolved.

Politicians were also in favor of such optimism. In 1957, Harold Macmillan (PM 1957-63) boasted that "most of our people have never had it so good" and that "the class war is over and we have won" (as cited in Hill, 1986, p. 5, 6). Macmillan himself told the electorate "You’ve never had it so good" (Lowe, 1989, p. 574). This mood is even shared by the Labor Party leader Hugh Gaitskell: "The day is gone when workers must regard their stations in life as fixed—for themselves or for their children" (as cited in Laing, 1968, p. 7). With "affluence" and "mobility" dominating public discourse, the traditional base of Labor support was undermined. And there seemed no point preaching class consciousness if "class" was no longer in existence.
It was generally believed that as the working class were better paid, they adopted middle-class lifestyles and values and lost political militancy.

However, despite the growing prosperity, income and class inequalities continued to exist. "In 1961, 1 per cent of the adult population derived 10 per cent of total post-tax incomes (i.e. much the same as the poorest 30 per cent) while the richest 5 per cent enjoyed much the same income as that of the poorest 50 per cent. Figures for the distribution of private wealth reveal a similar picture. According to estimates made by *The Economist* for 1959-60, 88 per cent of tax payers owned only 3.7 per cent of private wealth while the richest 7 per cent owned 84 per cent." (Hill, 1986, p. 9) Moreover, these figures retain a remarkable consistency with figures of the early 1950s. Yet the political debates tried to avoid dealing with the unpleasant social and economic facts.

The embourgeoisement thesis was mainly promoted by political scientists and journalists, but not much supported by sociological surveys. The most thorough and influential research interrogating the embourgeoisement thesis was conducted in the mid-1960s by John Goldthorpe, David Lockwood, Frank Bechoffer and Jennifer Platt in Luton, which was a rising new industrial city and therefore a more valid sample. Two hundred and twenty-nine (male) manual workers at three establishments in Luton (a car manufacturer, an engineering company and a chemical plant) were interviewed. Fifty-four white-collar employees were also interviewed as a comparison group. In their book on this research *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure* (1969), the findings and interpretations rejected the embourgeoisement thesis based on the
following reasons: “First, the vast majority of their respondents identified with the working class. Second, they were nearly all not only trade union members but regarded trade union representation as indispensable. Third, 71 per cent had voted Labor in the most recent general election (a higher figure than for the working class nationally). Fourth, the manual workers had few if any white-collar friends.” (Roberts, 2001, p. 91) The Luton survey denied embourgeoisement so convincingly that after it, “the thesis lay dead and buried” in sociology (Roberts, 2001, p. 91).

Britain in the 1970s was troubled with world oil crisis, economic recession, low rate of growth, high level of inflation, and a deterioration in industrial relations such as the coal miners’ militant strike, culminating in the so-called “winter of discontent” of 1978-9 when over one million low-paid public service workers were on strike for nearly three months due to Callaghan Labor government’s pay freeze for inflation control. Under such embarrassing context, the voice of classlessness weakened, replaced with an official recognition of some of the realities of class. Throughout the decades, census reports had continued to make use of the (unsatisfactory) I-V classification; then the 1975 edition of the Central Office of Information publication, Social Trends, was devoted to Social Class (Marwick, 1990, p. 322).

In 1980, shortly after Mrs Thatcher came into office, two opposing voices around the issue of classlessness were simultaneously heard. Arthur Scargill (President of the National Union of Mineworkers, 1982-2002) continued to tell people that “in a capitalist society it is inevitable that there will be class conflict. There are only two classes in Britain. The ruling class which arms and controls the means of
production, and the working class which provides the labor. There is no such thing as a middle class. How do you become a member of it? A building worker may earn more money than a man in pinstripes. Does this make the building worker middle class? It is an illusion.” (Sunday Mirror, September 7, 1980; as cited in Mount, 2004, p. 132). Conversely, Norman St John-Stevas, the Conservative Leader of the House of Commons, said: “I think that class is largely an irrelevancy in contemporary British society. Some people may use it as an excuse for their own failures, but I think we have very largely a mobile society, a society open to talent. The talented child or young person is able to reach the top of any profession or activity to which that child sets his or her mind, provided that the ability is there… We talk a lot about class in British society, but I think its social significance is very small.” (The Listener, 1980; as cited in Reid, 1998, p. 236). Generally, with Mrs Thatcher’s reform policies, terms like “decline of class” and “classless society” continued to be common terms.

Mrs Thatcher (Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990) practiced drastic economic reforms which terminated the political consensus. Her “revolution” of monetarism and privatization to cure the “British Disease” of relative economic decline was commented as removing class from the political landscape. Many of Thatcher’s reforms were delivered in the rhetoric of “empowerment of the people” (Storry & Childs, 2002, p. 177), shifting power away from the Establishment and the trade unions to individual consumers and the free market. For example, parents were treated as consumers buying education and were encouraged to participate in school governance. Council houses were sold to tenants at discount prices. Employees were
encouraged to buy company shares for share-holding democracy. British society became fragmented with life revolving around the individual, the family, and the idea of a better life through home ownership and consumer goods. She encouraged private health insurance and personal pension schemes, the growth of which marks the arrival of what Bennett terms a “post-welfare paradigm” (as cited in Barker, 2000, p. 122).

Thatcherism benefited a substantial amount of people. However, the Thatcherite reform was at the cost of high unemployment rate, growing industrial conflicts and larger gap between the rich and the poor, and tougher law and order. Sinfield remarked that, with the Thatcherite New Right, the British experienced “a return to the conditions” that the postwar settlement “was designed originally to avoid: unemployment, poverty, social rupture and authoritarian government” (1989, p. 3). The distribution of wealth became more concentrated in the 1980s. The poor became poorer, with 20 percent of the people living under the poverty line, “reversing a forty-year pattern where incomes were gradually growing more equal.” By 1988 the best-off tenth of the population enjoyed nearly nine times more income than the worst-off tenth, though the general earnings of the working public increased. (Quart, 1993, p. 20) The country was also morally broken by the contrasting decaying industrial North represented by mining and steel towns and booming South dominated by high-tech and financial industries and office skyscrapers.

The coming of a classless society continued to be acknowledged in the 1990s. Thatcher’s policies were largely inherited by her successor John Major, who was very idealistic in saying: “I think we need a classless society, and I think we need to have
what I refer to as social mobility. And what I mean by social mobility is the capacity of everybody to have the help necessary to achieve the maximum for their ability.” (The Guardian, 28 November 1990; as cited in Edgell, 1993, p. 121) The 1997 election ended the 18 years of Conservative rule and the trauma of Thatcherism; but optimism seemed to have outrun reality. New Labor, with its Third Way politics, appeared to have avoided the term “social class” from their political vocabulary. As Munt pointed out, “Class differences are seen by many as irrelevant to Blair’s Cool Britannia; since the death of Di, we are New Britain, cobbled together in a new national truce of participatory politics” (2000, p. 2). Prime Minister Tony Blair put forward his own populist wording in December, 1998: “slowly but surely, the old establishment is being replaced by a new, larger, more meritocratic middle class” (Marwick, 2005, p. 87).

Yet sharp class division continued to be spotted through sociological surveys, although in certain technical aspects, the old blue-white-collar divide has crumbled. Findings from a nationally representative sample on questions about jobs and labor market experiences in the early 1990s illustrated big contrasts between middle-class and working-class jobs: “The chances are that a middle-class employee will initiate and decide his or her own daily tasks, and supervise someone. The chances are that a working-class employee will do none of these things.” (Roberts, 2001, p. 8). Social Trends listed explicit divergence in the distribution of wealth in 1999 as follows:
Table 1: The distribution of marketable wealth (adults aged 20 or over), 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Population</th>
<th>Percentage of wealth owned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most wealthy 1%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most wealthy 5%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most wealthy 10%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most wealthy 25%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most wealthy 50%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: adapted from Social Trends, 2002, as cited in Coxall et al. 2003, p. 25

Pronouncing the death of class is premature. Politicians’ feel-good mood was definitely not shared by the postwar British general public with their self-assigned class as reflected in surveys and opinion polls. According to Marshall et al’s empirical survey conducted between 1 March and 3 July 1984, of a final sample of 1,770 people of working age they interviewed, 73 per cent of the respondents felt class to be an inevitable feature of modern society. “Sixty per cent of our sample claimed that they thought of themselves as belonging to one particular social class and well over 90 per cent could place themselves in a particular class category” (1988, p. 143). Within this 90 per cent, 58 per cent claimed to be working class and 42 per cent middle class (1988, p. 144). One general conclusion was, in most respects, persuasive: “The growth of the service class and the contraction of the working class reflects the transformation in the occupational division of labor in Britain since the war—the decline of manufacturing and manual laboring together with the expansion in the services sector and of professional, administrative, and managerial jobs—it does not signify a reduction in the inequalities of class life-chances. More ‘room at the top’ has
not been accompanied by greater equality in the opportunities offered to get there.”

The British Social Attitudes survey included a self-assignment question on social class every year between 1983 and 1991. In each year about 98 per cent of respondents answered the question, among which around two-thirds placing themselves as upper working or working class, and around a quarter classifying themselves as middle class. A vast majority of them (about 82 per cent) did not think they had crossed the boundary between working and middle classes. And 58 per cent of respondents acknowledged “feeling very or fairly close to other people of the same class background.” Between two-thirds and three-quarters each year claimed to the extent of “a great deal” or “quite a lot” that their class affects their opportunities. The highest perception of class disadvantage was in 1991, with but 3 per cent claiming “not at all” and 21 per cent “not very much.” (Reid, 1998, pp. 32-33)

In a MORI poll in 2002 based on interviews with 1,875 people, 68 per cent agreed with the sentiment: “At the end of the day, I’m working class and proud of it,” compared with 52 per cent backing the statement in a similar poll in 1999. Fifty-five per cent of those who would normally be categorized as middle-class by occupation, claimed to have “working-class feelings.” (Hickley, 2002) More media surveys in the 2000s confirmed that quite some people with good income still claim to be working class.

With decades of social progress and improvement, it is nevertheless quite surprising that so many people describe themselves as “working class,” particularly
for those who should be counted as middle class according to economic criteria.

Why politicians’ optimism was not shared by the general public? Professor Ringen argues in 1997 that “[w]hat is peculiar in Britain is not the reality of the class system and its continuing existence, but class psychology: the preoccupation with class, the belief in class, and the symbols of class in manners, dress and language” (as cited in Mount, 2004, pp. 49-50). There are some obvious or possible reasons for this.

Firstly, some people who have got middle class jobs but with working class origin can’t wholeheartedly feel middle class. Andy Medhurst takes his own experience as an example: “although I am paid a middle-class salary to do middle-class things, I never think of myself as an entirely middle-class person. I simply do not feel middle-class.” He explains that “class is not just an objective entity, but also (and mostly?) a question of identifications, perceptions, feelings.” Yet equally he cannot pretend to be working-class any more. So he feels living in a space between and his sense of class identity is “uncertain, torn and oscillating--caught on a cultural cusp.” (2000, p. 20) This mixed feeling is nothing new. Richard Hoggart illustrates in The Uses of Literacy, “Almost every working-class boy who goes through the process of further education finds himself chafing against his environment during adolescence. He is at the friction point of two cultures ...” (1998, p. 225).

Besides, some of such people prefer to be seen that they had resisted the charms of embourgeoisement and still stand shoulder to shoulder with the fellows of working class they originated from. In such cases, it is a “downward mobility of the mind” with an “endearing moral gesture” (Mount, 2004, p. 102).
Secondly, it is a high possibility that, public perception of the concept of class has undergone changes. Many people are using “class” in a very different way in defiance of the traditional connotations of class categories. In post-manufacturing capitalism with more jobs shifted from manufacturing to service sector, many white-collar work force might be categorized as in middle-class occupation, but have been proletarianized in income, a situation particularly true with jobs occupied by women. Braverman in developing his neo-Marxist thesis challenged the view that the routine non-manual worker is a member of the middle class in monopoly capitalism as “a drastic misconception of modern society” (as cited in Edgell, 1993, p. 67).

Thirdly, people feel less secure in the present post-modern world characterized by growing number of temporary or part-time jobs. This deepening insecurities around long-term employment and property ownership have led people to recognize that whatever their occupation is, “economically they are ‘working-class’” (Bromley, 2000, p. 53).

Fourthly, Sayer (2001) holds that “in evading acknowledgement of their social position, people want to be ‘ordinary’ without being read as superior because they do not want to be held as responsible for perpetuating or agreeing with inequality.” This is why so many concepts, such as mobility, reflexivity and individualization, are developed by academics to enable mis-recognition and evade responsibility for their privilege and position. (Skeggs, 2004. p. 116)

Having put elite view of Britain as a classless society and the public view of Britain as a class-bound society in binary opposition, it is now sensible to review the
criteria with which a classless society should be.

Edgell (1993) lists three main conceptions of classlessness widely acknowledged by sociologists: total classlessness, one-class classlessness, and multi-class classlessness. Total classlessness is an extreme form, such as Marx's prediction of a communist equality. One-class classlessness refers to embourgeoisement; with declining class differences and class conflicts, everybody is middle class. Multi-class classlessness refers to societies where “civic equality co-exists with the progressive fragmentation of the class structure and class consciousness” involving “the equal opportunity to be unequal.” (pp. 118-120) Multi-class classlessness has been called “non-egalitarian classlessness” by Ossowski, who views it as carrying political importance in “legitimizing social differentiation” based on individual ability (Edgell, 1993, pp. 120-121). Mount also lists three kinds of classlessness: equality of income, equality of one lifestyle (convergence of lifestyle) and equality of opportunity (2004, p. 45). Mount’s equality of opportunity equals to Edgell’s multi-class classlessness. Both of them see their last point as the one that really counts. Equality of opportunity has been the declared goal of most British politicians since the war, Tory or Labor.

Essential to this “equality-of-opportunity” classlessness is free social mobility. During his campaign for the leadership of the Conservative Party and the country, John Major stated that “I think we need a classless society, and I think we need to have what I refer to as social mobility. And what I mean by social mobility is the capacity of everybody to have the help necessary to achieve the maximum for their
ability” (Guardian, 28 November 1990; as cited in Reid, 1998, p. 235). Free social mobility symbolizes a fair or “meritocratic” society in which the social and economic status of individuals would not be inherited, but depend on their own talents and efforts. Political intervention would be necessary to monitor the practice and remove the inequalities of conditions. Equality of opportunity is the concept that is mostly used by politicians and academics concerning class.

Mobility can be divided into absolute mobility and relative mobility. Relative mobility equals to social fluidity which refers to the degree of openness in a society “in the sense of how equal are chances of access to different class situations for individuals for different class origins” (Goldthorpe, 1987, p. 305). According to John Goldthorpe, the issue of class formation is best analyzed using absolute mobility data, whereas the issue of openness is best considered using relative mobility data.

Goldthorpe undertook a large-scale survey of male mobility (male’s occupation in comparison with their father’s) in Britain in 1972 and updated it in 1983. His findings revealed that there had been an increase in the rate of absolute mobility, but no improvement in relative mobility chances. He even found that “the return of mass unemployment has created a serious new risk of what can only be regarded as downward mobility—and that this risk is much greater for men in working class positions” (1987, p. 269). Goldthorpe came to the conclusion that, despite economic growth and a political strategy of egalitarian reform, “no significant reduction in class inequalities was in fact achieved” (1987, p. 328). He added that economic growth and the increase in absolute mobility had “served effectively to distract attention away
form the issue of whether at the same time any equalization of relative mobility chances was being achieved" (1987, pp. 328-9).

A comparison of Goldthorpe's 1972 survey with the National Child Development Study (NCDS) of samples born in 1958 surveyed in 1991 when they were aged 33 is informative and enlightening here. Fourteen per cent of the Goldthorpe fathers had middle-class jobs compared with 27 per cent of the sons; in the 1991 NCDS survey, 36 per cent of the males held middle-class jobs. The size of working class shrank from 55 per cent to 44 per cent of the male population between the Goldthorpe generations and remained at 43 per cent of the NCDS sample. (Roberts, 2001, p. 198) Besides, 16 per cent of the Goldthorpe working class sons had reached the middle class by 1972, compared with 26 per cent of NCDS working-class males climbing up into the middle class (Roberts, 2001, p. 199). From this, we see evidences of absolute mobility and growth in middle class population, but the long-term numerical reduction of the male working class seemed to be ending. With regard to relative mobility, 16 per cent of the Goldthorpe working class sons had risen to the middle class by 1972, yet of those from middle-class families 59 per cent had remained there. Fifty-seven per cent of the Goldthorpe sample who were born into the working class had remained there whereas only 15 per cent of those who had begun life in the middle class had descended that far. (Roberts, 2001, p. 199) And NCDS shows that 61 per cent of those who began life in the middle class had remained there (Roberts, 2001, p. 201). So the middle class children are much more likely to become middle-class adults. Working class upward mobility was not due to any equalization
of life-chances. As Goldthorpe concluded, the change in mobility patterns is not a reflection of a more “open” society, but the number of middle-class jobs has outstripped the capacity of the middle class itself to fill them.

*Social Trends* have identified the advent of “the super-rich” and the growth in the numbers of “the poor,” defined by the EU as those on less than 60 per cent of median national income. The figure for “the poor” had been fairly steady in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s, “fluctuating between 10 and 15 per cent, then it rose steeply from 1985 (the ‘Thatcher effect’ with a vengeance) to a peak of 21 percent in 1992. From the mid-1990s onwards it stuck at around 18 per cent, whereas it was at 16 per cent in France and Germany.” (Marwick, 2005, p. 88)

Educational reform has widened the opportunities for working-class children. Education is widely seen by the working class as a way to escape. However, the middle class has taken full advantage of all postwar educational reforms and benefited as much as the working class from the expansion of higher education, which has “mostly enabled the not-so-brilliant children of the middle class to attend university” (Mount, 2004, p. 50). Mount attacked that with the New Labor’s policies in “the post-comprehensive era” as compared with the Old Labor’s promotion of comprehensive schools in the 1960s--the Department of Education has simply “confirmed the Downers in their down-ness” (Mount, 2004, p. 278).

So, as Field comments in *Unequal Britain* (1973), “Despite the growth in national wealth the age-old inequalities remain. The position of the poor has improved. But so, too, has that of the rich.” (as cited in Reid, 1998, p. 240) Reid sees classes in
the Britain of the 1990s experience “not only differing life-styles” (quality of life) “but also differing life-chances” (quantity of life) (1998, p. 234). On the whole, middle-class expansion has shed significant influence and the class structure has been much less rigid and much more difficult to map. The working class, instead of having died, has simply been driven into new habitats and acquired new forms and boundaries, displaying very different characteristics from the working class of the 1950s and 1960s, or of the 1970s, which was coined by Rowbotham and Beynon as a new “working class in-the-making” (2001, p. 3). Relative deprivation and the “underclass” are now more serious social and political problems challenging policymakers.

To conclude, after the Second World War, while some people dismiss social class completely, many others believe that it remains a vital ingredient of British society. Both Class in Britain by Reid and Class in Modern Britain by Roberts use sufficient statistics to prove that Britain remains a profoundly unequal society. In social surveys and opinion polls working-class people still refuse to see themselves as middle-class and many in white-collar occupations deny middle-class status imposed on them. Hence, we can come to the conclusion that classless Britain is more illusion than hard reality. R. Hoggart in his 1995 book The Way We Live Now described the claim that we are all classless now which has been said for at least half a century as “one of the most commonly voiced misconceptions” (as cited in Reid, 1998, p. 236). Edgell believes “the ‘withering away’ of class” is “a sociological fantasy” (1993, p. 115). The argument is that the changes in themselves have been “insufficient to cause
even the decline, let alone the death of class” (Roberts, 2001, p. 13). Gareth S. Jones simply sees class as a “life-sentence” (as cited in Dave, 2006, p. 104).

As far as the nature of British class society is concerned, Storry and Childs conclude that “it is still possible to divide British society into three broad classes—upper, middle, and working”, though the nature and composition of each class have undergone change (2002, p. 179). Mount prefers “The Uppers” and the “Downers” binary opposition, which he develops from the concept of “two nations” in Disraeli’s Sybil (1845), in which the Queen is said to reigns over “Two nations”—“THE RICH AND THE POOR” 4 (Mount, 2004, p. 115). David Cannadine’s Class in Britain, in accounting for the dominant perceptions of class in Britain from the early 18th century to the present, claims three enduring, overlapping but differently structured models: the hierarchical which views society as “a seamless hierarchy of individual social relations” (editor, Cannadine, 1998, front cover 2), the triadic which saw class as “upper,” “middle” and “lower,” and the dichotomous which saw society as polarized between the two extremes of “us” and “them.” Cannadine argues that it is the hierarchical vision of British society which “has had the widest, most powerful and most abiding appeal” (1998, p. 22) or “has been the most pervasive and persuasive” (1998, p. 167). Furthermore, in analyzing the serious impact of Margaret Thatcher’s attempt “to change the way we look at things” and John Major’s vision of a “classless society,” Cannadine leads readers’ attention to the

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4 In Sybil (1845), Disraeli writes of a “younger stranger” suggesting the Queen reigns over “Two nations”—“THE RICH AND THE POOR”—“between who there is no intercourse and no sympathy, who are as ignorant of each other’s habits, thought and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws.” (Mount, 2004, p. 115)
role of politicians in shaping social identities in modern democratic Britain, illustrating class as “social description, social perception, social identities and political creation” (1998, p. 171).

Since the 1990s, social class differences and inequalities have become less central concerns politically, socially, and culturally, due to shifting concerns to gender and ethnicity. However, social class remains the most fundamental form of social stratification as most of the vital social differences can be seen to have an economic base. Reid’s view that “being Black, female or elderly and middle class is different from being Black, female or elderly and working class” (1998, p. 238) is widely shared, and this dissertation takes the same view. Class difference will continue to feature prominently, along with those of gender, ethnicity and age, in the 21st century.

The Rise and Decline of British Working Class

British working class experienced drastic changes in the 20th century. The suffrage movement, working-class co-op, trade unionism, the Labor Party politics, and etc. all to great extent empowered the working people. Changes since the Second World War have been enormous. With the working classes’ entitlement to welfare, health, full employment and education, a sense of positive social identity for working-class people was formed which “destroy[ed] the Victorian imaginary of the lumpen, threatening masses who lurked on the edges of British society like a savage breed” (Munt, 2000, p. 1). The postwar economic and political changes greatly contributed to changes in social ideology and people’s mentality. However, the later post-industrial occupational restructuring transformed the pattern of labor force, and
greatly weakened the traditional manual workers, leading to Hopkins’ conclusion that “there was a rise up to the seventies, and a decline thereafter” (1991, p. 265). Three interrelated trends made a particular impact on the working classes between 1980 and 1997: first, the transformation in the country’s industrial relations; second, a resulting decline in the power, influence and size of organized manual working class; third, greater division between people with work and without work and hence the shaping of the underclass.

The rise and decline of working-class politics.

Britain had a strong correlation between class and political behavior. British trade unions and the Labor Party were two institutions that appealed for solidarity on the basis of class position and class interests, representing the special strength of the British working class. Trade unionism was strong until the 1980s and the Labor Party was deeply rooted in working-class political culture via numerous Labor clubs in working-class areas until the 1990s. However, it is paradoxical that, as Marwick lamented, “Britain, with the most clearly defined class structure and highest degree of class consciousness, yielded the least in the way of class-related violence” (1990, p. 204), or “Britain, with the most developed class structure, was the most stable and cohesive society” (1990, p. 205). George Orwell traced post-war working-class inactiveness to the fact that the availability of cheap luxuries made life more bearable (Hopkins, 1991, p. 37). Industrial actions were generally reformative rather than revolutionary in nature and the Labor Party has transformed into a “catch-all” party aiming to seek the support of the great majority of citizens.
Trade unions and industrial actions.

Trade Union movement has a long history in Britain and has played a forceful role in industrial relations. The 1860s saw the establishment of a more institutionalized trade union movement with legal status and the setting up of a central organization the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in 1867. In the Victorian period only a minority of the best-paid and most skilled workers--around 10 per cent of the workforce--belonged to unions. Yet from the 1880s onwards, membership extended to semi-skilled and unskilled workers. By the First World War, all the main industries and manual occupations had trade unions and membership rose from only 2 million in 1910 to the peak of over 8 million in 1920, at which point nearly half the workforce was unionized, though membership collapsed to just over 4 million in 1933 due to unsuccessful strikes in the 1920s and high unemployment caused by the Great Depression. (Savage, 1994, p. 55) Taking into consideration that the working class amounted to three-quarters of the population at that time, the union influence was enormous.

The second half of the century was divided into three distinct phases in union development. Between 1945 and 1969, union density remained very stable at a little above 40 per cent, with membership increasing slowly, but only to the extent of keeping up with an ever-larger work-force. Between 1969 to 1979, membership and density grew significantly, rising from over 9 million and 45 per cent union density in 1969 to a peak of 13,289,000 members and 54 per cent in 1979 (Abercrombie & Warde, 2002, pp.86-7; Gallie, 2000, p. 309). According to Marwick, since
membership covers both middle-class as well as working-class occupations, it can be seen that "union membership among working-class males must have been a good 80 percent throughout this entire period" (2005, p. 83). Since 1979, with the parliamentary acts of Conservative governments to curb union influence, there has been an annual fall in membership. By 1989 the number had fallen to just over 9 million. In the 1990s, membership was lower than at any time since 1945: in 1995, membership was as low as 8,089,000 and union density was down to only 33 per cent (Gallie, 2000, p. 309); in 1997, 7.9 million, or 30 per cent of employees (Abercrombie & Warde, 2002, p. 84); in 2000, there were 76 unions representing only 6.8 million workers (Storry & Childs, 2002, p. 189). So the trade union movement did not cover the majority of UK employees until the 1970s since when membership has declined. The changing trend in union density is shown in more detail in the figure below:

Figure 1 Trade union density, UK, 1900-95 (Gallie, 2000, p. 310)

Another important change in the trade union development was the occupational composition of membership represented by an expansion among white-collar workers in the last 3 decades of the 20th century, suggesting a weakening of the traditional
individualism among non-manual employees. Between 1971 and 1979, while manual worker membership increased by 602,300, white-collar membership rose by 1,379,000 (Gallie, 2000, p. 310). And since 1980, the decline of membership has mainly involved manual workers. This shift reflected the post-industrial changing occupational structure and the collapse of the manual traditional manufactory industries such as steel, coal, textiles and vehicles in which the union used to be strong. So, by the end of the century, manual workers made up a minority of the total union membership. The archetypal trade union membership was now “a professional university graduate in a relatively well-paid and secure white-collar job in the public sector” and only one in five private sector industrial workers were any longer in unions (Taylor, 2005, p. 383). Under such circumstance, it is fair to conclude that the present-day trade union movement is no longer rooted in the working class.

With regard to industrial actions, the working class faced major periods of conflict in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Strikes were frequent in the 1920s, cumulating into the General Strike of 1926 called by the TUC and lasted 9 days. After the Second World War, the unions played a more prominent role in national politics. In the 1960s and 1970s, the TUC was routinely consulted about economic and social policy and was for a time responsible for delivering wage restraint in exchange. At the same time, individual unions had used industrial actions to influence government policy. For example, in the 1960s boom, especially in the South East and Midlands where investment in cars and engineering was heavy, the labor movement was able to take successful industrial actions to push up wages. The strikes were largely due to the
impact of new technologies, new management strategies, and etc. Conflict was firmly related to wages and conditions and there is little evidence of any ambitions for revolutionary change. And strikes were always the resort of desperate workers. Even in its heyday, strikers found it difficult to mobilize and expect the automatic sympathetic solidarity of the entire working class. Besides, one worker’s wage increase tended to be another’s price rise.

In the mid-1960s, the economy under the Wilson Labor government was worsened by the balance of payment deficit and large numbers of strikes, e.g. the dockers’ strike in May 1966. Wilson’s attempt to reform trade unions and curb unofficial strikes through introducing a bill faced strong opposition within the Labor party and from the TUC, and therefore failed.

In the 1970s, trade unions were seen as having the power to bring down governments. The Industrial Relations Act (1971) reformed trade union law in an attempt to cut down strikes and curb extremists. It set up a National Industrial Relations Court and introduced a “cooling-off period” and ballot for strikes. Although it was relatively a moderate and sensible measure, the unions opposed it with a wave of strikes, the most serious of which being the miners’ strike in 1974, which put the whole of British industry on a three-day working week due to the shortage of electricity resulting from not enough coal. Huge anger and complaint was aroused from the general public as candle-light was even used at home. The Conservative Heath government resigned as a result. In 1978-79, the local authority trade unions caused the largest stoppage of labor since the 1926 General Strike, which is called the
“winter of discontent” by the media, demanding larger pay rises against Callaghan’s government’s Social Contract, which developed from an understanding between the Labor Party and the TUC and involved voluntary wage restraint in return for more employment in order to curb the record-high inflation rate of the time. Unions of public service workers refused to accept Callaghan’s proposal to extend the Social Contract for a further period by keeping pay rises below 5 percent. Again public resentment was aroused as services at hospitals, in refuse collection and in public transport were all influenced. Prof. Eric Hobsbawm in his 1978 Marx Memorial Lecture noted: “We now see a growing division of workers into sections and groups, each pursuing its own economic interest irrespective of the rest...The strength of a group lies not in the amount of loss they can cause to the employer but in the inconvenience they can cause to the public.” (Taylor, 2005, p. 381) The Labor government’s inability to contain the strikes contributed to Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative victory in the 1979 general election and facilitated forthcoming legislations to curb the trade unions.

Conservative governments between 1979 and 1997 strived hard to alter the balance of political and industrial power in favor of the capital and employers. Mrs Thatcher viewed the trade unions her prime political villains, whose commitment to collective rights and blanket protections stood in direct conflict with her strong belief in free market and individual effort. The union’s inflationary wage claims and destructive strikes in the late 1970s provided Thatcher with good excuses to take radical actions to restrain union power. Between 1980 and 1993, eight major Acts of
Parliament were passed to weaken and marginalize trade unions step by step, e.g. the Employment Act (1982) and the Trade Union Act (1984) which restricted the operation of closed shops and made trade unions more accountable for their actions. In short, the Acts outlawed the closed shop, curbed picketing, banned sympathetic solidarity strikes and secondary picketing, imposed the use of secret ballots for the election of union leaders and of postal ballots for the approval of strikes, and required trade union officials to be elected periodically. The highly unionized public sector was attacked, with such policies as the privatization of nationalized industries, the closure of coal mines, and the restructuring of welfare services like the National Health Service, which indirectly undermined traditional systems of collective bargaining. (Abercrombie & Warde, 2000, p. 85; Taylor, 2005, p. 383; Roberts, 2001, p. 102)

The bitter, year-long, coal-miners' strike of 1984-5 resulted from the decision of the National Coal Board to close 20 mines leading to 20,000 miners losing their jobs. The strike split the National Union of Mineworkers and ended in total failure for the miners. The strikers could not mobilize effective support in other sections of the working class due to the ban of sympathetic actions. Mrs Thatcher responded with saving substantial coal beforehand, importing much coal and oil, and subsidizing other energy. She won the nation's admiration for her toughness in confronting and defeating the left-wing, uncompromising, and militant miners' union leader Arthur Scargill. The event, added with a rise in unemployment in the declining manufacturing industries, led to a loss of about one-fourth of the country's union
membership. Thus, the union power was profoundly reduced and organized labor was weakened. Strikes became rare ever after and, when attempted, were usually unsuccessful. In 1997 only 235,000 working days were lost, more than a hundred times fewer than in 1984 (Abercromie & Warde, 2000, p. 94).

The unions’ damaging defeats such as the 1984 miners’ strike and The Times dispute at Wapping (1986) facilitated unions to make adjustments by adopting conciliatory policies to bargain with employers for the best possible deal, offering no-strike agreements and accepting arbitration.

*The Labor party.*

The Labor Party was originally a party for the working class. Its rise was largely indebted to the enfranchisement to large number of working class people and to trade union support and sponsorship.

The Chartist Movement of the 1830s and 1840s paved the way for universal manhood suffrage. Before 1832 the overwhelming majority of the general public were denied the vote for being poor. The Reform Acts 1932 and 1867 ensured manhood suffrage to about 60 percent of adult males in towns, with men only entitled to vote if they had some form of property. This right was extended to male workers in the countryside with the Representation of the People Act 1884, which amended the Reform Act 1867. The Representation of the People Act 1919 gave universal suffrage to women of 30 years old or over with property restrictions; at the same time it widened the male franchise by lifting the property restrictions, so that all adult males of 21 years old and over were now given the vote. The Representation of the People
Act 1928 made women's voting rights all equal with men, lowering the age to 21 and over with no property restrictions. The Representation of the People Act 1969 extended the suffrage to all people of 18 and over.

The Labor Party was established in 1900 (then named the Labor Representation Committee, changed to the Labor Party in 1906) principally by the trade unions, which had already learnt the limitations of industrial actions and sought political representation to gain legal protections. Trade unions were connected to the Labor Party directly through affiliation of members and indirectly through the Trade Union Congress. Throughout the 20th century, the trade unions were the Labor Party’s main source of financial support.

The rise of the Labor Party was aided by the two world wars, the 1920s depression and the Liberal Party splits after the First World War. The Party increased its number of MPs from 36 in 1914 to 57 in 1918, of whom 25 were members of the Miners Federation of Great Britain (Hopkins, 1991, p. 8). Then it grew extremely fast in the 1920s, coming in second place to the Conservative Party in 1922 election, forming minority governments in 1924 and in 1929 when it obtained 287 seats (Savage, 1994, p. 84), though both short-lived. It was not until 1945 that the Labor Party formed its first majority government. Socialism in the 1918 constitution of the Labor Party embodied a willingness to use any means including nationalization to attack poverty. The 1945 Labor victory consolidated the gains of the working class with welfare state, nationalization of key industries, and etc. On working-class gains, a leader of the Transport and General Workers Union declared in 1949: “Let there be no
mistake about it, we have made substantial progress in working-class conditions during the life-time of this government” (Marwick, 2005, p. 82).

Yet, of the 53 years from 1945 to 1997, Labor was only in office for 17 years: 1945-1951 (Clement Attlee), 1964-1970 (Harold Wilson), 1974-1976 (Harold Wilson), and 1976-1979 (James Callaghan). And at no time in the 20th century did a Labor government serve two full terms in office. The Conservative Party had two extremely long continuous periods of governance, one from 1951 to 1964, the other from 1979 to 1997. Since 1979, there has been a decline in the political and economic power exercised by working-class agencies, for after 1979 the Labor Party was out of office for 18 years.

It was only after the drastic reforms of the New Labor that the Labor Party was reelected and in office for 13 years: 1997-2007 (Tony Blair) and 2007-2010 (Gordon Brown). Unlike the trade union-influenced, deal-making, socialist-flavored old Labor, Tony Blair set out to forge New Labor as a democratic, market-oriented, efficiency-conscious, inclusive party of the radical center. New Labor’s philosophy was summed up as a “Third Way” between unrestricted free market capitalism (associated with Margaret Thatcher) and centralized state socialism (associated with “old” Labor). Unlike Thatcherism, the Third Way saw a large role for government; unlike social democracy, the Third Way stressed the responsibilities of individuals for their own welfare and the welfare of their families. The New Labor revised the party’s old constitution by getting rid of Clause Four, concerning the “common ownership of the means of production”, and ended trade union direct sponsorship of Members of
Parliament. It was also anxious not to identify too closely with the aspirations of its core working class voters. These measures suggest that Labor has become a “catch-all” party, aiming to sweep as many as possible into Blair’s “big tent”. However, Blairism has also been criticized as functioning “in Conservative coat”, its policies not much different from those of Mrs Thatcher. The Job Seekers’ Allowance and government Welfare-to-Work measures have pressured the unemployed to take part-time and temporary positions.

The Labor Party for a long time attracted most support from the working class. The association between Labor and the industrial working-class towns has been close and important, with the party more identified with municipal services and state intervention. However, the assumption about the natural relationship between class and vote was challenged during the 1970s and 1980s by class dealignment theorists. Labor’s working-class support was by no means either solid or universal. Trade union membership does not correlate with voting Labor.

Working-class class awareness has always been strong, yet involvement in Labor politics has certainly declined. Many simply stopped participating, except in voting. The reduced energy of trade unions and the ethos of the “New Labor,” which neither proclaims nor prioritizes working-class interests, mean that one previous source of a sense of solidarity has declined. And revival seems very unlikely.

To conclude, the working class have lost the trade unions in the sense that most manual workers are no longer members, and they are no longer the section of the workforce that is most likely to be unionized. The working class have also lost the
Labor party in the 1990s, for the leadership of the New Labor made it clear that “it did not wish to be associated with any particular class,” and that “it valued its links with employers as much as its relationship with organized labor” (Roberts, 2001, p. 109).

**Transformation in working and living conditions.**

**Work and employment.**

In the course of the 20th century, there was a huge shift of structures of occupation and patterns of employment.

In the early decades of the century, the core industries were manufacturing, trade and transport. In 1901, a good third of the labor force were engaged in manufacturing industry, and if those employed in mining and construction were taken into account and added to the figure, then the proportion rose to about 46 per cent. Trade and transport took another 22 per cent. A further 22 per cent belonged to service industries. Lastly, agriculture employed 9 per cent. (Hopkins, 1991, p. 2) In the later decades, there were the expansion and diversification of manufacturing industries and the sharp decline of coal mining. However, employment in manufacture experienced decline which was relative after 1951, absolute after 1968 and disastrous after 1979 (Beynon, 2001, p. 32). With restructuring and contraction in the 1970s, closure of plants and mass redundancies greatly weakened organized manual labor in coal, iron and steel, engineering, shipbuilding, textiles and auto production. Take coal-mining for example, it had 740,000 miners in 1947, but the number had declined to 230,000 by 1983 and to just 12,000 by the end of the century (Beynon, 2001, p. 27). The British car industry was also especially badly hit by rounds of take-overs and
mergers. Between June 1979 and January 1981, Mrs. Thatcher's first 3 years, 23 per cent of all manufacturing jobs were lost, with only 5.4 million remaining in 1981. Overall, between 1979 and early 1991, manufacturing employment fell by more than 2 million. (Hill, 1999, p. 6) By the 1990s, employment in the manufacture, construction and mining made up no more than a quarter of the country's jobs (Beynon, 2001, p. 32). Mrs Thatcher's privatization reform led to roughly 2 million jobs being shifted from the public to the private sector (Roberts, 2001, p. 103). Train drivers are now among the country's best-paid manual workers.

With the shift from Fordist (mass production of standardized products, intensification of management) to post-Fordist production (disorganized capitalism, flexible specialization) and the ever-increasing importance of service industries, the second half of the century saw a massive increase of the clerical as well as professional and managerial occupations. "Between 1911 and 1981 white-collar workers (i.e. professional, managerial, supervisory and clerical) increased from under 14 per cent of the occupied population to over 43 per cent" (Edgell, 1993, p. 66). By the 1990s, services provided over 15 million jobs and 70 per cent of total employment (Beynon, 2001, p. 32). Accompanying this change, there has been a substantial growth of new and more diversified types of employment, e.g. part-time work, temporary work (either in casual jobs or on short-term contract), self-employment (especially in the 1980s), and flexible work, which are termed by Roberts as "sub-employment" (2001, p. 114) and "Mickey Mouse jobs" (2001, p. 104), employees of which are termed sarcastically by Huw Beynon as "hyphenated
workers" (2001, p. 34). In the hotel industry, part-time employment made up 26 per cent of all jobs in 1971 (21 per cent for women and 5 per cent for men); by 1991, the percentage fled to 44 percent of all jobs in the industry (33 per cent for women and 11 per cent for men) (Beynon, 2001, pp. 35-36). And employment growth in the 1980s and 1990s mainly lay in the sphere of part-time jobs. This post-Fordist change signifies the end of secure full-time long-term employment for a large section of the labor force creating a pool of long-term unemployed; yet it has boosted female employment in the job market, though many are in vulnerable positions. In the first half of the century, women formed only 30 per cent of the workforce; but from the mid-century the percentage rose continuously and reached 44 per cent in 1997 (Gallie, 2000, p. 318). A natural consequence of all these changes is the drastic reduction of the size of the manual workers and its percentage in the general work force. The census reported that in 1951, there were 15.6 million manual workers, constituting 72 per cent of the workforce, but by 1991, the figure was only 9.8 million, representing 42 per cent (Abercrombie & Warde, 2000, p. 152). In 2001, they made up only 27 per cent of workers (Storry & Childs, 2002, p. 191).

With regard to unemployment, while there were one million unemployed in 1924, the figure rose to 2.5 million in 1931 (Lowe, 1989, p. 450, 477) pressed with the world economic crisis in 1930-1. The problem was greatly relieved with post-war relative full-time employment, so in 1954, the registered unemployed was only 260,000 (Kirk, 2003, p. 78). But the long-term relative economic decline and the oil crisis pushed unemployment in the 1970s towards two million (Roberts, 2001, p. 96).
Then with Mrs Thatcher's curbing inflation at the expense of mass unemployment, between 1979 and 1982, the figure more than doubled and stayed at over 3 million from 1982 until 1986\(^5\) (more than 10 per cent of the work force), then dropped to over 2 million in 1991 (Hill, 1999, p. 6). In 1982, 40 per cent of all male workers in Liverpool were jobless (Kirk, 2003, pp. 78-79). The most vulnerable groups were the craft, operative and non-skilled workers. Unemployment situation in the whole 20\(^{th}\) century can be explicitly shown with the following maps.

Figure 2: Unemployment rates, UK, 1900-96 (Gallie, 2000, p. 314)

Figure 3: Numbers unemployed, UK, 1900-96 (Gallie, 2000, p. 314)

\(^5\) The more specific figure for unemployment in 1982 was 3,400,000 and unofficial estimates put the total at four million (Kirk, 2003, p. 78).
Roberts accurately summarized main changing trends as "a shift of manual employment from extractive and manufacturing industries to services, from large to small establishments, from city-center locations and older industrial estates to out-of-town Greenfield sites, and increases in the proportion of women and ethnic minorities in the manual (as in the non-manual) workforce" (2001, pp. 100-101). The working class is more fragmented now than in the past.

**Life experiences.**

The work for the working class in the 19th century was usually arduous and often dangerous; workers needed to cooperate and depend on each other for physical safety and mutual support. Thus came the working-class comradeship, or mateyness, and the "us-them" frame of mind. At the same time, the families had to live close together to where the workers were employed. Working-men's clubs, pubs, football, chapel, brass bands, etc. were developed and became the foundations of working-men's leisure and working-class community. Material hardship could hardly be coped without family and community support. So, cooperative movement was developed during the 19th century, which played a major educational, social and political role. The most successful type was the consumers' cooperative: stores owned by shoppers, and therefore able to pass-on any profits to ordinary members.

By the 1890s, a distinctive working-class culture had emerged, based upon a sense of neighborhood and mutual support. And soon a labor movement consisting of co-operative societies, trade unions and the Labor Party became a unifying force. These values were called "populist", involving a pride in work and in mutual support.
in combating poverty, a delight in having a good time, a derision of privilege, which were all celebrated by Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957).

The state intervened in working-class life, making limited and slow progress in all aspects. Workers’ welfare started to be built before the First World War. The first National Insurance Act of 1911 compulsorily insured all workers against ill-health and introduced an insurance scheme against unemployment for workers most subject to unemployment; an old age pension scheme was also introduced in 1908 (Hopkins, 1991, pp. 25-26). After 1918, municipal activity increased extensively in the provision of hospitals, education and housing. The Labor became a party increasingly identified with the provision of urban public services. The establishment of the state welfare system during the first Labor majority government immediately after the Second World War marked the historical high of Labor achievements. In addition, working hours were much reduced. Starting with The Coal Mines Act (1908) introducing a maximum eight-hour working day for miners, the 54-hour common week before 1919 was reduced to 48 hours in many industries in the year. The 1930s saw a noticeable spread of the five-day week. The Holidays with Pay Act (1938) benefited about half of the manual workers in the country. (Hopkins, 1991, pp. 16-17) Elementary education became first compulsory in 1880, and then free in 1891 (Hopkins, 1991, p. 2) and secondary education was made compulsory and free in 1944. General improvement in physical safety at work was achieved with dramatic fall over the century in the number of people who were killed at work. With the postwar apparent job security, national welfare system, rising real wages and the
arrival of paid holidays, Britain’s working class were said to “have come into their own;” and for the first time in history, “they were at least no longer on the defensive” (Taylor, 2005, p. 374).

So, in the 1950s, there was a traditional picture of typical, usually male, members of the working class. They left secondary school to easily get a job as a manual worker. They spoke with a regional accent and lived in a close-knit community of terraced houses. They enjoyed a pint down the local pub, a bet, a trip to the football match and a tour to a scenic spot such as a beach. They joined trade unions and always voted Labor and enjoyed a shared experience. They also passionately got involved in popular culture. According to Hoggart’s account, the main threat was not from bulldozers and urban redevelopment so much as the mass media—the press, radio, the cinema, and especially television. Moreover, the imported American culture was seen as destroying traditional working-class culture and replacing it with something more shallow and less authentic.

In the 1960s, the working class continued to benefit tremendously from the new way of life brought over by general affluence. Their living standard further rose with continuing wage increase, better housing, better health, more equal education from the practice of comprehensive secondary schools by the Labor government and the expansion in higher education, more consumer durables and longer holidays. Goods and services formerly associated with the middle classes, such as soft home furnishings, television sets, washing machines, motor cars and holidays abroad, were now being enjoyed by more and more working-class families. All this brought
positive and lasting gains to the working class and particularly to women, who benefited substantially from the labor-saving washing machine, fridge, and car as well as from mass advertising. Working class popular culture, like fashion, rock music, subculture style, the glossy magazines, all flourished. The working class “as a whole attained unprecedented *visibility*” (Marwick, 2005, p. 83). Meanwhile, social moral standards became much more tolerant, leading to the terming of the decade as the permissive “swinging” sixties. Along with security of employment and the permissiveness of the society came the significant increase in individual liberty. All this seemed to indicate “the dawning of a new age for the working classes” (Hopkins, 1991, p. 268). Sociologists much talked about the homogenization of incomes and living standards of skilled workers and white-collar workers.

The rise in living standard tended to encourage working-class families to turn themselves inwards. Academic such as Zweig drew attention to how affluence made nuclear families less dependent on kin and neighbors, thus weakening one of the roots of traditional working-class culture (Roberts, 2001, p. 90). The spread of consumerism, the explosion of material and cultural goods like the telly, glossy magazines, cinema, fashion and etc. were seen to represent “progress” (affluence) and, conversely, “decline” (erosion of traditional values). Many Labor leading members began to criticize the working class for pursuing a guiltless materialism and a more individualistic attitude toward life. The belief that the British proletariat could be expected to play the revolutionary historical role of launching a class war became shattered. The working class were gradually being shifted from producers to
consumers and even trendsetters. Their collectivism based on sectional self-interest also undermined the general worker solidarity. More public spending on welfare, health and education also led to rise in taxation and statutory and compulsory wage restraint. Upward social mobility certainly increased but the extent of embourgeoisement was still only relative and limited, according to the Luton investigation report.

In the 1970s, working class suffered from economic crisis and industrial restructuring. The decade witnessed more industrial disputes and strikes, some big events caused great inconvenience to people’s daily life and ignited their anger. The media was full of sensational negative coverage of strikers. So the miners simply had to be defeated with whatever means and “the ‘nation’ had to be mobilized against the miners by projecting the crisis right into the heart of every British family” (Hall, 1988, p. 20). The happenings were made full use of by Mrs Thatcher in her later tough stance in curbing trade unions. After the mid-1970s, the working class were faced with mass unemployment and more unstable part-time jobs. There was obvious division between those who remained in work and those who were either out of work or in low-paid jobs. However, women in the decade harvested a lot, especially with the emancipating acts. The Equal Pay Act 1970 stipulated equal pay for equal work and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and 1986 legally ended discrimination against women in employment, education, housing, as well as in other service areas. More married women went out to work. Yet as married women earners were more likely to be found in families where their spouses were working than where the spouses were
unemployed, the income gap widened between families with jobs and without.

In the 1980s, working-class life was much influenced by privatization, deindustrialization, the record-high mass unemployment, Mrs Thatcher’s notion of enterprise culture and individualism. In 1989 Alan Sinfield observed that unemployment in Britain was not just a consequence of recession, but “40 to 50 per cent has been variously estimated as due to government policies” (1989, p. 254). Tom Narin in The Breakup of Britain suggested that economic policy — what he termed Mrs Thatcher’s experiment — was “no more than an attempt to utilize the recession to hasten and complete the dominance of financial capital. The apotheosis of ‘Freedom’ is de-industrialization: southern hegemony permanently liberated from the archaic burden of the Industrial Revolution’s relies, the subsidies that prop them up, and the trade unions that agitate for them.” (as cited in Kirk, 2003, p. 78) The steepest decline was in the skilled manual jobs in manufacturing and extractive industries, replaced by industries of service, finance and information technology.

Poverty increased with high unemployment and the cut in welfare and public spending by the Thatcher government. The post-war trend of convergence of social classes was stopped and reversed as inequalities widened on a significant scale. An underclass was seen to be emerging whose deprivations are many and severe. But on the other hand, the living standards of people with jobs continue to improve, especially for those with jobs in those rising professions.

Home ownership was promoted with the sale of council houses at discount prices. So was the ownership of shares, especially in the newly privatized industries.
of gas, water and electricity; the first issues of shares in these industries were very heavily publicized. "In 1987, 25 per cent of all men owned shares: among skilled manual workers, the figure was 17 per cent, among the semi-skilled 13 per cent, and among the unskilled, 9 per cent" (Hopkins, 1991, p. 273). Working class voters, the aspiring and respectable in the working class in particular, were found to ally more with conservative neo-liberal values of personal choice and individual freedom than with those of Labor, which were turning more toward the Left. Thus, "working class individualism" was seen in rise (Taylor, 2005, p. 382).

In the 1990s, much of the Thatcherite ideologies and policies were followed. Working-class house ownership continued to grow. "In 1996, 77 percent of skilled manual households, 56 per cent of semi-skilled and 38 per cent of unskilled either owned outright the house in which they were living in or were in the process of purchasing it on a mortgage" (Abercrombie & Warde, 2000, pp. 157-158). While life was easy for a new aristocracy of labor (of technicians and technologists) and the affluent workers, the overall condition of the low-paid appeared to have deteriorated, their life being marked by a loss of basic dignity and respect as well as limited self-worth. With lack of companionship and the anxiety about the security of employment and its low pay, people did not feel attached to a future, living in miserable hopelessness. New Labor introduced in 1999 a national minimum wage and a ceiling on compulsory working time, which were welcomed, but also viewed by Roberts as reluctant and half-hearted measures as the minimum pay is extremely low, and the ceiling on working time can be easily breached (2001, p. 102). The publicly
funded-welfare to work scheme to eradicate long-term unemployment was commented as pressing the unemployed to take whatever poor jobs offered. Some old culture and values survived, such as the brass bands which were still playing, but the problem for the faithful was that "the old roots have gone" and working-class power have waned (Roberts, 2001, p. 89).

On the whole, manual workers work longer hours. In 1998, the average working week for a male manual worker was 44.1 hours; for non-manuals, 38.1 hours (Abercrombie & Warde, 2000, p. 153). Manual workers have far less attractive prospect of promotion and suffer from greater insecurity of employment. As Reid comments, "It is difficult to see that political activity and social change in the 1980s and 1990s has done much other than to sustain, or even increase, existing class differences" (1998, p. 239).

**The “Underclass” and Devaluation**

Since the 1980s, the major division within British society has been between those with work and those without. A new underclass is seen to have developed and to be expanding. The term “underclass” was only used in a very limited sense in the 1970s by a few sociologists. In the early 1980s, Ralf Dahrendorf pointed out the increasing size of an “underclass” caused by mass unemployment and the devaluation of wage work, and its threat to British society and thus made the word better known. In the New Right political discourse of the early 1990s, the term “underclass” came

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into wider use, with the promotion by Charles Murray⁷, to refer to the section of the working class whose existence is characterized by a combination of “illegitimacy, violent crime” and “the tendency to drop-out from the labor force” (Murray, 1996, p. 25).

The “underclass,” according to Roberts (2001), refers to “excluded groups”—people “who are left out and deemed beneath the working class” (p. 110). It includes the following types of people: those who are very poor (welfare-dependent or single parent family); those who suffer chronic unemployment (either long-term or recurrent); those who are persistent criminal offenders; those with serious alcohol or drug dependency problems; those with serious physical mental or psychological disabilities (pp. 110-111). Roberts holds that an underclass has not been a reality yet, though “a real future possibility” (p. 117) if the level of unemployment persists.

What must be stressed here is that the term “underclass” does not refer to “the poorest of the poor,” but is highly ideological in the sense that it is not a “degree” of poverty, but a “type” of poverty. It covers “those who no longer share the norms and aspirations of the rest of society, who have never known the traditional two parent family, who are prone to abuse drugs and alcohol at the earliest opportunity, who do poorly at school and who are quick to resort to disorderly behavior and crime.” (Sunday Times, 23 May 1995, as cited in Haylett, 2000, p. 71). Thus, the underclass is seen to be characterized not so much by its lack of work and poverty as by its

⁷ Charles Murray is an American neo-conservative social scientist, pioneer of “underclass” theory. He was invited by the right-wing Sunday Times and the Institute of Economic Affairs to consider whether an underclass similar to the one he had discovered in America existed in Britain. He assessed in 1990 that a British underclass was “emerging” and in 1994 that the crisis was “deepening.” Murray cited the persistent unemployment among able-bodied young men, rise in violent crime, high rates of single mother, etc. as evidences of the existence of underclass in Britain (Roberts, 2001, p. 112)
attitudes and lifestyles. The underclass involves the most disadvantaged sections of a generally disorganized working class: excluded and detached, cut off from the consumer society and the normal, respectable working-class way of life, and politically apathetic. This group “makes up about 10 per cent of the population, having doubled from 5 per cent in 1979” (Haylett, 2000, p. 81).

The underclass debate was drawn into social policy debates as Murray took the “over-generous” welfare as the original cause of the formation of a British underclass. While the Left held that the underclass phenomenon was caused by unemployment, poverty and inadequate welfare leading to social exclusion, the Right emphasized the lack of qualification, skills, motivation and appropriate attitudes as primary reasons. The tendency is obvious of the privileged to blame the victims for their poverty or at least to try to distinguish between the deserving and the undeserving poor: the Victorian notion of the “deserving poor”—the good poor, who are industrious and know their place, as opposed to the underclass—the bad poor, the “working-class-gone-wrong” (Munt, 2000, p. 8), those “workshy scroungers” or “idle thieving bastards” (Roberts, 2001, p. 112), who deserve nothing. Murray’s underclass theory is in some ways “comforting for the already comfortable” (Roberts, 2001, p. 113). It assures them that they are not to blame, and that spending more of their taxes on welfare will actually do harm to the recipients. Generally, the underclass concept conceals the systematically destructive effects of capitalism on particular sections of the working class, e.g. the young, single mothers, ethnic minorities and the unemployed. It does this by moralizing these same effects in terms of individual and
cultural failings. On the other hand, it locates the source of value in society outside the working class. In its political discourse, the New Labor government addressed the issue of underclass as "social exclusion," and proposed to solve it by providing "equal opportunities" through education and training, especially for the young unemployed. By equalizing the underclass as simply social exclusion, the New Labor stance is thought to be too neutral for lack of sympathy.

This out-of-work underclass is divided from those in work. Sociologists are uncertain whether it is included or excluded from the working class. Roberts holds a mixed attitude. In his *Class in Modern Britain*, the ONS category 5, 6 and 7 is termed as "working class" and category 8 as "underclass" (2001, p. 25), and he writes "but a series of 'excluded groups' have been separated from the working class proper" (2001, p. 118). But he identifies that though this disadvantaged group differs from the "respectable" section of working class, a close look from the aspects of their work and market situations, characteristic life chances and especially class consciousness proves that the underclass should not be separated from working class. The self-definition of excluded groups always remains working class. (2001, pp. 113-116)

Stephen Edgell in *Class: Key ideas* argues that it is more useful "to regard the underclass as the underemployed and unemployed fraction of the working class...distinctive in its poverty" rather than as a separate social grouping (1993, p. 80).

In conclusion, there is no convincing evidence to prove that class differentiation has withered away in contemporary Britain. In the 20th century, much has altered in
working-class work and life with occupational restructuring and labor reorganization and the configuration of daily life. The traditional working class and manual workers is shrinking or in long-term numerical decline. Their community is lost. Manual workers become more mixed in gender and ethnicity. Higher absolute rates of upward mobility coexist with unemployment and precarious jobs. Resulting from the structural changes as well as the legislative restrictions since the 1980s, the trade unions have been greatly weakened.

At the same time, working-class living and consumption patterns have changed. There is no doubt that working class living standard greatly improved with the increase in productivity, shorter working hours and paid holidays, rise in real wages and larger choice in consumer products. New modern housing has replaced the old ones, though the relocation of which is thought to have destroyed working-class communities. Television and motor cars brought people more family-centered. Continuing education has become more general. Though for the long-term unemployed the story is different. Family instability has been a headache for society, especially with underclass single-parent.

Working class has become more heterogeneous within itself. Those in skilled and rare trades, such as plumbers and electricians, are earning good middle-class salaries. Train drivers and firefighters perceive themselves as “professionals” and reject what they claim as “manual workers’ wages”. At the bottom is the “underclass” of the unfortunate, welfare-dependents, causal and miserably paid workers—more generally known as “the poor.” (Marwick, 2005, pp. 84-85) Class structure becomes
more blurred and complicated to define and classify. Attention also needs to be paid to the different situation of women, youth and ethnic minorities. The expansion in private service jobs and public services provided women with more opportunities for advance than was possibly for men. Women’s wages have become an essential part of household income. Women have become more independent, attending increasing all-female social activities outside home, an extreme example being the popular male striptease performance by the most famous Chippendales, who were viewed by women as sex objects. But women without skills suffer from boring low-paid part-time jobs or joblessness. Ethnic minorities experience an “ethnic penalty” (Roberts, 2001, p. 211). Their occupational achievements are lower, their risks of unemployment are higher, and they live in run-down inner-city areas. Youth are more fragile in the labor market, haunted with crisis of masculinity as they are unable to obtain men’s jobs and cannot shoulder family duties.

So Britain’s working class today has been transformed and fragmented. In this process, it has been disempowered, devaluated and marginalized. For disempowerment, it has lost the trade unions in the 1980s and the Labor Party in the 1990s; the co-op has become just another retailer; working men’s clubs and community bonds have been largely replaced by television and commercial leisure. This results in a disorganized working class which has lost its capacity for collective actions. There is little hope for “the poor” to remedy their inferiority; protest is useless. For devaluation, it is now very difficult to develop shared knowledge of its

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8 The trade unions have changed their names to less confrontational, more winsome and more technical-sounding titles, e.g. Amicus and Unison. The Mineworkers became the Mine Technicians; “worker” became a “taboo word.” (Mount, 2004, pp. 60-61)
interests and common inspirations. “Identifying with the working class is no longer associating oneself with a powerful group, or a way of life with features that others should envy” (Roberts, 2001, p. 109). Beverley Skeggs’ (1997) ethnographic study of 83 young working-class women in an industrial town in north-west England for over 12 years found that “working-classness was treated as a stigma” (Roberts, 2001, p. 109). For marginalization, few spoke any longer of or on behalf of the working class. The country is “now dominated overwhelmingly by the broad, diverse and ill-defined middle classes” and “the very term—class—is now often frowned upon and even derided as obsolete for our understanding of the post-industrial age” (Taylor, 2005, p. 386). The advice of governments to working-class parents and their children favor individual escape—“get qualified and get out” (Roberts, 2001, p. 109). Unfortunately, in a society where over a third of all jobs are still working-class, the dream is not so easy to come true.

Working class images in social realism films have recorded vividly the past and present, or rise and fall, of British working class. The following chapters will explore the films representations, study the changing identity of British working class on screen in different periods of time, and analyze ideology and resistance in cinematic portrayal of working class fate.
CHAPTER IV

WORKING CLASS IDENTITY IN NEW WAVE FILMS

British working-class screen identity before the Second World War was far from fair. Paul Rotha pointed out in 1936 that working-class people were often depicted “either as creatures of fun, Cockney types or rustic half-wits, or as dishonest rogues, tramps and pick pockets” (as cited in Rowbotham & Beynon, 2001, p. 2). The Grierson Documentary Film Movement in the 1930s, which started the British social realism tradition, offered some counter-balance. For Rotha, it “represented the first attempt to portray the working class in Britain as a human, vital factor in present day existence” (as cited in Higson, 1995, p. 197). The Second World War further cemented social realism as the preferred mode for British films. In critics’ calling for realism of setting, content and character, the working class, within limits, was “treated seriously for the first time in the mainstream cinema” (Richards, 1988, p. 59). Then the Free Cinema Movement between 1956 and 1959 helped to train some young directors who soon became famous directors of the British New Wave films.

The New Wave films are landmark social realist films, directed by young talents like Tony Richardson, Lindsay Anderson, Karel Reisz, along with Jack Clayton and John Schlesinger. They are usually seen as typically represented by Room
at the Top (Jack Clayton, 1959), Look Back in Anger (Tony Richardson, 1959), Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (Karel Reisz, 1960), A Taste of Honey (Tony Richardson, 1961), A Kind of Loving (John Schlesinger, 1962), The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner (Tony Richardson, 1962), This Sporting Life (Lindsay Anderson, 1963). With industrial working-class characters placed at the center of their narratives, the films portray the working class at a key moment of economic and social change, displaying working class identity to full extent.

This chapter aims to look at working-class identity in British New Wave films. It will firstly briefly survey the working-class representation in the Grierson Documentary Movement, the Second World War films, the Free Cinema Movement for social realism tradition, and then focus on two New Wave films—Room at the Top and Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, which are all popular, influential and representative of the New Wave, as case studies. It argues that the New Wave films successfully presented the lifestyle and aspirations of an emerging new working class, displaying to full extent their masculine energy and sexuality, class pride, youthful discontents and rebellion, greater individuality, desire for social mobility, confidence in change for the better, and resistance as well as conformity to consumerism. The protagonists are alienated working class male who aspires to find a role for himself in a fast changing affluent and materialistic world, yet often trapped by the high cost or compromise he has to bear.

From the Grierson Documentary Movement to the New Wave

The documentary tradition.
The Grierson Documentary Film Movement is taken as Britain's "most important contribution to cinema as a whole" (Dodd & Dodd, 1996, p. 38). The Movement envisioned film as being "a serious, committed, engaged cinema," with primarily a social responsibility, unlike Hollywood movies, which functioned essentially as escapist entertainment (Higson, 1986, p. 74). In Grierson's own phrase, the documentary film is for "national education" (as cited in Murphy, 2000b, p. 125) and must "put the working man on the screen" (as cited in Aitken, 2009, p. 179). For the movement's young directors such as Anstey, "the working man can only be a heroic figure" (as cited in Hood, 1983, p. 107), as they believed that providing positive images of working-class individuals and communities could play a role in the betterment of society and national cohesion. This attitude reflected the interest in and idealization of the working class, common among middle-class intellectuals in the 1930s and Grierson's team were overwhelmingly middle-class and mostly Oxbridge graduates. Hence, the documentary vision was seen as a vision from above and outside, mainly based on second-hand stereotypes rather than on first-hand observation.

The film-makers of the Movement were all kind of "sociologists." Taking documentary as a sociological device, they made many films on issues such as

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9 "British Documentary Movement" refers to a group of film-makers and the body of films and writings they crafted during the late 1920s and the mid-1940s. John Grierson (1898-1972) is regarded as the founder as well as the central figure of the movement for he was first to envisage that the crucial social role for cinema was to provide effective medium of communication between the state and the public, and to put his idea of documentary into practice with the film Drifters (1929). Following the success of Drifters, he established Empire Marketing Board Film Unit (EMB). When EMB was abolished by the Act of Parliament in 1933, the film unit was re-established as General Post Office (GPO) Film Unit (1933-1939). During World War Two GPO Film Unit was transferred to the Ministry of Information and put to work in the war effort as the Crown Film Unit. The movement's importance diminished after the war and the Crown Film Unit was abolished in the early 1950s.
poverty, pollution, housing policy, nutrition, education, unemployment, and dealt with the desires of the multitude of working people instead of an individual hero-protagonist. The documentaries dealt with working-class life in all aspects, presenting the dignity and heroism of labor.

*Drifters* (1929) is a film about the work of herring fishermen in the North Sea. Hard, honest labor is exalted with many sequences displaying the skills and techniques of fishing. Through the portrayal of heroic work on the boats and in the harbor, traditional working class masculinity, dignity and community are celebrated. *Industrial Britain* (1933) deals with the socially useful labor of Britain’s craftsmen and the proud tradition of craftsmanship, showing the ardor and bravery of common labor. *Night Mail* (1936) is concerned with one aspect of the work of the General Post Office (a public institution) --the night mail from London to Scotland. *Coalface* (1935) furnishes general information about coal production, while dwelling in more detail on harsh working conditions within the mine and on the individual experience of miners. *Today We Live* (1937) touches on the social hardship caused by unemployment in a Welsh mining community. *Housing Problems* (1935) deals with slum housing and presents the form of model council estate as an alternative. The film, for the first time in British cinema, made working-class people actually speak on screen as opposed to being spoken over. *Enough to Eat* (1936) deals with poor nutrition. *Spare Time* (1939) maps the leisure of the working class.

The Grierson documentaries tend to deal with the work of a particular “public” institution that can be broadly perceived as social (such as the General Post Office)
and concentrate on a multitude of workers instead of the desires of just one individual hero-protagonist. In order to construct the idea of a common public sphere, labor is taken out of the context of capitalist economic class relations; the interests of the capitalist class are transformed into the public interest. Similarly, the party political government becomes “subsumed into the idea of the benevolent state, above divisive politics” and the audience is addressed as “a citizen of the nation, not as a subject of one or another antagonistic class, race or sex” (Higson, 1986, p. 77). Thus *Housing Problems*, sponsored by the British Commercial Gas Association and the London County Council (LCC), was made to publicize the role of the gas companies in aiding slum clearances and the effectiveness of LCC in dealing with the problem of slum poverty. However, the detailed stories of poor health and child mortality that were told by people living in slums instead of being told by voice-over were still powerful enough to reduce the working class as social victims who could not help themselves and needed aid from the state and sympathy from society. *Enough to Eat* recognizes it as the duty of the state to provide the material means for better nutrition and the citizen’s duty to eat better. These social problems are “removed from the arena of antagonistic power relations and depoliticized, and the films effectively construct the working class as victims deserving of ‘our’ (i.e., the public’s) sympathy” (Higson, 1986, p. 78). Montage editing is mobilized to strengthen a sense of unity and harmony rather than of conflict and contradiction. Dodd & Dodd acknowledge the “victim” portrayal of the working class, but see more of a counter-representation of
male working "hero" --the fetishising of the working class male body engaged in hard, honest labor through countless close-ups (1996, p. 43).

**The Second World War films.**

The war films’ attachment to realist methods and a socially progressive outlook derived from general feeling that it was right and necessary to show people from all walks of life pulling together for the common good. So the war promoted “democratization and documentarization” (Richards, 1988, p. 59) of British films. Many of the Grierson group worked during the war for the Crown Film Unit set up by the Ministry of Information. Class inequalities and cultural differences that had preoccupied the documentary movement were somewhat flattened out. As George Orwell observed, “class feeling slipped into the background, only reappearing when the immediate danger had passed” (as cited in Richards, 1988, p. 60). And the British wartime films also evoked specific values — bravery, loyalty, self-sacrifice, social harmony, unselfish pulling together for the common good.

The Documentary Movement was continued with the short documentaries such as *London Can Take It* (1940) and *Listen to Britain* (1941). But the Documentary Movement’s influence was more reflected in feature films embracing documentary elements. A large number of war films became story documentaries—hybrid of documentary and feature films. *The Lion Has Wings* (1939), the first feature-length film of the war, was a propaganda film intended to reassure the public of the might of the Royal Air Force (RAF). *Target for Tonight* (1941) is about a squadron of bombers on a night bombing raid over Germany which shows the RAF successfully fighting
back in the heart of Germany. It was commissioned by RAF Bomber Command, produced by the Crown Film Unit, and played by RAF personnel. *In Which We Serve* (1942) was inspired by and based on the true incident of Lord Mountbatten’s battle ship, HMS *Kelly*. The ship equals to the country, in which all Britons serve. In this film, the working, middle and upper-classes were clearly defined. The documentary-style photography presents a convincing picture of the prevailing mood of all classes pulling together for Britain through quiet heroism and the stiff upper lip. *Fires Were Started* (1943), acted by real firemen, was about fire fighting and London during the Blitz. *Millions Like Us* (1943) tells the story of a young daughter who is separated from her family and called up to work in a huge aircraft components factory and finds love with an RAF pilot. It touches upon the egalitarian concept of people’s war and harmonizes class discord. Women were directly addressed in order to encourage them to contribute to the war effort. *The Way Ahead* (1944) again glorifies the concept of people’s war and wartime populism through telling the story of seven civilians who are called up to the Army and take part in the North African invasion. *Western Approaches* (1944), paying tribute to the Merchant Navy, deals with the effort to defend the essential trade routes between Britain and America through the convoy system. The players are serving officers and men of Allied Navies and Merchant Fleets.

Some wartime features are not directly about war effort, but about harsh working class life and their expectation for new economic and social order after the war, giving voice to the emerging political consciousness. The best examples include
Love on the Dole (1941), The Proud Valley (1940), and The Stars Look Down (1940). There was a feeling that the past had to be acknowledged and a determination that unemployment, poverty, class conflict, injustice should not be repeated. John Baxter’s Love on the Dole tells the story a young brother and sister in 1930s Salford, both of whom fall victim to poverty and unemployment and have to make difficult decisions to survive. The problems it deals with are the Depression, mass unemployment, poverty, pre-marital pregnancy, riots and prostitution. The sentiments for change into a new, better and cooperative world are expressed by a postscript caption at the film’s end, signed by A.V. Alexander, the Labor MP and First Lord of the Admiralty, that read: “Our working men and women have responded magnificently to any and every call made upon them. Their reward must be a New Britain. Never again must the unemployed become forgotten men of peace.” (Aldgate & Richards, 1986, p. 14). On the other hand, the film reinforces the view that the British working classes who had survived such hardships would survive others in defense of the liberal democracy now under threat. Love on the Dole is praised for constituting an argument that poverty of the previous decade should be banished, replaced by a new start or a better and cooperative future. The Proud Valley gives a remarkably authentic portrait of a Welsh mining village, displaying the truly heroic image of the working class, proud in song and ready in danger and self-sacrifice. The film not only deals directly with opposition of the miners to a pit closure but also stars Paul Robeson, a well-known socialist activist. The Stars Look Down is about injustices in a coal mining community in Northeast England. It shows people’s different choices of escape, facing the
industrial action’s failure in dealing with safety issue: one has gained political consciousness and supports nationalization; one chooses to be businessman. Yet the protagonists’ attempt to escape always ends tragically. In Love on the Dole, the girl has to be the bookie’s tart to support her family; in The Stars Looks Down, Davy’s call for nationalization or union’s official support on saving the miners from working on the dangerous Scupper Flats seems all in vain. The film ends with the tragedy of inevitable coalface detonation and gas explosion. The working class figures are more represented as victims of the existing system, a system which deserves at least moral critique for producing hardship that the working class can hardly escape, if not a system that needs radical change or even revolution to alter it. Compared with the blind optimism of the 1930s, this is an improvement.

**The Free Cinema movement.**

The Free Cinema Movement is a documentary film movement represented by a series of six programs of shorts and documentaries presented at the National Film Theatre between 1956 and 1959, depicting the English working class on specific aspects of contemporary British social life. The word “Free” implies “an aspiration towards a cinema whose tone is neither ‘commercial’ nor ‘sponsored’” (Durgnat, 1970, p. 126). Filmmakers were free to choose the subjects that interested them as artists. The significance of the Movement lay in 2 aspects. Firstly, it helped to train three young directors—Tony Richardson, Karel Reisz and Lindsay Anderson—who went on to become famous directors of the British New Wave films. Secondly, the Free Cinema documentary and New Wave representation was seen to be from the
inside, as the directors were of working-class background, though grammar school beneficiaries of Butler’s 1944 Education Act and university-educated. The movement resembled the Grierson team of the 1930s with the same commitment to a realist aesthetic, the same middle-class romanticization of the working class, the same belief in location-shooting and rejection of studio artifice, but developed new concerns as summarized by Alan Lovell: “a sympathetic interest in communities, whether they were the traditional industrial one ... or the new, improvised one of the jazz club ...; fascination with the newly emerging youth culture ...; unease about the quality of leisure in an urban society ...; and respect for the traditional working class...” (as cited in Murphy, 1992, p. 11).

Anderson’s Every Day Except Christmas (1957) is about market life and the workers at the Covent Garden Market. It follows the loading, transport and delivery of goods to the Market, the sale of the goods and the aftermath. As Industrial Britain in the 1930s, the film looks at working-class faces with respect and continues the liberal humanist tradition of representing working people as dignified and heroic: “rough diamonds, you know, but jolly good fellows, and damned hard working.” And the emphasis is shifted from work as a process to work as fulfillment or even vocation. Apart from the general dignity of labor, the film also emphasizes local and national community. Reisz’s We are the Lambeth Boys (1959) tries to deliver sympathetically a positive portrait of the lives of ordinary teenagers, instead of the widespread violent youth delinquent images. Shot in a youth club in Kennington, South London, it follows a group of teenagers at work, at home and in their leisure time, and shows
much club activities. Young people are given space to express their frustrations and aspirations. The film lets the camera move around the youth or uses close-ups to capture their faces. Richard Hoggart praised the film in *Sight and Sound* that it sets out to show “not the whole truth, but some aspects of the truth, wholly” and succeeded in embodying “the strength and variety of these young people’s vitality, their lively, tolerant and complex sense of community” (*We are the Lambeth Boys*, BFI screenonline).

Soon the Free Cinema directors began to make New Wave feature films with working-class heroes based on the materials of working-class northern novelists. Due to the interest in the emergent youth culture and the respect for an authentic traditional working-class which was endangered by consumerism, the representations of working class people were more energetic and vibrant.

**The New Wave films.**

The British New Wave films, also called “Angry Young Man” films, “kitchen sink” realistic films, was a further development of the Grierson Documentary tradition, and drew from 3 contemporary sources. Firstly, it drew on Free Cinema Movement documentaries, as illustrated above. Secondly, its formal and stylistic characteristics were heavily indebted to the French New Wave. Thirdly, its literary sources came substantially from the revolting Angry Young Man literature and theatre.

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10 “Kitchen sink” was originally used to describe realist painters who chose to paint ordinary objects, but with *Look Back in Anger* it began to apply to the depiction of the ordinary, everyday life of the working class on screen.
productions\textsuperscript{11}, which determined its principal mood as one of discontent and dissatisfaction.

The New Wave films were born in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a time of full employment, especially of young people, and relative affluence of social development. Out of the affluence came the increased importance of the market and consumption and youth-oriented leisure industry. Mark Abrams in 1959 published his famous survey \textit{The Teenage Consumer}, revealing teenage consumption as the most distinctive product of these changes. Youth became the prime beneficiaries of the new affluence, as their real earnings had increased by 50\% since 1938, which is double the rate of expansion for adults, and their real "discretionary" spending has probably risen by 100\% (Abrams, 1959, p. 9). More and more women went out to work, including many married women. Affluence, embourgeoisement and political consensus became key popular terms in political debates of the period which tended to ignore those unpleasant social and economic class inequalities that continued to exist. Working class consciousness underwent changes concerning attitudes towards consumerism, sense of community and solidarity, and etc.

The New Wave films took an honest look at the people who lived in the grimy industrial communities in the Midlands and North of England. They were marked for their commitment to address contemporary social realities and, more importantly, to

\textsuperscript{11} Angry Young Man refers to the literary movement of the 1950s involving many new novelists and playwrights such as John Wain (\textit{Hurry on Down}, 1953), Kingsley Amis (\textit{Look Jim}, 1954), John Osborne (\textit{Look Back in Anger}, 1956), John Brain (\textit{Room at the Top}, 1957), Alan Sillitoe (\textit{Saturday Night and Sunday Morning}, 1958). Their writings expressed their anger and frustration as the postwar reforms failed to meet their demand for genuine social change. Their anger was toward the ineffectiveness of the government in eliminating poverty and inequality and toward the dominant political consensus that left the working class with the "loss of politics." Their protagonists are often proud and rebellious working-class figures.
“a politically serious representation of working-class experiences” (Hill, 1986, p. 1). They enriched British cinema with “an enhanced and expanded version of contemporary reality” (Lay, 2002, p. 59) through introducing new themes into the British cinema. They challenged wartime idealization of consensus and community, captured the new individualism in British culture, and delivered more energetic and vibrant representations of working class “authentic” experiences. Focusing on working class male protagonists, the films displayed to full extent their class confidence, masculine energy and sexuality, anger and rebellion, and mixed feeling toward mobility and consumerism.

Stylistically, the films set the stories in provincial, grey northern towns with natural surroundings of small terraced houses, factories and pubs. They used unknown regional stage actors mainly from the North in ensemble casts, whose fresh faces, vernacular accents and rebellious spirit helped immeasurably in strengthening the realistic mood. Typical example was Albert Finney in Saturday Night and Sunday Morning. His sudden stardom proved that “it was no longer necessary for passion, appetite, and enjoyment to be held in check,” and “the camera was no longer afraid of robustness and charisma” (Stead, 1989, p. 198). Besides, black-and-white photography and location shooting carry a decidedly authentic, documentary-like quality. So we see shots of cobbled streets, chimneys, factories, canals, pubs, the fairground, the bus journey, and the visit to the nearby countryside. The industrial landscapes and townscapes shots, especially “That Long Shot of Our Town From That Hill” (Higson, 1984, p. 17), had an almost exotic lure.
New Wave realism was seen by many critics as characterized by “poetic realism.” For Higson, poetic realism involves a more perfect conjunction of surface realism, which is “the ‘authenticity’ of place and character” involving “a fetishization of certain iconographic details,” and moral realism, which is a moral commitment to the representation of “ordinary people,” involving “a particular construction of the social in terms of ‘universal human values’” for which “films should show the dignity of the working man” (Higson, 1984, p. 4). It is a conjunction “which in fact, transcends ordinariness, which makes the ordinary strange, beautiful—poetic” (Higson, 1984, p. 5). Stylistic techniques often used to create this poetic realism include the use of sequences of establishing shots to give a sense of place, long and wide-angled urban landscape and townscape shots, particularly “That Long Shot of Our Town From That Hill” termed and explored in detail by Higson (1984), which lures the eye across the vast empty space of a townscape. Critic Roger Manvell called this “industrial romanticism” (as cited in Higson, 1995, p. 192), which seeks a kind of beautiful ugliness, transforming scarred images of cities and poverty into images of “comfortable contemplation” or “bringing beauty out of squalor” (Hill, 1986, p. 136). Poetic realism is intended “to psychologize rather than historicize the space” (Higson, 1984, p. 8) and to elicit sympathy from the morally committed audience for the working class protagonists as victims of the city.

As the major directors of the New Wave films are scholarship boys—working class males who benefited from free grammar school and university education and moved upward, Terry Lovell identifies that poetic realism represents a perspective of
Hoggart’s scholarship boy “looking back with nostalgia at a remembered childhood landscape” (1990, p. 370). It is only from a class position “outside and above the city” that the city can appear beautiful (Higson, 1984, p. 18). In essence, it is a combination of both insider and outsider’s view from someone who experienced the life and moved outside with considerable sense of loss and who identified in the young, sexually active male protagonist “a fantasy projection of the self he might have become had he remained” (Lovell, 1990, p. 370).

In a negative way, the aesthetic and the psychological of poetic realism “block access to the social and the historical” (Higson, 1984, p. 11). Often typical shots of a place or locale are presented without any particular narrative function. Hill criticizes such poetic shots and montages of the northern industrial landscape as being “visual abstractions...emptied of socio-economic content” (Hill, 1986, p. 136) which undermine the social messages.

The following part will do identity analysis, focusing on two films, which are all popular, influential and representative of the New Wave. Room at the Top is considered the first of the British New Wave of realistic and gritty film dramas. It won American Academy Awards (1960) for Best Actress in a Leading Role (Simone Signoret) and Best Writing Screenplay Based on Material from Another Medium and was nominated for 4 other Academy Awards (Best Picture, Best Actor in a Leading Role, Best Actress in a Supporting Role, Best Director). It also won three British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Awards. The film also earned an award at Cannes. Saturday Night and Sunday Morning took British Academy Awards
for Best Picture and Best Actor and won very good box office.

*Room at the Top* (Jack Clayton, 1959)

*Room at the Top* is Jack Clayton’s film of John Braine’s novel of the same title, telling the story of a young man who uses his good looks to gain mobility in a class-bound society.

Joe Lampton (Laurence Harvey) is a working-class lad determined to escape his working-class background and climb the social ladder through the shortcut of marrying Susan Brown ((Heather Sears), the daughter of a rich local industrialist. Joe has high ambitions. He has improved himself through education and has found a decent job as a clerk in the Treasury Department of the local government of Warnley, a town which is more prosperous than his grim northern industrial town of Dufton. He aspires to marrying out of his working-class background and soon sets his target on Susan Brown, for whom he joins the drama club of which Susan is a member. During the slow progress towards his goal, he is unexpectedly drawn into a fulfilling love affair with an older woman, penniless Alice Aisgill (Simone Signoret) who is also a member of the drama club. She is French and unhappily married. However, when he feels his relationship with Susan seems impossible and his heart strongly connected to Alice, Mr Brown presses him into marriage with Susan as Susan has been made pregnant by him. Joe is promoted to a comfortable position in Brown’s company. As a precondition, Joe must also abandon Alice, which leads to her suicide by drink-driving her car off the cliff. Joe realizes his goal, but his pursuit of upward mobility is achieved at high emotional and spiritual costs of suppressing the real
feeling—he does not really love Susan and his true love Alice dies and the wedding is shaded with regret.

Numerous critics have commented on the themes of *Room at the Top* as notable for “its comparative sexual candor and open acceptance of the go-getting hero’s greedy aspirations” (Brown, 1986, p. 160), for “class and the struggle for material success” (Leese, 2006, p. 59) or for “class power, class rigidities and the possibility of social mobility; and sex, frankly presented and still more frankly discussed” (Marwick, 1991, p. 74). For me, the film’s explicit and weighty emphasis on class and sex needs to be firstly acknowledged, at the same time I would like to lay stress on Joe Lampton’s identity as an ambitious and confident working class “scholarship boy” who claims eligible to the new affluence and classlessness. Joe Lampton simply signifies the arrival of a new kind of working-class lad targeting big in times of change.

Class obviously is a key theme, which can be subdivided into class difference, class mobility and class confidence.

Class difference is firstly an explicit physical existence. When Joe arrives to report to the Treasury of Town Hall, Mr. Hoylake assures him that he’ll “find big differences” in Warnley, not only work, but also “a different class of people” who pride themselves on “being civilized here in Warnley.”12 Although Joe tries to defend his hometown in front of Mr Hoylake that “Dufton is not much of a place but ... we’re not exactly savages there,” deep in his heart, he sees it as a hopeless place as he later

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12 Quotations in this chapter with no citations are all taken from the scripts in the relevant films.
mentions it to his colleague: “Nobody ever goes to Dufton, they just pass through it;” Dufton seems like “a lifetime sentence.” To his uncle and aunt he also speaks high of his new town that “Warnley is a different kind of a town” with “a different sort of people.” Brown’s family property forms a sharp contrast to working class existence. Their house is like a castle, with a swimming pool. Susan’s clothing, car and boyfriend all display a world of affluence. The two richest families of the town, the Brown’s and the Wales’s, are “worth more brass than the rest of Warnley rolls together.”

Class difference and class barrier is marked deep in people’s mind and attitude. When Joe declares his ambition to have the lot that Mr Brown now has, Charles simply laughs: “No you’re not! Not in local government... In 20 years time, you could be sitting in Hoylake’s chair, and that is as high as you can go. And that means, a 1000 a year, a semi-detached downtown, a 2nd-hand Austin, and a wife to match if you know what I mean.” When Joe shows great interest in Susan after knowing she is the millionaire’s daughter, his colleagues keep warning him not to waste his time as Susan is “way up in the top drawer” and out of his reach. Joe’s immediate superior Mr Hoylake persuades him to give up Susan as Mr Brown “is a powerful man” with the biggest engineering works in Warnley and Joe had better find a girl of his own class (he technically uses the word “background”). Joe’s uncle also firmly believes that “Money marries money” and advises him to “Stick to your own people Joe.”

The way Mr and Mrs Brown deals with Susan’s love relationship with Joe vividly reveals class antagonism. When Mrs Brown first hears Joe’s name mentioned
by her daughter, her first response is “But we don’t know him, do we? Socially I mean.” Knowing that Joe is only a clerk, naturally she doesn’t think he’s “suitable.”

The couple uses every means to break the relationship. Firstly, Mr Brown phones Joe’s superior Mr Hoylake to talk to Joe into giving up Susan with persuasion as well as threat of “no promotion.” Then he purposefully highly recommends Joe to a firm in his hometown so as to send him away from Susan. He humiliates Joe with his condescending warning: “You want to improve yourself, you want to get in among the money. Alright, I don’t blame you for that. But you’re not getting my brass through Susan.” After Susan is pregnant, Mr Brown presses Joe into marrying her as soon as possible and settles everything (quitting the Town Hall job, breaking with Alice) for him without consulting him first.

Talking about the Brown’s, Joe is full of envy and hatred: “They’ve got just about everything, haven’t they?” With Mr Brown trying to arrange everything of his future before the marriage, he does not hide his resentment: “You can fix just about anything, can’t you?” He is particularly angry about the sense of superiority of Jack Wales, Susan’s suitor who shows contempt for Joe in every way: “That type they make me mad. The boys with the big mouths and a silver spoon stuck in them. But they think they can take everything worth having by sort of divine rights.”

Alexander Walker complains that “what one feels most strongly in Room At the Top isn’t anger--but envy--the envy of a have-not for what he wants to acquire” (1974, p. 45). But Murphy thinks this is “misleading” as John Braine is very specific about Joe’s attitude: “I tasted the sourness of envy. Then I rejected it. Not on moral grounds,
but because I felt then, and still do, that envy’s a small and squalid vice … This didn’t
abate the fierceness of my longing. I wanted an Aston-Martin, I wanted a three-guinea
linen shirt, I wanted a girl with a Riviera suntan—these were my rights. I felt, a
signed and sealed legacy.” (Murphy, 1992, pp. 13-14) To me, what makes Joe a
typical representative of new working-class lads is his strong sense or class
confidence that he has a right to the good things in life, a feeling that transcends envy.
He never tries to hide his hunger for a better life. When Charles Soames notices his
gaze at Susan and challenges him “Is that what you really want? A clerk’s dream; a
girl with a Riviera tan and a Lagonda?” Joe directly responds: “That’s what I’m going
to have.” When he sees Mr Brown’s huge “castle” mansion, he reasserts that “I’ll
have one of those. I’m going to have the lot.” When Charles Soames points out to him
the limit of his promotion in 20 years time, he once again insists “That’s why I’m
going to have the lot.”

Joe’s desire for upward mobility or “escape” is strong and unambiguous. Of
working class origin, he has already improved to a white-collar job through his
intelligence and grammar school education and is ambitious to go further. The film
begins with a journey that defines Joe’s working-class status from the start and his
eagerness to move up. Joe is leaving his grim industrial hometown to take his job in
Warnley. He sits in a railway carriage, smoking and reading a Nottingham local
newspaper with his shoeless feet high on the table. He is dressed in decent suit. Upon
arrival, he changes into a pair of new leather shoes, a symbolic gesture to show his
need for respect from others, and takes a taxi to the town hall. As he expects, he
attracts the attention of every secretary in the outer office of the Treasury Department and then meets privately with his boss, who teaches him on class difference. Coming out of the boss's office, he sets his eye outside an office window on the wealthy Susan Brown in luxurious dress and car in the street. His colleague, Charles Soames (Donald Houston), follows his gaze and warns “That’s not for you, lad,” to which Joe retorts: “That’s what I’m going to have.”

Joe understands that an easy way to move up quickly is through marriage with a rich girl, who is a kind of quarry he is highly motivated to hunt for. He quickly sets his target on Susan after he knows that Susan’s father is a millionaire and owns most of Warnley. According to very practical criteria of grading women-- “partly money, partly background and partly J. Lampton’s instinct” -- Susan is grade one on every account and is “so wholesome.” So Joe joins the drama club so as to be close to Susan and tells Susan directly that “I only joined the club because of you.” He does not “beat about the bush” in praising her beauty in great detail. As Charles Soames observes clearly, Joe’s feeling for Susan is “lust after her” for her family wealth. “I’m going to marry to Susan” is priority of priority for Joe. Talking to his uncle and aunt about Susan, he is not ashamed of stressing Susan’s family wealth and status: “Her father owns a factory. He’s on the council, Warnley council...He’s rolling in money.” He takes uncle’s warning of sticking to his own people as “old fashioned” class stuff and believes that things have changed since the war. So he feels nothing wrong in wanting both the girl and the money since he is “entitled to be in love with any girl.” So, he confidently claims that “If I want her, I’ll have her.” His final success in
marrying Susan is sincerely congratulated upon by his colleagues, which shows wide public approval for working-class entitlement for betterment.

However, Joe’s rise from working-class origin to lower middle-class clerk and to foreseeable eventual career success largely builds on an unloving marriage to a rich man’s daughter and the dumping of and the death of a woman who truly understands him and whom he actually loves. The story implies vividly that working class can only rise at high costs, in Joe’s case, the cost being the sacrifice of personal happiness as well as honesty and integrity; or in Stead’s word, “the emasculation of personality” (Stead, 1989, p. 189M), and in Shafer’s words, spiritual death and the loss of his “own values and independence” (Shafer, 2001, p. 6).

As a representative of the rising working class, Joe is aggressive and very sensitive in defending his class dignity and pride. When he is rehearsing in the theatre and pronounces the word “Brazier” wrongly, which is heartily laughed at by everybody watching and commented by Alice as “Erotic vise among the working class,” he feels deeply hurt and loudly proclaims that “Let me tell you, I am working class. ...Working class and proud of it!” When Alice asks him if he can drive, he retorts “My father didn’t know engineering works or a mill. He never even owned his own house. But that doesn’t mean that I can’t drive a car or pronounce brazier.” However, while he has full courage and confidence in claiming the eligibility of the best things for him, his sense of pride is somewhat shaded with diffidence. Though Joe refuses to admit, Alice sharply points out that “Your trouble is you don’t believe enough in yourself.” And it is ironic that he only feels to be “the proudest man in the
world” when he is with Alice, a penniless lover. So Alice honestly advises that “You’ve got so much Joe... Everything. You don’t ever have to pretend. Just have to be yourself.” But Joe is extraordinarily brave and dignified in turning down Mr Brown when the latter tries to buy him off with alluring terms for him to leave Susan forever.

*Room at the Top* is also about sex and love and the story develops along two lines, that with Susan and that with Alice. Joe’s value concerning love and marriage is perplexed yet practical, which worries his colleague Charles Soames, who timely warns him, “you can’t do it, you know you can’t woo two women. Not in a town this size.” Joe is attracted by Susan’s wealth and beauty and at the same time by Alice’s understanding and serenity. As the relationships develop, he is drawn closer and closer to Alice. With Alice, he is relaxed and can be himself. Alice’s love and sexual passion makes him feel he is “the proudest man in the world.” Alice’s alertness and understanding for his moods and feelings and subsequent consolation relieves his stress and aggressiveness. Emotionally, he wants to stay with her and they even discuss about Alice’s divorce so as to be together. Yet the following external circumstances press him to break off the relationship. Alice’s husband refuses to divorce her and threatens to rid Joe of his precious job and even sue him for enticement. Susan is made pregnant by him and her father makes a generous offer he cannot refuse. So out of selfish calculation, Alice is sacrificed for Joe’s upward mobility. Her resulting horrible death fills Joe with deep regret: “I’ve murdered her... I killed her...Everybody knows I killed her. I wasn’t planning but I killed her.” Joe’s
relationship with Susan is much simpler. He is simply taking advantage of her to realize his greedy ambition and to compensate for his frustrations in the hierarchical society.

In Room at the Top, women are treated seriously with the only exception of Mrs Brown, whose disgusting snobbishness invites our loath and contempt. Alice can be herself in whatever situations. When scolded by Joe for being frivolous in having been a nude model once, she does not abandon her independence in exchange for Joe’s favor, as she declares, “Now listen, I own my own body and I’m not ashamed of it. And I’m not ashamed of anything I’ve ever done.” Unlike Joe, she does not envy the wealth of the Brown’s as she tells Joe “Who cares?” She is honest and passionate about love and sex. Joe praises her heartily that “You’re such an honest person. Why the hell do you have to be so honest? Darling I’m glad you’re honest. I love you for it.” More significantly, Alice functions as “the moral force of the film” (Street, 1997, p. 82) and a spiritual guide to Joe. In two scenes she teaches Joe philosophically to be himself and to be proud of himself, one during their love-making outing (scene 1), the other during their final break-up talk (scene 2), both of which are crucial for our deeper understand of Joe’s identity:

Scene 1:

Alice: You’re stronger now. More sure of yourself. I was so angry with you at first when you wanted Susan. Seemed to want things for all the wrong reasons. And you didn’t see how you were damaging yourself as a person. You weren’t proud to be you, just to be yourself. But you’re proud now, aren’t you?

Joe: Oh, yes, now I am the proudest man in the world.

Alice: You’ve got so much Joe... Everything. You don’t ever have to pretend. Just have to
be yourself.

Scene 2:

Alice: You've done very well for yourself Joe. Finally, you've got everything you wanted, haven't you? There's something you have never understood, Joe. These people are the top. They are the same as anybody else, but you had it inside of you, to be so much bigger than any of them. You just had to be yourself, that was all. With me you were yourself, only with me.

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Susan is rich, but not snobbish. She is warm, lovely, yet a bit too simple, for she feels Joe's absent-mindedness and strangeness but cannot see through the truth. Both Susan and Alice seem to have been made use of by Joe; Susan is put into a loveless marriage and Alice is punished to death. Such a fate reveals a misogynist tendency, although the two women are treated with sympathy.

*Room at the Top* was widely acknowledged for its honest treatment of adult sexuality. The immediate popular reaction was to its sexual content, which was seen as “savagely frank and brutally truthful” (Lowenstein, 2000, p. 224) and for which the film was advertised as “A Savage Story of Lust and Ambition” (Aldgate, 2005, p. 108). The sex scenes were shot with a frankness, sensuality as well as sincerity never tried before. The British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) offered the film an “X” certificate for its “good adult entertainment” (Aldgate, 2005, p. 106) which was “made with sincerity” (Aldgate, 2005, p. 111). BBFC Secretary John Trevelyan viewed the film as “a milestone in the history of British films” as well as “the history of British film censorship” (as cited in Aldgate, 2005, p. 105). Critic Frank Jackson
commented in 1959, “At long last a British film which is truly adult. *Room at the Top* has an ‘X’ certificate and deserves it - not for any cheap sensationalism but because it is an unblushingly frank portrayal of intimate human relationships” (as cited in Aldgate, 2005, p. 111).

*Room at the Top* ends with the news of Alice’s horrible death and Joe’s wedding with Susan. Joe is congratulated on achieving his ambitions. His tears of deep regret and self-accusation on his wedding day is mistaken by his wife Susan for tears of happiness and sentimental personality.

Stylistically, *Room at the Top* is more conventionally made than later New Wave films. Its casting is more orthodox, except that it uses a glamorous French actress, Simone Signoret, to play the sexually experienced Alice. Murphy argues that, by making Alice a foreigner, the filmmakers “put her outside the English class system and change her into a symbol of honesty and true love” (1992, p. 14).

In conclusion, *Room at the Top* inaugurated the New Wave. Its significance lies in “taking its hero’s self-interested aspirations seriously” and in “its emotional and sexual candour” (McFarlane, 1986, p. 137). Though it is honesty about sex which attracted more media and censorship attention, it is honesty about class aspirations which is more thought-provoking. As John Braine, author of the original novel, put it: “The new dimension of the film was in presenting a boy from the working classes not as a downtrodden victim, but as he really was. It wasn’t important that Joe Lampton was honest about sex, what was important was that Joe was honest about the whole business of class. Most ambitious working-class boys want to get the hell out of the
working class. That was a simple truth that had never been stated before." (as cited in Richards, 1992, p. 221)

Peter Hutchings views the film as “an old-fashioned morality story in which the desire for material possessions leads inevitably to unhappiness” (2009, p. 305). I take the film as meaning much more than that. Joe’s upward mobility serves as a facilitator for people to think about the identity of the rising working class and the nature of the old British class system. Joe’s seeming success is in reality a tragedy which expressed the resentment of the first generation of working-class children who benefited from the 1944 Education Act but were still trapped in a society far from the classless, populist utopia the consensus politics had promised. Though Joe’s acceptance and merge into a higher class breaks the class rigidity, indicating some social progress, his success can only be a tragic one and can hardly be reproduced or popularized to the vast working class still stifled by socioeconomic restrictions and class barriers.

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (Karel Reisz, 1960)

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning is a 1960 production directed by Karel Reisz adapted from the novel of the same name by Alan Sillitoe. It portrays the life of Arthur Seaton (Albert Finney), an affluent, talented, and rebellious young factory worker in Nottingham, who spares no effort in seeking pleasure from life until finally trapped into conformity and marriage on a new housing estate.

Arthur is depicted as “an archetypal angry young man” (Lay, 2002, p. 71) rebelling instinctively against the society. He hates the tedium and restrictions of his work and domestic life. At work, he stands all day in a noisy workshop, matching his
activities to an unrelenting machine tool's movements and reciting his credo, “What I’m out for is a good time. All the rest is propaganda.” After work, he drinks and brawls hard and has an affair with Brenda (Rachel Roberts), the wife of his older work-mate, Jack. He also has a young and beautiful girlfriend, Doreen (Shirley Anne Field), who works in a hairnet factory. When Brenda gets pregnant and Jack discovers the affair, Jack’s brother and brother’s friend, two angry soldiers, give Arthur a vicious beating. After recovering, Arthur returns to work, and the film ends with Arthur and Doreen discussing marriage and the future new house, suggesting Arthur being trapped into marriage and a life of consumerism on a new housing estate.

By discovering Arthur, a new folk hero, British cinema made its most powerful statement about the working class. The *Daily Worker*’s Nina Hibbin complimented on the film: “Most of us know someone like Arthur;” “it is the best, most accurate and profoundest film that has yet been made in England—here at last” about working class lads and it “is a film which, not only in the contemporary fashion, is about the working class, but also of and for the working class” (as cited in Stead, 1989, pp. 193-194). The film’s strengths were those of social realism, with vivid realist depiction of Arthur as a typical factory worker of the period. Isabel Quigly also spoke highly of the film as “the first British feature film in which today’s working-class world has appeared ... people today with today’s attitudes and outlook and today’s money” (as cited in Laing, 1968, p. 123). Arthur Seaton, with his masculine energy, confidence and sexual arrogance, signified the emergence in British post-war affluence of a new breed of British working men, who earned high wages but
distained for being told what to do, who enjoyed hedonistic freedom and were irresponsible as long as they could get away with it, yet who were still pressed to confirm. The title *Saturday Night* refers to the hedonistic enjoyment of Arthur (drinking, fighting, womanizing) and *Sunday Morning* refers to his settling down through acceptance of marriage and conformity to conventions. The film portrayed a working-class rebel with sympathy.

A close text analysis distinguishes Arthur’s character in the following aspects.

First of all, Arthur is an efficient, yet alienated worker. He works as a lathe-operator and is conscious and proud of his efficiency and good piece-work wage (instructed by his foreman not to leak how much he’s earning to others). He is first located in and identified in relation to his work place. The film opens with an authentic presentation of a busy and noisy industrial community of the Raleigh bicycle factory and with Arthur toiling at his lathe expressing in voice-over details of his job, its piece-work payment system, as well as his attitude toward his work and his workmates. He is fed up with the job in which men are treated like a part of the machine: “Nine hundred and fifty four, nine hundred and fifty bloody five. Another few more and that’s the lot for a Friday.” Yet he flaunts his pride in his own ability to be an efficient worker and a high earner: “I could get through it in half the time if I worked like a bull, but they’d only slash my wages so they can get stuffed!” When Doreen notices his generous spending on clothes, he explains “I get good wages.” He sees no hope for factory work as it is boring hard labor and causing physical pain (bad back): “work next week. I’ll be hard at it, sweating me guts out at that lathe. It’s a

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hard life if you don’t weaken.” “Work next week” or “work tomorrow” is murmured several times with knitted brows and in bewilderment. So Arthur does not look forward to his work, and he is not going to work hard: “I’ll have a fag in a bit, no use working every minute God sends.” He does not want to get on. He views Jack with sheer contempt for his wish to get on and for his obedience to the foreman Mr Robboe. He also despises the workmates of the older generation, who “got ground down before the war and never got over it.” As the film title suggests, the film is more about leisure than work. Clarke et al. see leisure as a significant life-area for the class, as Marx observed, “…The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself… His labor is therefore not voluntary but coerced; it is forced labor. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely the means to satisfy needs external to it.” (as cited in Clarke et al., 1976, p. 50) So the workplace is only briefly shown for four times and merely acts as the source of income to pay for Arthur’s relatively affluent, hedonistic lifestyle, helping to keep male dignity.

Secondly, Arthur is a “playboy.” He is tied to a factory lathe throughout the week, but tries hard to make up for it at the weekends. On Saturday night, he selects his flash suit, carefully does his hair style, and goes out for an evening in the pub, which is a popular working class culture. He enjoys boozing match and once has more than eight pints, obviously “having a good time” as commented by an old lady watching, after which he falls downstairs smiling. He enjoys betting, which for Doreen, is a waste of money. He does not want to be bound by marriage. For Arthur, people “must’ve been drunk to get married” and it “costs too much” to get married.
As unmarried girls would expect engagement and marriage with kisses and sex, he plays with Brenda, a married woman. Nothing seems to worry him: “I never worry, you know that,” as he told Aunt Ada. When having sex with Brenda, he never takes care, just doesn’t bother about the result, which results in Brenda’s craziness about pregnancy by him and they have to consult Aunt Ada for abortion. For Aunt Ada, “That’s a daft thing to do” and Arthur is a “brainless loon” and “ought to have more bloody sense.” Even then he is worried for only a short period. Arthur’s attitude toward Brenda suggests that he somewhat sees woman as objects, to be possessed, enjoyed and then cast aside for a better choice. He is a “fast worker” in his relation with Doreen, inviting her to a date in the cinema after knowing her for just a few minutes. He seeks to enjoy life every minute and doesn’t want to settle down: “You see people settle down and before they know where they are they’ve kicked the bucket.” Both Brenda and his cousin Bert feel that Arthur needs to “better come down to earth” or “keep [his] feet on the ground.” But Arthur’s hedonism is finally constrained. He is punished with Brenda’s pregnancy and the beating by the soldiers and contained by the marriage to Doreen.

Thirdly, Arthur is rebellious. His philosophy is best summed up in the phrase “Don’t let the bastards grind you down!” and he warns “I’d like to see anybody grind me down.” He exercises rebellious individualism in rejecting tight social moral codes in his macho search for pleasure. As he explores his inner heart, “I’m not barmy, I’m a fighting pit prop that wants a pint of beer, that’s me. But if any knowing bastard says that’s me I’ll tell them I’m a dynamite dealer waiting to blow the factory to
Kingdom Come. I’m me and nobody else. Whatever people say I am, that’s what I’m not because they don’t know a bloody thing about me! God knows what I am.” This rugged individualism leads Arthur to have contempt for his newly-found affluence, which is mostly spent on alcohol, women, and fishing.

On the whole he rebels blindly against social restrictions and conventions instead of having any clear political aims. He fights to seek freedom from or independence of society, employer, and marriage. For him, laws are things “to be broken by blokes like us.” So we see Arthur in the film fighting in all directions. He voted for Communist Party in the last election using father’s ballot ticket as he was not old enough. He is against the tedium and conventions of life and work, for which he keeps alienated from his working-class neighborhood community, and is different from his fellow workers, whom he thinks have “got ground down.” He hates the foreman in the factory, and plays an annoying trick on a female worker by placing a mouse on the work desk and enjoys the subsequent screaming, for which he is called “a bit of a Red” by the foreman for his trouble-making tendency. To revenge on the “nosy parker” Mrs Bull for spreading news about his affair with married woman and for her lack of sympathy for the unfortunate, he shoots her from his home window with an air gun, hitting her backside. He is stubborn even after being seriously beaten by the soldiers: “They’d busted me... Still, I’d had my bit of fun. It ain’t the first time I’ve been in a losing fight. It won’t be the last, either...I’d have flattened them if it had been one at a time.” When his relationship with Doreen is found out by Brenda, who accuses him of not knowing “the difference between right and wrong” and will
never know, he retorts that “Maybe I won’t, but I don’t want anybody to teach me, either.” And when scolded by Jack for causing too much trouble between him and his wife, he reaffirms that “You don’t have to tell me what’s right and what’s not.” To sum up, Arthur is an energetic fighter, taking great pride in still having got some fight left in him, not like most people. When Bert challenges him “where does all this fighting get you?” he simply retorts, “ever seen what not fighting’s got you?” In Jack’s view, Arthur is “too much of a troublemaker” and “should take things as they come and enjoy life.” His aggressive attitude alienates him from people around him.

In the film, we see different sectors of the working class in confrontation largely due to different attitudes toward affluence and consumerism.

Arthur in the film is set as alienated from the rest of the working class. Firstly, the parents’ generation has been beaten down into total acceptance of consumerism. When Bert asks him: “What do you have got to be so angry?” Arthur then talks about his own parents. They have got TV, but are “both dead from the neck up” and unable to think. Society pushes them like “a lot of sheep.” He scorns his parents’ gratitude for a few, small material advances and believes that he’s got “a lot more life” in him than his mum and dad, the older generation who got “ground down” before the war and never recovered. Arthur’s contempt and anger for his father’s indulgence in TV program is clearly shown in an early scene of the film in which Arthur comes home and find his father in front of the TV set, not wishing to participate in a conversation with him. The father even fails to respond to Arthur’s bitter joke about a man who lost the eye sight of one eye through “watching telly day after day.” The scene has a series
of close-up shots revealing Arthur’s scornful eye sight when he tells the joke. Under such situation, Arthur stops only long enough to have his tea and change his clothes. Secondly, the elder workmate, Jack, is ground down and “wants to get on.” Arthur warns that the firm’s tea might lead to stomach trouble, but Jack wouldn’t mind drinking it, as “if it’s good enough for the others it’s good enough for me.” Jack chooses to work on nights in order to earn more to afford a television, while Arthur feels night shift is “a dog’s life.” Although Arthur finally admits that Jack is “not a bad bloke really,” he is still “a bit of a dope,” who is steady but dull, unable to satisfy his wife sexually and emotionally. For Arthur, Jack will “squeal like a stuck pig” until he “get[s] bashed in the face.” Thirdly, women as represented by Doreen and her mother are materialistic and snobbish. Arthur and Bert are coldly greeted in Doreen’s house, which is a new one on the edge of the city, by Doreen’s more better-off mother, who thinks of Arthur as too rough for her daughter. In frustration and anger, Arthur invites Doreen to visit his family: “You can always drop into our house, you’ll be welcome there” as happens subsequently. At the end of the film, this contrast is reemphasized by Doreen’s aspiration to save money and buy a new house “with a bathroom and everything” while Arthur wouldn’t mind living in old houses. Compared with the above attitudes, Arthur’s casual attitude toward spending money can be seen as sort of non-materialistic. Arthur’s contempt for his workmates and his father is all clearly shown in close-up of facial expressions at the beginning of the film in the workshop scene and later the home scene.

About working-class consciousness, unlike Look Back in Anger, class
difference and class hatred is not the main theme of this film. Arthur embraces no political beliefs or ideology and is shown simply as alienated from people around him. The class anger is blindly targeted toward society as a whole and toward other members of the working class. Only at one place does Arthur deliver his political protest vaguely: “They rob you right, left and center. After they’ve skinned you dry, you get called up to the army and get shot to death.” In contrast, Bert can take this peacefully as “That’s how things are” and one can only hope that some day something good will turn up. Lay holds that in terms of class consciousness, the film offers “neither solutions nor enlightenment” as its focus on a rugged individual Angry Young Man figure, Arthur, “excludes the possibilities of unified class action” (Lay, 2002, p. 73). Andrew Higson notes that Arthur’s anger works to obscure class tensions, displacing them onto generational differences (Lay, 2002, p. 73). Much of Arthur’s attack and disrespect is directed towards his parents’ generation and older co-workers. Though lacking distinct expressions of class consciousness, the film displays convincingly that there is little real possibility of escape for the working class. Being born into the working class is “a life sentence,” even if the sentence is served out “in fine suits and at pubs and discos” (Marwick, 1990, p. 299).

Upward mobility is beyond expectation and working-class boys can only marry working-class girls. For a bright and good-looking lad as Arthur, he sees no meaningful future. So throughout, Arthur is an angry man, angry with society, work, neighbor, parents, mates, and even himself. On the whole, he doesn’t find it easy to live with himself. Elements of working-class community solidarity and friendship are
also revealed in certain scenes, e.g. Arthur’s father helps the son to cheat the police, and Arthur and Bert (the coal miner, a safe person) often kill time together, going fishing, drinking in pubs and walking through the city at night. The film doesn’t glamorize working class. When Aunt Ada talks about the difficulty in bringing up children before the war when “it was rotten days,” Arthur is confident that “It won’t happen again.”

The ending of the film is very thought-provoking and has attracted a good deal of critical comment. In spite of his voice-over’s insistence that he won’t be ground down by the bosses or women, Arthur seems trapped to give in to the system. His affair with Brenda is messily concluded and his working class marriage with Doreen is quickly settled. The final scene sets on a hillside behind a new housing estate on the outskirts of Nottingham. Arthur stands on the hill with Doreen looking down towards the new houses being built. In frustration, he throws a stone at the building site, while Doreen mildly chides him “You shouldn’t throw things like that,” and reminds him that one of them might well be their future home. Arthur responds “It won’t be the last one I throw.” This final act of Arthur indicates “an unresolved ending” which has been variously interpreted as “deliberate ambiguity, unintended confusion and the product of a conflict of view between author and director” (Laing, 1968, p. 120). Lay summarizes that this can be read in a number of ways: “as a sign of Arthur’s continuing struggle against settling down and mediocrity (Sillitoe’s preferred interpretation), as a sign of his frustration at the futility of his struggle against work and domesticity (Reisz’s view), or as the act of a boy resisting manhood who needs to
be told off for throwing stones by his mother/fiancée” (Murphy’s view) (Lay, 2002, p. 71). For McFarlane, the remark “epitomizes the note of real resilience Karel Reisz has found in Arthur’s proletarian assertiveness” (1986, p. 138). Has Arthur been tamed?

Lay is sure that he has for that’s the way of life. Conformity is certain, but it may not be “passive acceptance of his fate” (Lay, 2002, p. 73). It is true that near the end of the story, Arthur is already a bit tired of fighting as he tells Doreen after being beaten by the soldiers: “You’re a nice girl Dorren, I like you a lot. I reckon you oughta stay with me for good so’s that I don’t get knocked down by any more horses. Trouble with me is I’m always bumping into things, it’s not much of a paying game.” For me, the hurling of a defiant stone epitomizes his frustration and puzzlement of his temporary lost battle in keeping his difference. Yet although he is pressed by the system to accept certain things which he has derided, Arthur’s rebellious spirit will continue to function and he will continue his independent lifestyle as that is his nature.

To sum up, Saturday Night and Sunday Morning provided uninhibited display of masculine energy and sexuality. Arthur Seaton is individualistic, anti-authoritarian, hedonistic, sexually active and misogynistic. He is aggressive, cruelly courageous and heroic in the face of a suppressive system, remaining defiant of social restrictions. He represents the group of working class emphatically refuting the assumption that affluence had led to social conformity and embourgeoisement. The social significance of such a hero is that he is widely acknowledged as a typical representative of the ordinary hardworking young workers of the time, confident, dignified, and full of bravado. As Stead comments, “We accept him as a genuine worker” and “can
appreciate fully why he was so much better than the rest of his mates and why inevitably he must move away from them” (1989, p. 194).

**Working-class Identity in New Wave Films: Theme Analysis**

With full employment, general affluence and embourgeoisement of the 1950s and 1960s, hardship, misery, poverty were no longer dominant themes of working class films, though still existing. Upward mobility, masculine pride and sexuality, and youthful rebellion came in their place. The New Wave films centered almost exclusively on the pride and discontents of the young urban working-class male in the Northern industrial towns of England, tackling the lifestyle and aspirations in a fresh unpatronizing way. The protagonists seek freedom and rebel against restriction and repression imposed by the combination of the class system, traditional Victorian morality and social convention.

**Affluence, upward mobility and working-class dignity.**

In New Wave films, the protagonists are generally benefiting from the affluence of the time. They all have a job or can easily have one but choose not to take. Arthur Seaton in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* earns a decent income, buys loads of decent suits and spends much on drinks. Colin Smith in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* refuses the job offered to him by his father’s firm so as not to be exploited by capitalists. The coalminer Frank in *This Sporting Life* wins simultaneous temporary prosperity once signed with a professional rugby team. The exaggeratedly fast speed and the dazzling white color of the new large car he buys mark it as a deliberate statement of personal success.
Upward social mobility is explicitly shown and for good reasons. Both Joe in *Room at the Top* and Vic Brown (Alan Bates) in *This Kind of Loving* have climbed out of rough working class background and now hold decent white collar jobs. Frank in *This Sporting Life* has won fame and money through his athletic talent and aggressiveness. Because working class formed the majority of the cinema-goers, filmmakers tried to appeal them with daydream and wish fulfillment which are more easily satisfied by “identification upwards.” As Paul Swann observes, “Films were regarded, in the words of Leavis and Thompson, as ‘substitute living,’ a seductive form of shallow but unsatisfying escape which they felt had come to dominate industrial culture…” (as cited in Gillett, 2003, p. 188). However, this wish fulfillment is weakened by the fact that though Joe’s change for a better job as a clerk contributes to his climbing up the social ladder, a central facilitator for his mobility is the seduction of and marriage to Susan from a higher social class. In films where the hero remains within his class (e.g. *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, A Kind of Loving*), we see a difference between the “rough” and “respectable” working class with the man marrying the woman who represents “a social refinement or ‘classiness’ desired by the male hero” (Hill, 1983, p. 305). It is also a common feature for New Wave films to make the desire for escape to prove “impossible” (e.g. Colin), or to be demanded at “too high a cost” (e.g. Joe passively marries Susan and Frank loses his lover, who dies). As a result, the protagonists have to “accommodate themselves to compromise and an eschewal of fantasy” (Hill, 1999, p. 179) despite his yearnings to transcend the confinement of their class position. Besides, escape as collective class
action is impossible, only as individual is feasible. While escape from class is hardly an option, temporary outing to a nearby rural or coastal resort briefly as an escape away from the urban drudgery and restraints to relax and enjoy sex is a routine happening (for detail, see Higson, 1984, pp. 12-16).

Representing the rising postwar new working class, the New Wave protagonists are confident about the social change for betterment and proud or dignified about their class background despite the frustrations they experience. Joe in Room at the Top claims “I am working class...and proud of it!” Jimmy Porter in Look Back in Anger is a university graduate but chooses to run a market stall to show solidarity with the working class.

Youthful energy, sexuality and masculine pride.

The New Wave films are overwhelmingly preoccupied with working class males, obviously providing an “uninhibited display of masculine energy” (Stead, 1989, p. 190) and sexuality, represented perhaps most prominently in Arthur Seaton’s forceful, muscular physique in Saturday Night and Sunday Morning. Arthur is strong, confident, arrogant and rebellious. Joe is actively manipulating his life rather than living passively. Colin is talented in running, stubborn and rebellious. Frank is extraordinarily aggressive in order to distinguish himself in a violent sport and spend much money to impress others. They can earn good money, have good time once work ends, engage in irresponsible sex, or cheat system in some respects. Nothing seems to worry them much.

The New Wave film is noted for its honest treatment of adult sexuality or
“sexual frankness” (Richards, 1992, p. 226) with the willingness to acknowledge and depict sexuality in a brave way never tried before, for which Hill named his book Sex, Class and Realism. Lovell sees New Wave realism as defined in terms of “its working-class subject, and a more open treatment of sexuality, as well as its aesthetic form” (1990, p. 367). Room at the Top and Saturday Night and Sunday Morning all tell people that sex can be enjoyed for its own sake. Important here, Hill draws our attention that the image of active sexuality which provided “a resistance to refinement and repression” is primarily a masculine sexuality, suggesting “the triumph of male ‘virility’” and “the reaffirmation of sexual hierarchy” (1986, p. 163). In a sense, the lower social status of working-class or “rough” working-class heroes is compensated by their strength of masculine sexuality for enjoying a “good time.” Female sexuality is treated as more complicated—bold, passive and conservative. Some heroines answer the sexual desire of the heroes with “an equal and equally raunchy desire” (Lovell, 1990, p. 370) and enjoyment of their own (e.g. Brenda and Alice). Audrey in The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner responds shyly. More others draw the hero into marriage and conformity after sexual relationship and especially pregnancy (e.g. Doreen and Ingrid), thus repressing the more radical emancipatory sexual impulses of the hero. However, despite their reputation at the time for sexual content, the films’ handling of sexuality is only relatively progressive, termed by Hill as a “pseudo-liberation”—“ostensibly liberating but actually repressive” as the films tend to favor conservative resolutions which reproduce an ideology of marital and procreative sexuality (1983, pp. 309-310). Extra-marital sex very probably leads to
pregnancy and pregnancy always leads to marriage and conformity as in *Room at the Top* and *A Kind of Loving*.

**Youthful anger and rebelliousness.**

The New Wave films reveal the protagonists’ “frustrated or compromised search for freedom from interfering authorities..., for material success, for a better life” (Leese, 2006. p. 98). A principal mood was one of discontent and anger. Most protagonists are Angry Young Men and rebellious. Their anger is political as well as cultural.

Politically, the anger is directed towards authority or establishments, generated by a sense of loss of politics and continuing social injustice. In *Look Back in Anger*, Jimmy Porter complains about the absence of “good, brave cause,” as “when we shop around for an outlet, we find there is nothing on stock, no Spain, no Fascism, no mass unemployment.” Being leftist in politics and strongly tied to his working class background, he greatly resents the ruling class for the unfairness and poverty they produce, and resents the society for not having changed enough for the better as promised. He is more representative of the scholarship boys who were disappointed with the society in which deep-rooted class barrier prevented the true meritocracy from becoming fully actualized. And he is frustrated about finding the right way to fight. All he can do is just to stay with his class and refuse to seek acceptance by the middle class though university-educated.

In *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, the film opens with Arthur toiling at his lathe in a busy, noisy factory expressing in voice-over his rebellious attitude to
work and the world at large: “No use working every minute God sends, that’s my motto. Don’t let the bastards grind you down. That’s one thing I’ve learned...I’d like to see anybody try to grind me down. That’d be the day. What I want is a good time. All the rest is propaganda.” He revolts individually against all authorities through breaking the rules of election, despising his work mates who defer to the management and is sensitive to capitalist exploitation. Yet there is little for him to do to change the reality.

Colin in The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner exerts more profound anger and rebels more intensely against the system. Identifying with his father who is an active strike leader, he is conscious of working-class suffering and capitalist exploitation which is seen as the cause of his father’s early death after years of toil in a local factory, as he says: “I’m beginning to see that it should be altered.” Hence, his attitude toward job is that there would be no point in getting a job simply to increase the bosses’ profits. He tells his girl friend, “It’s not that I don’t like work, it’s that I don’t like the idea of slaving my good self so the bosses can get all the profit. It seems all wrong to me. My old man used to say that the workers should get the profits. ...Thing is, I don’t know where to start, though.” So Colin rebels by declining the job opportunity offered to him by his father’s factory after the father’s death. The politician’s TV speech about people now “all enjoying greater luxury than ever before” is met with derisive snorts and sarcasm from Colin and his mate as it is a manifestation of everything their lives are not. Finally, when the borstal authority places high hope on Colin for winning a five-mile long distance race for the borstal
against a local public school, Colin tricks the governor into believing that he is willing
to comply, but in the end rebels by deliberately losing a certain victory in the race to
show his contempt for the authority, even though he knows he is giving up an
opportunity to improve his circumstances.

However, the revolt of New Wave protagonists is somewhat blind and aimless.
Colin Smith wants to line up the Establishment and shoot them; Arthur Seaton
denounces capitalists, foreman and the system. But what the New Wave heroes want
in its place is really vague, as Jimmy Porter says “Everything…nothing.”

Anger and revolt stimulated from cultural aspects is more emphasized in New
Wave films, involving the concern over working-class corruption by the new mass
culture of consumption and materialism and the resulting spiritual “dry-out,” which I
have analyzed in great detail in the previous 2 case studies. In The Loneliness of the
Long Distance Runner, like Arthur, Colin is hostile to consumerism as well. He
watches with disdain as his mother spends the five hundred pounds of insurance
money (the company compensation money for the father’s death) on clothes, a
television set and new furniture.

The anxiety about the decline of traditional working class.

Richards holds that respect for the traditional pattern and texture of
working-class life as it was lived – “the seaside holiday, the pub, the football match,
the dance, the family party” is the positive side as well as integral part of the New
Wave films (Richards, 1992, p. 226) and part of the Hoggartian nostalgia for a warm
old working-class culture of communality. But it was a world that was vanishing even
as it was being filmed. With television, private cars, and enthusiasm for all kinds of leisure activities, society was becoming steadily more privatized, eclipsing and fragmenting the working class communal traditions.

The post-war explosion of material and cultural goods, while representing social progress (affluence), led to the erosion of traditional values and therefore aroused concern about the decline or demise of the traditional working class associated with work, community and an attachment to place and anxiety about the growing “corruption” of the working class by consumerism, mass culture and suburbanization. While the political right were concerned with the perceived social and sexual amorality of the working class (especially youth), the political left were more worried about what they perceived to be a threat to traditional working class culture.

In New Wave films, traditional working class morality, community and masculinity are all threatened by the mass consumption culture, only to be respected in a sense of nostalgia. For example, the older workers in Saturday Night and Sunday Morning recall the “good old days;” Colin’s father, a socialist union fighter, is facing death in The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner. In Look Back in Anger, Jimmy Porter denounces the Americanization of culture and celebrates the dying indigenous art of the music hall. In A Kind of Loving, the traditional working-class culture of the brass band is contrasted with and seen lost to the new, superficial mass culture represented by television. Vic’s wish to attend the brass band concert (at which his father is playing) is rejected by his wife Ingrid and her mother for being “a bit
old-fashioned.” Hill sees the sequence of shots from the concert to the three of them all at home watching TV quiz as crucial in the film’s construction of gender positions, with older working-class world (the brass band) male dominated and the new world of affluence (TV) associated with women (1983, p. 308). John Kirk described the whole concern as the New Wave films’ “affluence-as-culture-deficit paradigm” (2003, p. 69).

Only in *Room at the Top*, the traditional working class is not seen to be eclipsed by consumerism. It is Joe’s uncle and aunt who challenge his desire for “brass” as the aunt states: “I asked you about the girl and all you tell me is about her father and his brass. Joe you wouldn’t sell yourself for a handful of silver.”

In all these films, as I have explored in great detail in the three case studies, the male protagonists are all against consumption; consumerism is always associated with women, who are perceived as threats to masculinity in pressing their conformity. The films reveal a degree of sympathy towards the virile, working-class male who seeks to resist the pressures towards mass consumerism and social conformity.

The demise of traditional working class is also displayed through “the absence or weakness of fathers” (Hill, 1983, p. 305) or a “decline in the status of the father” (Hill, 1986, p. 162). The New Wave films is marked by a lack of masculine head of household pointed out by John Hill. For example, Joe Lampton’s parents are dead in *Room at the Top*; Colin Smith sees his father dying in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*; Doreen in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and Ingrid in *A Kind of Loving* have no father. Arthur’s father, the representative of the traditional working class male, has been “lulled into a television-induced coma” (Lay, 2002, p.
He is not seen at work, but only at home, sitting in front of the TV set.

The de-politicization of the working class and the shift from the public to the personal.

The traditional working class as an occupational community separated themselves by production activity through which they grew their "proletarian consciousness" and established their cultural identity. This is obvious in films of the 1930s and 1940s. But the New Wave films shifted the emphasis from work and production to leisure and consumption in order to better define the new affluent working class. The individualism of the New Wave films was also in sharp contrast with the communality of the Documentary and war films. As Hill comments, in the face of affluence and mass culture, the focus on cultural aspects tended to preclude work and the "focus on the discontented male hero involved a downplaying of collective conditions and actions" (2000b, p. 251).

This tendency demonstrated the depoliticization of the working class, with work, industrial conflicts and collective action all missing in the representation. New Wave films seldom showed their characters at work, although it is work and the workplace which define the working class as a class. Instead, the focus was on the characters' personal lives, enjoyed during leisure. Saturday Night and Sunday Morning prioritizes Arthur's consumption on fancy suits, drinking and womanizing rather than production, with only 4 short workshop scenes of Arthur working at the lathe in factory. Work is almost invisible in Room at the Top. Capitalist exploitation is only slightly touched upon in Saturday Night and Sunday Morning through Arthur's
determination not to work "every minutes God sends" as the capitalists would "only slash my wages so they can get stuffed!" and in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* through Colin's attitude toward work--"I don't like the idea of slaving me good self so the bosses can get all the profit." The prospect of workers' strike looks dim as Colin's father, a hard-line trade unionist and strike-leader, is dead, and Arthur simply does not favor such a solution so as we know from his talk in the traditional working man's club. *I'm All Right Jack*, a right-wing film not taken as core New Wave representative, even makes vicious political satire on a card-playing "pig-headed, work-shy working class" (Marwick, 1990, p. 294) regularly taken out on strike by their union, and mocks the communist trade union shop steward Kite. Working-class collective fighting spirit is made fun of when Colin shouts "Share and share alike" and "All for one and one for all, united we stand, divided we fall" to ask Mike to divide the money they steal from a gambling machine.

The revolts of protagonists are on the whole blind in essence with no clear political or social ideology. The conflicts represented in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* are not between the trade union and the factory owners (the "haves" and the "have nots") but between old and new generations of working class. And the film does not provide sufficient account of why the elder generation, who have been "ground down," "have been so reduced (e.g. predatory capitalism, alienating labor)" (Hill, 1986, p. 139). In this way, class inequalities and industrial conflicts were placed down. Class was presented as "primarily an individual, rather than collective, experience, a moral, rather than socially and economically structured, condition" (Hill,
The working class was figured in terms of the politics of the personal. Higson notes that the documentary’s “distanced public gaze at ‘universalized’ social process and people” was soon replaced by “the individuated private looks of the fictional protagonists” of the New Wave (1986, p. 83). The narratives were organized around the exploration of the individual desires and fate of a single central protagonist, and no longer required a multiplicity of plot lines.

By centering on male individual protagonist’s own experience and struggles, “[s]ocial issues are reduced to the micro level of character, rather than explored at the macro level of the social” (Lay, 2002, p. 65). Thus, in The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner, it is the unfavorable environment in which Colin lives (e.g. the absent father, disinterested mother) and Colin’s own stubborn character that are explored to explain his downfall, not social stratification and its subsequent social inequalities (Lay, 2002, p. 65). This tendency encourages the spectator to see people as individual beings rather than as members of distinct class. As Alan Sillitoe, who wrote the screenplay Saturday Night and Sunday Morning based on his own novel, suggested: “Those who see Arthur Seaton as a symbol of the working man and not an individual are mistaken. I wrote about him as a person, and not as a typical man who works a lathe. I try to see every person as an individual and not as a class symbol, which is the only condition in which I can write as a worker” (Daily Worker, 28 Jan., 1961). Such an approach promotes only individual consciousness and solutions at a film’s end, with the central character either escaping out of society or adapting and
adjusting to its demands, rather than collective consciousness and actions leading to social and political change. As John Hill points out, this emphasis of individual fulfillment rather than social change tends to make the films more conservative than radical (1986, p. 174).

**Marginalization of women and misogynist tendency.**

Women in New Wave films are put in subordinate and marginal position. With *A Taste of Honey* (Tony Richardson, 1961) being the only exceptional female-centered film, the protagonists are always young men. But narratives largely develop in terms of their relations with the other sex.

Hill holds that New Wave films produce a representation of women and female sexuality which "works against and ultimately undercuts their claims to be 'progressive'" (1983, p. 304). He condemns the New Wave for its misogynist attitude towards women: "misogyny is not only 'simmering under the surface', but is embedded in the very structures of the films themselves" (1983, 304). He criticizes the British New Wave for being too often "content to abandon their female characters to the confinement of familiar domestic and marital roles and even inflict a 'punishment' on those to stray beyond" (1986, p. 174). He even goes a bit to extreme in claiming that the real subject of *Look Back in Anger* "was neither social injustice nor hypocrisy but the debasement and degradation of women" (1986, p. 25). While acknowledging Hill's certain stance, Murphy argues that this last statement of Hill is too "bold" a judgment, which "ignores the historical context" (1992, p. 29), and in general, what Hill misses, is the fact that the women portrayed in New Wave films
have "a seriousness, an emotional weight, altogether lacking in the pathetically trivial roles women had to play in most 1950s British films" (1992, p. 33).

On the whole, women's screen image has been pretty negative. The status and progress of working-class male protagonists in narrative is dependent upon using and/or abusing women. Women often function as elusive objects of male sexual desire (e.g. Brenda, Alice, Ingrid), targets for the vitriolic attacks (e.g. Alison), or a threat to authentic working-class masculinity—"through their obsession with marriage, motherhood and 'settling down'—or else as agents of consumption" (Lay, 2002, p. 16) (e.g. Susan, Doreen, Ingrid). So we assume Joe Lampton will "forfei[t] his potential for manhood" and "knuckle under" after marrying the magnate's daughter (McFarlane, 1986, p. 138). Consumerism is mostly associated with women, who are partially to blame for the demise of traditional working class culture. Colin's mother is depicted as a senseless consumerist and immoral woman of perpetual infidelity. Narratives are centered on the "devaluation and punishment" of women (Hill, 1983, p. 305). Female independence is curtailed by pregnancy. The adulterous Alice and Brenda are rejected, while the heroes enter into marriage. Brenda becomes pregnant by Arthur, suffers the anxiety, has an unsuccessful back-street abortion (required by the film censor) and is "punished" by having to return to a loveless marriage. So, women in the New Wave films suffer long-lastingly.

In addition, as Terry Lovell notes, there are clear gender divisions in the way place, space and setting are used in the films (1990, p. 374). Women are strongly associated with domestic space while men command public space and actively resist
confinement to the domestic sphere, reinforcing the patriarchal system. But we can also see more women at work due to full employment. In *A Kind of Loving*, the contradiction between Vic and Ingrid’s mother is solved through the young couple moving out of the mother’s house to less comfortable conditions. Hill reads this as a reassertion of the “normality and naturalness of the patriarchal family” (1983, p. 309) and Laing sees it as symbolizing the victory of the husband’s rights over the mother’s and a rejection of the shallowness of the new affluence (1968, p. 132).

However, some positive depiction can also be found. Brenda is positively seen as having the courage to shoulder the awkwardness and difficulty of pregnancy: “I’ve decided to have it and face whatever comes of it.” The key figures in persuading Vic to compromise with Ingrid through mutual understanding and tolerance again are his sister and mother. And we don’t see much misogyny in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*. As Claydon observes, “Colin and Mike do not use Audrey and Gladys in the same way Arthur and Jimmy clearly use the women in their lives” (2005, p. 137). Audrey is almost a minder to Colin, depicted with seriousness and warmth. She appears as an attentive listener to whom Colin is willing to tell about his thoughts, frustrations and hopes. She seems to be able to share Colin’s concerns though she is less rebellious and unsure how to act upon her own discontent. Colin’s seriousness and authenticity are further consolidated by Audrey’s “But why?” questions. Audrey seems to represent “that basic level of human fulfillment denied to Colin by his environment” (Laing, 1968, p. 129).

In this chapter, I have explored and analyzed British working class identity in
the New Wave films, especially represented by *Room at the Top* and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. The young working-class protagonists display vigorously working-class confidence, masculine pride, youthful rebelliousness, and high individualism in consciousness and behavior, an identity which continues the documentary and war film respect for the dignity of labor and masculinity and challenges the older, wartime idealization of consensus and community. In the following chapter, I am going to look at British working-class identity in the serious social criticism films of Mike Leigh, Stephen Frears and Ken Loach.
CHAPTER V

WORKING-CLASS IDENTITY IN FILMS OF LOACH, LEIGH AND FREARS

British working class in the 1980s and 1990s underwent severe fragmentation. A few top skilled became new Tories and the vast majority were in general decline, with the collapse of traditional heavy industries and larger division of the rich and the poor. The harsh reality facilitated a return to social realism in artistic expressions.

Working-class films of the decades can be easily defined by its anti-Thatcherism, with the focus on the exploration of the damage brought by de-industrialization, mass unemployment and poverty, severe cuts in welfare benefits and services typical of the Thatcher years (1979-90), leading to the statement that “some of the most potent political opposition to the Thatcher government, therefore, appeared in the movie theatres rather than in the House of Commons” (Friedman, 1993, p. xix).

This chapter only discusses works of three independent filmmakers--Mike Leigh, Ken Loach, and Stephen Frears, whose works resist the temptation of commercialization and offer serious social criticism, showing life as a difficult struggle in a society dominated by social injustice, greed and racism. In the words of Peter Wollen, “independent filmmakers of the eighties reacted strongly against the
effects of Thatcherism” (1993, p. 35). They work within the orbit of leftist critical theory. Leigh and Loach identify themselves as a socialist and have managed to remain within the realist tradition for four decades (1970s-2000s). Their works have been well received in Europe. “Leigh is funny; Loach is angry; but neither offers us any illusions,” as Mount comments (2004, p. 98). Leigh is interested in family life whereas Loach is more concerned about social and political issues articulated through characters.

The 1980s witnessed the polarizations along lines of gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, apart from class. More working-class women, gays, blacks, and Asians began to occupy central focus in films. Britain in the 1990s witnessed the development of an embittered, visible “underclass,” which for Claire Monk, denotes a subordinate social class, “a post-working class” in a post-industrial context that “owes its existence to the economic and social damage wrought by globalization, local industrial decline, the restructuring of the labor market and other legacies of the Thatcher era” (2000b, p. 274). So, the 1990s sowed a renewed interest in portraying working-class life, with a group of films about underclass aiming at minority or mainstream audiences. Similar to the New Wave but different from the 80s, the 1990s films were more characteristically “men’s films” with an obsessive focus on white, non-working masculinity, projecting images of alienation and masculine anxiety. The issue of unemployment and its effects is, however, treated very differently from film to film.
Three films are chosen for analysis in this chapter: *High Hopes* (Mike Leigh, 1988) is chosen for its anti-Thatcherism, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Stephen Frears, 1985) for race and class, and *Sweet Sixteen* (Ken Loach, 2002) for its concern on underclass youth. The films represented a cultural model of film-making targeting minority audience and were generally exhibited in an art-house context. The 1990s commercial comedies of working class representation will be dealt with in the following chapter.

**Thatcherism and the Working Class**

The 1980s were very much the Thatcher years. With her radical reform to solve the problems of 1970s, such as low growth rate, high inflation, deterioration in industrial relations, Mrs Thatcher completely broke with the post-WWII social democratic consensus. Thatcher’s administration was characterized by laissez-faire economic strategy plus repressive, backward-looking social policies. Peter Wollen sums up Thatcherism as comprised of three distinct elements: an economic neo-liberalism with minimum state intervention, a political neo-conservative authoritarianism, and a social “two nations” project dividing the nation between the poorer, industrial North, and the affluent, metropolitan South (1993, p. 35). Thatcherism was marked by tight control of monetary supply, privatization of nationalized public corporations (e.g. telephone, gas, electricity, water, rail transport), reduction of taxation, the curbing of trades unions through legislative restrictions and mass unemployment at record high (4 million at its peak by 1984). For many, this mass unemployment was “the deliberate creation” of the Conservative government to
break working class solidarity.

In the Thatcher era, economic growth was smooth and faster. Hugo Young notes that economy in 1988 was “still growing at 4 percent after seven years’ continuous expansion” (as cited in Quart, 1993, p. 21), although the trend stopped in the 1990-91 economic recession. Inflation was curbed, from 18 per cent in 1980 to 3.4 per cent in 1986, though it rose again afterwards to 10.9 per cent in her year of departure (Hill, 1999, p. 5). Business enterprises were pressed to seek efficiency in more fierce competitions. Favorable environments were cultivated and attracted more foreign investment. Yet the results were very much mixed, the growth in productivity was at the expense of dramatic rise in unemployment, a decline in British manufacturing and hence bigger division of the rich and the poor. More significantly, there was evidence that unemployment was “being inherited.”

The Conservative tax reform also led to the widening gap between the rich and the poor. Cuts in direct taxation contributed greatly to their repeated electoral successes. “The basic rate of income tax was dropped, in stages, from 33 per cent to 25 per cent and the top rates from 83 per cent to 40 per cent” (Hill, 1999, p. 6). Yet this was accompanied by increases in indirect taxation (e.g. national insurance, VAT, poll tax). So the rich benefited more, contributing to greater inequality.

Politically, the Conservative government took the unionism as its major enemy and spared no effort in reducing its power. After the greatest confrontation with the unions – the 1984-85 National Miners Strike, in which the union eventually had to concede to the well-prepared government, the working class was fatally
de-politicized.

Ideologically, in promoting consumption, competitive individualism and traditional family values, Thatcherism initiated a moral and legal crusade to punish the "workshy" and to "outlaw" those lifestyles and pursuits which contradicted Thatcherite conservatism (homosexuals, single mothers, ravers and demonstrators). Aggressive self-interest also thrived as a result.

In brief, tax reductions, cuts in public spending, privatization of social services led to the growth of a visible, embittered underclass—"20 percent of the people living under the poverty line." Britain was turned into "a more morally callous, crude, and desperate society where a falling quality of life was covered over by a rising standard of living" and where "the ethic of social responsibility began to unravel." (Quart, 1994, p. 241) While the majority of skilled workers voted Conservative, the majority of the semi-skilled and unskilled working class continued to support Labor in the 1983 and 1987 elections (Hill, 1999, p. 14). Support for Thatcher came mainly from the south of England.

Thatcherism has stirred considerable resentment, but during her reign, the English Left was both divided and self-destructive. The Labor Party leadership was split, the unions were crushed and a large section of the skilled working class was bought over into the Tory camp. Liberals and Social Democrats were neutralized. The Labor Party, in order to win election after consecutive defeats, was forced to transform itself into "a centrist, European-style Social Democratic party" (Quart, 1993, p. 21). It became a "catch-all" party appealing to the middle, faced with a diminishing
industrial working class. Under the leadership of Tony Blair, it became the New Labor, which largely followed Thatcherite neo-liberalism, for which it was criticized as “in Conservative clothes.” This compromise to the market principles of neo-liberal capitalism has been seen to be the most enduring achievement of Thatcherism. However, the New Labor and its Third Way politics tried hard to balance between efficiency and fairness. The Blair government lowered enterprise tax, especially for middle and small enterprises, to boost their development. The “unemployment benefit” was changed into “job-seeker’s allowance” to emphasize re-employment training and the active seeking for jobs. Blair introduced national minimum wage system to protect the basic interests of low-incomers; promoted reforms in social welfare and education leading to considerable increase in health service fund and education budget. Yet the measures were criticized as half-hearted and lacking strength.

In film, three famous independent directors, Stephen Frears, Mike Leigh, and Ken Loach, all responded to Thatcherism with films of angry criticism and savage satire of the Thatcherite ideology of self-interest and materialism.

**Mike Leigh and High Hopes (1988)**

**Leigh and his films.**

Mike Leigh is a prolific as well as award-honored director. From 1971 to the present, he has made nineteen full-length films, eight of which are for television, of which *High Hopes* (1988), *Life is Sweet* (1990), *Naked* (1993), *Secrets and Lies* (1996)
and *Vera Drake* (2004) bring him awards and honor. Mike Leigh worked in television through the 1970s and later revived his career as a cinema director.

Leigh was born in 1943 into a middle-class family; his father was a doctor. But he grew up in a very working-class area of North Salford, Lancashire. He went to local working-class schools and has actually lived in working-class territories throughout his entire life. Therefore, as a middle-class kid growing up in a working-class environment, Leigh claims himself “an insider and an outsider, all at once” with “an awareness of and sensitivity to both those worlds” (as cited in Watson, 2004, p. 50).

On thematic concerns, Watson holds that Leigh’s work is obviously driven by “a pursuit of the real” and “[t]here cannot be many artists who have taken such pains to capture ‘the texture of real life’” (2004, p. 27). Leigh’s pursuit of the real centers on ordinary people, or the day-to-day experience of ordinary people. As he explains himself: “For most people in the world ... life is hard work; it’s tough ... It’s about coping. Most movies are about extraordinary or charmed lifestyles. For me what’s exciting is finding ... the extraordinary in the ordinary — what happens to ordinary people...” (as cited in Carney, 2000, p. 14). Leigh’s protagonists are all ordinary with diverse jobs, e.g. chef and shop assistant in *Life is Sweet*, motorbike messenger in *High Hopes*, a self-employed photographer, an optometrist and a street cleaner in *Secrets and Lies*, two taxi-drivers, a cashier, a cleaner, a waitress in *All or Nothing*.

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13 *Naked* (1993) and *Secrets and Lies* (1996) are the two films for which he is best-known internationally. At Cannes, *Naked* won both the Best Director and (with David Thewlis) the Best Actor awards in 1993 and *Secrets and Lies* both the Palme d’Or (Best Picture) and (with Brenda Blethyn) the Best Actress awards in 1996. *Vera Drake* (2004) won the Golden Lion for Best Film at the Venice International Film Festival.

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To be more specific, Leigh further explains that his films “are actually about things like work, surviving, having an aged parent or whether it’s a good idea to have kids, the problems that everybody cares about” (as cited in Watson, 2004, p. 18). In this list, it is work that leads. Hence, naturally, class is a central focus in Leigh’s films. The class-related real Leigh explores is often “the traumatic real” of broader scope (Watson, 2004, p. 12). As he affirms, “My sympathy for people transcends matters of class. I usually show people who are vulnerable, flawed, and imperfect, but …I have made films where class identity is clearly important.” (Quart, 2004, p. 37)

E.P. Thompson did not see class as a “structure,” nor even as a “category,” but as “something which in fact happens ... in human relationships” (1963, p. 9). Leigh has distinguished himself in this aspect. Family is a key area of concern for Leigh. Focusing on “the domestic enclosures of class realities” (Dave, 2006, p. 162), Leigh’s films generally deal with the successes and failures of communication and connection within families. High Hopes (1988) and Life is Sweet (1990), etc. can all be seen as works that celebrate marriage, family and the pursuit of happiness despite all the difficulties. What Leigh values in his films are “faith, trust, a positive spirit and ‘getting on with living and working’” (Watson, 2004, p. 104). In Leigh’s films “the willingness to carry on” is a key virtue (Watson, 2004, p. 87). High Hopes (1988) and All or Nothing (2001), glorify working-class mutuality and endurance despite the deformations on society, culture and self wrought by neo-liberal governments. All or Nothing is about three families with all kinds of problems in making a living and are deeply unhappy. Expressions of care are made all the more touching by the ways in
which the film has deepened our awareness of essential human vulnerability and loneliness. *Naked* (1993) approaches more heavy social topics: the unemployed, the drifting homeless, the drugged, the sharpened social divide left by Thatcher’s Britain. Politics in Leigh’s films are mostly shaded in the background. *High Hopes* is more obviously political than most of Leigh’s other films. The couple Cyril and Shirley may be politically confused, but are more conscious of what is going on in the world than the couple Wendy and Andy in *Life is Sweet*, who show little political awareness.

Stylistically, in seeking to reflect the ordinary, Leigh’s films are relatively “undramatic.” They tend to focus on an extended range of characters. The plots are leisurely paced and concentrate much more on character and situation than action and event. Many of his films contain comic elements, e.g. *Life is Sweet*, *Happy Go Lucky* (2008). Andy Medhurst sees that the humor of Leigh’s films is the only thing that keeps them “from being too wounding to bear” (as cited in Watson, 2004, p. 11). *High Hopes* has a satirical element especially in the portrayal of the upper-middle-class characters, which is rare in Leigh’s films, as Leigh claims “Satire is not my natural tendency” (Watson, 2004, p. ix). His films are shot on location and his shots are often static and lengthy, permitting situations or conversations to evolve. Leigh’s films are all low-budgeted due to tight funding.


The film is set in the King’s Cross area of London and centers on the domestic life of three very different kinds of couples—Cyril and Shirley (Philip Davis and Ruth Sheen), Martin and Valerie Burke (Philip Jackson and Heather Tobias), and Laetitia
and Rupert Boothe-Braine (David Bamber and Lesley Manville), plus an old lady, Mrs Bender (Edna Dore), who is Cyril and Valerie’s mother and Rupert and Laetitia’s next-door neighbor. In line with Leigh’s emphasis upon the domestic, their very different lifestyles are seen to be the most revealing aspect of class distinctions and class consciousness, through which the film attempts to “map out the contours of ‘Thatcher’s Britain’” (Hill, 1999, p. 193).

Cyril and Shirley are a sweet working-class couple in London and the most decent characters in the film. Cyril works as a motorbike dispatch rider (or messenger) and Shirley is seen planting trees (for the local council). They are “gauche, left-wing relics of an earlier era” (Murphy, 2009b, p. 422). Cyril reads Marx and wants the whole world to be perfect. Valerie and Martin are Cyril’s hysterical sister and her husband. Pretentious and philandering, they represent the “vulgar nouveau riche” who “epitomize the new ‘enterprise culture’” (Hill, 1999, p. 193). Martin is a self-made man who owns a second-hand car business and a Burger Bar. He despises Cyril’s stubbornness in sticking to his high “principles” and advises him to form “a little company” so that “all the other wallies do the dirty work.”14 Valerie impresses us with her snobbishness and low taste in clothes and house decoration. They are familiar Leigh stereotypes: “vulgar, boorish, offensively loud and have more money than sense” (Murphy, 2009b, p. 422). Laetitia and Rupert are Thatcherite yuppies of upper-middle-class. Rupert works “in wine” and Laetitia is a rather “brainless socialite” (Hill, 1999, p. 193). They live in a well-decorated and well-furnished town

14 Quotations in this chapter with no citations are all taken from the scripts in the relevant films.
house, spend weekend in the country, and go to the opera (despite Rupert's lack of understanding of it). They are also selfish and unkind, treating Mrs Bender coldly and condescendingly when she locks herself out of her house. Mrs Bender is the last council tenant in a newly gentrified street. Living alone in isolation, she is aging quickly and becoming forgetful. In *High Hopes*, Leigh seems to promote audience's emotional close identification with Cyril and Shirley and hostility to Laetitia and Rupert.

The story starts with Cyril and Shirley treating Wayne, a stranger who cannot find his way to his sister's home, with great hospitality. It then develops around Cyril and Shirley, and Valerie visiting the mother separately, from which we know their difference in attitude and manner towards the mother. In the middle of the story, Cyril's mum, Mrs Bender, locks herself out and has to ask her neighbor for help. While she waits for her son/daughter to arrive with a spare key in the neighbor's kitchen, she is treated with reluctant hospitality from Laetitia and Rupert. Their impolite remarks towards Cyril, who comes to fetch his mother, almost ignite a quarrel. The climax comes when Cyril and Shirley visit Marx's tomb and on coming back invite Suzi to stay for the night, during which time they have a heated discussion about working class solidarity and struggle. Near the end, Valerie stages a surprise party for her mum's 70\(^{th}\) birthday, which turns out to be a disaster for everybody. So finally Shirley holds things together. She takes Mrs Bender home. At the end of the story, Cyril gives up his opposition to Shirley's wish of having a baby, and in the morning Mrs Bender seems to have recovered from her misery. Standing on the roof
of their building and looking down on the railway station where her husband used to work, Mrs Bender exclaims: “It’s the top of the world.”

In Leigh’s films, the working class and the middle class are always put into binary opposition for sharp contrast; their different worlds are “forever colliding” (Watson, 2004, p. 52). In High Hopes, through exploring the 3 couples of different class background, this class divide and class consciousness are displayed to even an extreme extent, from which we can definitely say that the film is a political one. With working class identity represented by Cyril and Shirley, working-class consciousness, critique of Thatcherite politics, human kindness and positive spirit, plus the importance of family are key themes of representation.

Working-class Consciousness.

Cyril is left-wing and idealistic. Filled with emotions of class resentment, he hopes for a world in which everyone has “enough to eat.” He reads Lenin for Beginners and shows admiration for Marx and his vision of society by visiting his tomb. Although he yearns for social change, he admits that he sits on his ass in despair because he just isn’t sure what to do politically. He feels cut off. Cyril clearly knows that the society won’t suddenly be transformed in accordance with the high political hopes he still holds in his head; so for him, pursuing Marx’s vision of a classless society is now merely like “pissing in the wind.”

In the film, three scenes reflect his political consciousness: visiting the tomb, discussing with Suzi and exchange with Shirley in the end. On their visit to Highgate cemetery, in front of Marx’s head sculpture, Cyril expresses his Marxist class
resentment about Industrial Revolution having forced people into the factories to be exploited. He then praises Marx for “[w]ithout Marx, there’d have been nothing ... no unions, no welfare state, no nationalized industries.” Shirley reads out that “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.” To this, Cyril seems puzzled: “The thing is, change what? It’s a different world now, innit?” His frustration about the possibility and feasibility to change leads to his such disillusioned conclusion that pursuing the road is like “Pissing in the wind.” In this event, Shirley is casually looking around, speaking to herself. This is the only conversation that the couple do not seem to match, leading Cyril’s challenge “You ain’t interested, are you?” to which Shirley answers “Yes, I am. I care a lot.”

In discussing with Suzi (Cyril and Shirley’s female friend), Cyril’s revolutionary mind is degraded by Suzi’s more radical and passionate belief in revolutionary socialism, seen as follows:

Su: ...I mean, we’re fighting, right, to hold onto rights we fought for years ago. She’s already crippled the welfare state. And now she’s gonna kill it off because the power isn’t with the workers. I wanna go to Nicaragua in October, to help them pick the coffee beans. That’s what we need here, see—a revolution.

C: Here we go.

Su: That’ll put it back the power with the people. Where it belongs.

C: What do you know about revolution? There won’t be none here.

Su: You can’t say that. The situation’s ripe for it. What, with the unemployment and poverty and that. We’re heading towards a totalitarian state. But the people won’t have it. They’re gonna fight. She’s taken away the basic right of the working class. I mean, you look at what she’s doing to the unions.

C: Yeah, Yeah, Yeah, I know about unions.
Su: You’re not in a union, though, are you?

C: Well, we ain’t got no union.

Su: Right, that’s what you’ve got to organise yourselves—Otherwise you won’t have a voice.

......

Su: It’d do you good to get out and do something, instead of sitting on you arse talking about it.

In this conversation, Suzi’s sensibleness is undermined by her passion to go to Nicaragua to help them pick the coffee beans, and further weakened by her plan to start a jewelry stall in the market to relieve from unemployment, an act mocked by Cyril as “going into business” to be “small time capitalist.” When Cyril challenges about what she actually does at those political meetings, she answers that she and her comrades “discuss things” and “talk about things,” which, for her, is “working towards the revolution.” But for Cyril, “You are wasting your time” and he would “Sit on my arse.” The high-sounding big talk, instead of inspiring Cyril, leads to his harsh sarcasm that Suzi talks “a load of bollocks,” to which Shirley completely agrees: “She always does.” Suzi is deeply hurt by this. The conversation exchanges are all shot in close-ups. Suzi’s enthusiasm forms a sharp contrast with Cyril’s scornful face. In this scene, Leigh displays little use for leftist slogans or sentimentality. The scene impresses us that Marxist revolutionary cause is not practical and there is nothing that can be done except “sitting on the arse.” A mood of pessimism is conveyed. Suzi’s revolutionary ideas and her confidence in people fighting against unemployment and poverty are simply dismissed as naïve. Her leftist rhetoric about changing the world and going to help the peasants in Nicaragua looks like someone whose politics
“function more as a psychological lifeline than as a thought-out commitment” (Quart, 1993, p. 30). In this conversation, we get to know that Cyril is not even a member of the trade union.

After that, Cyril and Shirley have a heart-to-heart talk. Cyril criticizes Shirley desire’s for a baby as just another “bourgeois game:” “Get yourself into a nice house, couple of kids, dog... garden with a greenhouse.” When asked what he really wants, after thinking seriously, he says “I want everyone to have enough to eat, places to live, jobs.” This is “a noble reaffirmation of socialist priorities in an age of postmodernism, post-Fordism, neo-Marxism, all of them seductively revisionist strategies devised to make liberals forget that” (Adair, 1989, p. 65). Cyril then expresses his frustration that he feels “cut off:” “I’m a dead loss. Don’t do nothing. Just sit here moaning.” Shirley consoles him that “The world ain’t ever gonna be perfect.” So Cyril’s explicit working-class consciousness is constrained by his confusion about what to do politically, a confusion deepened by Mrs Thatcher’s political actions.

The working class are split. Mrs Bender is a working-class widow, yet from Cyril and Shirley’s talk we know that she voted for the Conservative Party last year, an act taken by Cyril as “Working-class Tories stabbing themselves in the back.” The working-class community is an absence. Hill noticed three evidences for lack of community in the film: firstly, Cyril “isn’t actually a member of a trade union;” secondly, “while the film chides the lack of neighborliness shown by the Booth-Braines towards Mrs Bender, there is no evidence of any ‘community’ in the block of flats in which Cyril and Shirley live (where no neighbors are seen, or
identified, at all);” and thirdly, “Cyril and Shirley would appear to lack any clear sense of connection or involvement with a more broadly based social or political community and tradition” (Hill, 1999, pp. 196-197). Based on such observation, he argues that “it is a portrait of `practical socialism’ that only goes so far” (1999, p. 196).

**Critique of Thatcherite politics.**

In the film, the three couples represent different classes and display different responses in attitude and behavior toward Thatcherite politics.

Valerie and Martin represent the “new rich.” They live in an overstuffed suburban detached house. They seem to have succeeded along Thatcherite lines of making money and acquiring material goods. Martin, a second-hand car-dealer and a burger bar owner, is “crassly entrepreneurial” (Adair, 1989, p. 64) and sensitive to market opportunities of Thatcherite Britain. He sees that business is booming and delivery boys are needed, so he seriously wants to give Cyril “a piece of professional advice” to form “a little company” of his own so that “the other wallies do the dirty work” and Cyril can “sit in Happy Valley collecting the dosh.” Valerie is succumbed to shallow materialism. With the family wealth, she is seen spending loads of time exercising, consuming, and hungering for affection from her abusive husband. More than anything else, she is such a big social snob! She painfully tries to imitate Laetitia’s yuppie dress and manner, e.g. the leopard-skin coat and the hat. She holds a birthday party in her house for her mother’s 70th birthday to show off her detached house and decorations (the fireplace, chess). As Hill sharply observes, Valerie’s
character is precisely “comic” because “she lacks ‘good’ dress sense, has suburban
tastes (e.g. an imitation log-fire, ornamental brass fruit, a two-tier tea trolley) and is
generally pretentious (proudly displaying a glass chess set in which the pieces are laid

Laetitia and Rupert represent the upper-middle class. Laetitia is extremely
satisfied with her life and tells her husband that she thanks God every day that she has
been blessed with such beautiful skin and no saggy neck. Leigh uses the snobbish
Tory couple “as venomous comic caricatures to send up gentrification and Thatcherite
social callousness” (Quart, 1993, p. 30). Laetitia conveys the brittle, harsh inhumanity
of Thatcherism in her talk with Mrs Bender about the house while serving tea:

L: But you can hardly justify having three bedrooms, though, can you?
M: It’s my home.
L: It is at the moment, I grant you that.
....
L: I’m not sure it wouldn’t be better appreciated by a professional couple or even a family.
M: I have always lived here.
L: Yes, that’s as may be, but times change.
L: I think you’d be the first to agree you’d be far better off buying yourself a nice little
modern granny flat.
M: Where would I get the money from?
L: If you were to put your house on the market, you’ll find you’ve been sitting on a gold
mine.
...
M: It’s not my house. ... It belongs to the Council.
L: Oh...Well, mercifully, you people have the opportunity to purchase your council
property nowadays. I’d snap it up, it I were you. Then, of course, one resells.
Apart from the sense on property-owning which is very Thatcherite, the conversation also suggests that, for Laetitia, Mrs Bender is only an embarrassing neighbor whose presence only lowers their street’s property value. When Cyril takes his mother away, Rupert warns that “what made this country great is a place for everyone and everyone in his place. And this is my place.”

Conversely, Cyril and Shirley are like aliens in Thatcher’s Britain. Cyril has no interest in money or status. He declines Martin’s suggestion of setting up a small company based on his “principle,” saying that “It ain’t everybody’s purpose in life to accumulate money.” Cyril is also against his sister’s wish to buy her mother’s house so as to “sell it off later on” and “make a huge profit.” Shirley grows a cactus plant and names it “Thatcher” because “it’s pain in the arse. Prongs you every time you walk past it.” The couple view with contempt that the street where Cyril’s mum lives has been almost taken over by the middle class who buy for “capital investment” to sell for a fortune instead of simply as a home. While Laetitia’s house is well furnished, Shirley pities that Cyril’s mum’s house gets no central heating.

The film, through showing scorn to the other two couples, who adapt, in different ways, to the Thatcherite ethos, exerts critique to Thatcherism and all inhumaness it embodies.

*Human kindness and positive spirit.*

Leigh acknowledges that any “notion that there’s a bias on [his] part in *High Hopes* and that, in some way, Cyril and Shirley are the goodies and Rupert and Laetitia and Valerie and Martin are the baddies is absolutely true” (Fuller, as cited in
Watson, 2004, p. 90). In *High Hopes*, it is Cyril and Shirley’s “ordinary sense of goodness and concern” which stands in opposition to “the selfish temper of the times” and “gives a positive embodiment to traditional socialist values” (Hill, 1999, p. 196). This unmarried left-wing working-class couple are taken to stand for a more decent set of caring attitude and socially responsible values that Thatcherism is seen as attacking. Adair praises them as “one of the most poignantly loving couples...that our national cinema has produced” and that “[t]heir responses to the needs of others recall those of Londoners in the Blitz” (1989, p. 65). In Hill’s words, Cyril and Shirley shine by their “intuitive humanism” (1999, p. 197). Shirley’s radiance and warmth make her seem beautiful at times, and she is connected to the world in a more concrete and knowing and less ideological way than Cyril (Quart, 1993, p. 30).

At the film’s beginning, the couple selflessly help Wayne (Jason Watkins), a stranger who asks the way. Cyril takes him home for a cup of tea and when Wayne fails to find his sister, they let him stay in their home for the night. Shirley treats him like mother, giving him the towel to dry hands and makes the bedding. Later they accompany Wayne to his sister’s flat to check if she is back. When all efforts have failed, they send him back home on a coach. Near the end of the film, they are happy to give Suzi (Judith Scott) a bed for the night. Throughout the film, Shirley is shown to be kind to her mother-in-law, willing to stay longer to talk to her. At the birthday party at the end of the film, when she notices the old lady’s troubled mentality due to loneliness, she takes her home to stay with them. When Cyril says “I’ll have to go round there more often,” Shirley states “She needs more than that. She needs looking
Cyril and Shirley show genuine concern towards the mother and can be trusted when they say they will give her more help in the future.

In contrast, Valerie does not visit mum often, giving her a Christmas gift when it is already February. She holds the birthday party for her mother not out of kindness, but to show off her house. At the birthday party, she is rude to her mother, dragging her to move faster and forces her to drink soft drink instead of tea. The most notorious aspect is that, in order to call Cyril to take the mother home with the house key, she lies to Cyril that the old mum has had a serious accident. Valerie’s beneficence towards her mother seems to have more to do with her own wants than those of Mrs Bender.

Laetitia and Rupert, the upper-middle-class couple, are depicted as unkind and unwilling to help, treating Mrs Bender with “pained forbearance” (Adair, 1989, p. 64) and contemptuous cruelty. When Mrs Bender is locked outside her house and asks for help, Laetitia suggests seeing a policeman, a neighbor or phone children from a public booth before finally reluctantly invites her to come in “just for a moment.” When Mrs Bender wants to go to the toilet with some urgency, Laetitia answers “Ah, the lavatory. I will show you where it is in a minute.”

While Mrs Bender was waiting for her children to take her home with the house key, Laetitia and Rupert “make her pay for the privilege of sitting in their kitchen by subjecting her to a barrage of questions about the run-down state of her house and garden” (Murphy, 2009b, p. 422), all selfish questions showing no concern about Mrs Bender’s economic situation. After knowing that she doesn’t own the house to sell,
Rupert suggests: “how about getting outside with a brush and giving the front of your house a lick of paint? Smarten it up a little bit, eh?” The couple is half-hearted with charity, donating wine to “mentally-handicapped something-or-other.” Murphy notes that in British films the rich tend to be shown “as cuddly eccentrics with hearts of gold” and sees that Laetitia and Rupert’s callousness comes “as a shock” (2009b, p. 422). Waston sees Leigh’s representation as “a kind of political cartoon, one in which it is OK not just to dislike but even to hate the villain (or ‘baddies:’ the Booth-Braines)” (2004, p. 90).

Leigh places high hopes on the positive spirit in his characters (especially women) who have faith, hope and trust, and who inculcate that in other people. In Life is Sweet, the husband Andy is depicted as a dreamer with a passion for the caravan he buys for his cooking business. The wife Wendy can fully understand his passion and delivers a long speech at the end of the film in which she scolds her daughter Nicola for having “given up,” while she and her husband are “still out there, fighting.” In High Hopes, the most striking evidence of “the willingness to carry on” is to be found in the reluctant Cyril’s last-minute acceptance of Shirley’s hope for having a child. In each case, we are made to understand that carrying on is not something that should be taken for granted--it takes faith and courage.

**Family and women.**

Family provides a key theme in High Hopes. In Leigh’s many films, the social community is usually missing, placing family the only harbor to stick to. Cyril and Shirley are living together in partnership. Shirley wants to have a baby, but Cyril is
reluctant. His understanding of the family is only as far as “Two’s company,” not including children. He knows that Shirley must think of him as “being selfish,” but does not want to compromise. The reason he offers is “Families fuck you up. That’s the truth. They’re out of date, families. They ain’t no use any more” and “no one gives a shit what sort of world ... kids are ... born into.” Cyril’s view seems to be supported by the example of his own troubled family. In the touching scene of Mrs Bender’s birthday party, we see the close-up shot of the forlorn face of Mrs Bender while hearing Cyril and Valerie quarrelling off-screen in the background, accusing each other of having “breakdowns.” However, Hill has a point in suggesting that “if families are flawed, they seem, none the less, to be all that the characters have to hold on to, given that other forms of communality, extending beyond the family, are either inadequate or non-existent” (1999, p. 196). Watson takes this remark of Hill to be a criticism “not of the film but of the state of affairs that the film investigates” (2004, p. 91).

By the end of the film, Cyril agrees with Shirley and is prepared to have a baby. This decision is seen by Hill as investing the end of the film with “a degree of optimism (or ‘high hopes’) about the future” (1999, p. 198). Yet Hill holds that “while the film may, in this way, succeed in expressing values of care and responsibility which cut across the prevailing ethos of Thatcherism, it only does so by partly reproducing conservative (and, indeed, Thatcherite) values regarding the family and women” (1999, p. 198). On this remark, Watson accuses Hill of “having fallen victim to right-wing propaganda, which famously claims that it alone speaks for/is
concerned about ‘family values.’ Versions of the family long preceded ‘Thatcherism’ and, in all likelihood, they will long survive its demise” (2004, p. 94). Here I would agree with Watson’s criticism since family cannot become Thatcher’s patent simply because she stressed its importance. Hill also comments that “in celebrating the virtues of the privatized family as a kind of escape route from political impotence and passivity, the film, for all its apparent ‘socialism,’ appears to end up reinforcing the very scepticism about more collective (or ‘socialist’) forms of political action that was already such a feature of this era” (1999, p. 198). On this, Watson feels that Hill is mistaken here to assume that “the film is celebrating the family as a ‘way out’ or an ‘escape route.’” He reasonably views the celebration as surely more in the spirit of “At least this possibility still exists, at least there is still this to hold on to, or to try to make something of.” He believes that “It seems unlikely to be able to satisfy Cyril’s yearning for greater connection and purpose but it is something.” (2004, p. 91)

Women’s representation is rather mixed in the film. On the one hand, Shirley is almost perfect with her warmth, kindness and positive spirit; on the other, misogynist tendency can be detected in negative depictions of all other women. Valerie is hystericous and not much respected by her husband Martin, who once even throws her onto the ground. Her drunken collapse is disgusting but pitiable. Martin’s lover is divorced and is miserable in not being able to see her children. Shirley is teased by Martin, who claims that “Women! All the bleedin’ same. Fucking losers.” Laetitia is despised for lack of sympathy and concern. Hill notes a significant fact that all of the couples are childless in the film. He sees the case of the Gore-Booths and Burkes as
being “associated with the ‘sterility’ of the values they represent” and the case of Suzi, who has had an abortion, as “underscore[ing] the fruitlessness (and lack of ‘humanity’) of her politics” (1999, p. 198). In the film, women are not only despised for consumerism and social climbing, but also made “unwholesome” and “unfulfilled” by the “flawed” femininity of having no children (for whatever reasons). Suzi’s mentioning that “you have a room, you can have a baby” is heart-breaking for people to hear.

*High Hopes* provides us with a happy ending. The happy mood runs along three lines. Cyril isn’t defeated; yet he feels “more serene” and “more willing” to come to terms with life’s injustice and have a child with Shirley (Quart, 1993, p. 32). The decision of Cyril and Shirley to have a child, for Hill, “invests the end of the film with a degree of optimism (or ‘high hopes’) about the future” (1999, p. 198). Mrs Bender has a nice sleep and becomes less miserable the next morning. And above all, working-class culture is highlighted for appreciation. The film’s final scene shows Cyril and Shirley taking Mrs Bender up on the roof of the building and looking down on the railway station where Cyril’s father used to work, a nostalgic solute to the traditional working-class culture rooted in manual labor and a sense of place. Mrs Bender’s final exclamation that “it is the top of the world,” while illustrating the physical height, should also carry the metaphorical meaning of the superiority of working-class culture.

*High Hopes* provides no political alternative to Thatcherism. Those grander high hopes of radical political change appear impractical, but the film suggests ways
to live more humanly despite social inequality. Cyril compensates his political disillusionment with the more modest hope of building a humane and caring life with Shirley. This is not very high on the scale of human happiness, but it is enough to imbue the film with optimism rather than despair. Adair holds that “Cyril and Shirley both have and are the high hopes of Leigh’s title, which is absolutely not ironic; and theirs is a story of grace under pressure” (1989, p. 65).

Leigh depicts Cyril and Shirley in a more naturalistic fashion. They are played without the exaggerated mannerisms that typify the playing of the Burkes and Gore-Booths. Their intimate behavior—talking, fighting, having sex—“feels utterly genuine” (Quart, 1993, p. 32).

Class and Race in Stephen Frears’ My Beautiful Laundrette (1985)

Stephen Frears chose the feature film to attack Thatcherism, claiming that his film Sammy and Rosie Get Laid was “an attempt to bring Margaret Thatcher down” (Friedman & Stewart, 1994, p. 233). Both My Beautiful Laundrette (1985) and Sammy and Rosie Get Laid (1987) depict Thatcher’s England as dominated by racism, greed, and social injustice. His attraction to the working and underclasses is consistent with his interest in the Pakistani community. According to Frears, My Beautiful Laundrette was his and screenwriter Hanif Kureishi’s “ironic salutation to the entrepreneurial spirit in the eighties that Margaret Thatcher championed” (Barber, 1993, p. 221). Frears saw that Mrs Thatcher had divided the country “…between the people who’ve got and the people who haven’t” (Barber, 1993, p. 222) and her government
“transformed the postwar socialist state into a ‘nation’ courting and supported by private capitalistic enterprise” (Barber, 1993, p. 221).

My Beautiful Laundrette was shot in 1985 and was an instant success. At its American debut in 1986, the New York Times acclaimed it as one of the 10 best films of 1986. The film is a highly innovative exploration of marginalized cultures in Thatcher-era London. Kirk summarized that the film “succeeded by knitting together the themes of race and class within a much wider concern with national identity, and the dynamics of history which constitute us all” (2003, p. 177).

Set in a Pakistani community of South London in the 1980s, the film centers on a young Anglo-Pakistani, Omar (Gordon Warnecke), his white working class friend and lover, Johnny (Daniel Day Lewis), and Omar’s family of successful, rapacious entrepreneurs. Omar is living with his leftist alcoholic father and is “on dole like everyone else in England.” Then he is directed to work for his wealthy, entrepreneur uncle, Nasser (Saeed Jaffrey), who gives Omar a rundown launderette to run. Defying his father’s wish that he should enter college, Omar wants to grab a share of Britain’s wealth by “squeezing the tits of the system.” He hires his school friend Johnny, a poor white working class youth and a former racist, and succeeds in renovating the launderette into a beautifully decorated and profitable business. Omar and Johnny also become homosexual lovers. Johnny’s white working class fellows, Genghis (Richard Graham) and Moose (Stephen Marcus), belong to the National Front. They try hard to draw him back by warning him not to “cut yourself from your own people,” but fail. Racial tension is serious. After Salim (Derrick Branche), also a wealthy Pakistani,
injures Moose with his car, they fight back by viciously beating Salim and even Johnny, who comes to Salim’s help. The film ends with Omar helping Johnny clean up his wounds and the two splashing each other with water while topless.

The film is definitely about race. As Kirk puts it, it is “concerned in important ways with the dialectic of race and class...politics of difference...post-colonial theory of hybridity” (2003, p. 170). Omar, his father and his uncle’s family are of Pakistani origin making a scene in the multi-racial and multi-cultural metropolitan London. Racial prejudice and racial hatred are frequent happenings they have to come across. Yet the film is unique in that it is more about race, moving beyond the pitiable racial discrimination psyche. Both race and class are equally central and part of the construction of hybridity in the film and both get partly blurred in the New Right ideology. Kirk argues that, despite the emphasis on British Asian experience in the film, “race is a subordinate issue to a more subtle exploration of the workings of class inequalities and the power relations within them” (2003, p. 171). For me, the film, in its unique way of dealing with race through class, is more valuable to the analysis of class as a more determining factor of human existence.

*My Beautiful Laundrette* addresses the class issue by contrasting the haves with the have-nots: professional businessman Nassar, rich Salim, ambitious Omar on the one hand, and jobless, homeless Johnny, Genghis and Moose on the other hand. The Pakistanis now form part of the privileged class in the 1980s. The once colonial Pakistanis now own big business and live well in large suburban homes and luxury flats. In contrast, their tormentors, lumpen white punks and skinheads are “confined
and constricted” to streets, own nothing and “have only the dole and gratuitous street violence to console themselves with” (Quart, 1994, p. 243). So, the whites are seen as the real victims of Thatcherism. The Pakistani *nouveau riche* reverses the traditional imperial and colonial hierarchy. This is demonstrated at the beginning of the film when Salim and some Jamaicans he employs throw out “squatters” Johnny and Genghis from a run-down building Salim has purchased, depriving them of their only home in a sort of “symbolic ‘taking over’ of the white characters’ ‘home’” (Hill, 1999, p. 211). A similar inversion of roles is also evident in the fact that Omar is treating Johnny “like a servant.” It is also evident when Nassar’s white working-class mistress responds to Nassar’s daughter’s accusation of living off her father by saying: “And you must understand, we’re of different generations, different classes. Everything is waiting for you. The only thing that has ever waited for me is your father.”

Dispossession stands as the key state of the white underclass. Living on the streets with petty crimes (such as stealing) and sleeping anywhere possible, Johnny, Genghis and Moose (Stephen Marcus) belong to the expanding underclass--economic dropouts--of the society in the 1980s. And the scene is not a rarity, with the extremely high unemployment rate of the time taken into consideration. Kirk sees them as “quite pitiful characters” (despite their menacing racist activities), because despite their fervor to “belong” there is “something quite rootless” about them. Genghis pleads with Johnny, “Don’t cut yourself off from your own people, everyone’s got to belong.” But it is ironic here that Genghis is “invoking a national identity which seems to have no place for him.” (Kirk, 2003, p. 174)
Johnny is a complex and sympathetic figure in the film. He was Omar's friend at school, but joined the racist march. He is now "lower class" and "won't come in without being asked, unless he's doing a burglary." He sees working with Omar as a lifeline to escape from squatting and aimless wondering in the streets and to get self-respect. Responding to his white friends' warning of him not to cut off from his own people, he says "I want to do some work, instead of always hanging around." He still maintains some loyalty to the group of racist punks he once belonged to, but also helps Salim when he is beaten viciously.

In short, working class has declined as a historical force. In the film, they are mostly negatively depicted as aggressive little-Englanders, right-wing and reactionary, "to be pitied at best, despised at worst" (Kirk, 2003, p. 178). For the Old Left like Omar's father (Roshan Seth), a former socialist journalist, he sees the "death" of socialism with his lamenting remark that "The working class is such a great disappointment to me," representing the declining confidence in the agency of the working class (Hill, 1999, p. 205). For the Pakistani new rich, they also show strong contempt for the white underclass, as Salim says to Omar, "Look at them. What a waste of life. They're filthy, ignorant. They don't respect people, especially our people." So, there seems to be no place for Johnny and Genghis in the Thatcherite entrepreneurial society. As Salim shouts in the film: "What the hell else is there left for you in this country now?"

Then it becomes paradoxical that the successful and the favored are Asian-origin businessmen. Omar and his people are clearly benefiting from Mrs
Thatcher’s enterprise culture of self effort. “The Pakistani ... but they are not put off, despite the racism, by Thatcher’s England” (Quart, 1994, p. 243). Thatcher had applauded the Asian and Indian shopkeepers “as the nation’s new ‘meritocrats’” (Kirk, 2003, p. 174). They know there is money in the Thatcherite market: “In this damn country, which we hate and love, you can get anything you want. It’s all spread out and available...Only you have to know how to squeeze the tits of the system.” So, they embrace Thatcherism and regard enterprise culture as offering them opportunities for their success. As at a party, Nassar proposes to Omar, “We’ll drink to Thatcher and your beautiful laundrette...” In seeking success, they take whatever measures necessary, legal or illegal.

Nassar has definitely benefited most from the entrepreneur culture promoted by Mrs. Thatcher. Committed to making big money, he has acquired a business empire by all means, evidently including exploiting others, white or black, and thus could afford to say that “I’m the law. I create the world” and “no one works without my permission.” He owns garage, laundrette, slum housing for rent, and deals with porn-video cassettes, drugs, and a list of other businesses.

Omar is quick to learn and is not adverse to illegal dealings. He sees Salim’s drug game and immediately knows that’s how he is going to finance the start of his laundrette. So, he soon funds the opening of the laundrette with money he gets from selling drugs he steals from Salim. He is also professionally ambitious. When Nassar hands over the laundrette to him, what he expects is to have the place cleaned by Omar and improved a little. But Omar declares that “I don’t only want to sweep up...
I want to be manager of this place. I think I can do it.” The next thing we know is that
Omar hires Johnny—“a bloke of astounding competence and strength of body and
mind” in Omar’s words—to do all the tough work. So one of Nassar’s friends makes
such comment: “Typically English, if I can say that.” Omar’s efficiency and
leadership skill is appreciated and near the end he is given more laundrette to manage
by his uncle’s friend.

When Omar’s father asks: “How is it that scrubbing cars could make a son of
mine look so ecstatic?” Omar simply responds that “It gets me out of the house,”
which projects a strong implication that enterprise culture is much enjoyed and
approved by the young adults.

In addition, the state of their living—Nasser’s family home, Salim’s and
Cherry’s luxurious flat, the apartment building which they own and rent out—all
suggest that they have strived hard to “squeeze the tits of the system.”

Apart from Salim evicting Johnny and Genghis at the beginning of the film,
Nassar later hires Johnny to evict a black poet from a property he wants to re-let.
When challenged by Johnny that throwing out his own kind of people—the
colored—“Doesn’t look too good, does it?” Nassar simply answers, “I’m a
professional businessman, not a professional Pakistani. And there is no question of
race in the new enterprise culture.”

Yet race is forever the pain of the colored in Britain. In the film, though
members of oppressed racial groups—the Pakistani—are capable of and occasionally
even eager to engage in class-based exploitation, the most exploitative members of
the oppressed racial communities are themselves victims of brutal racist attacks. Genghis is against Johnny working for the Paki, claiming, “They came over here to work for us. That’s why we brought them over.” Salim’s car is banged on just because the gangsters notice that it is the Pakistani who drives the car. Salim is tough to fight back. When meeting these hoodlums again in the street, he accelerates his car fast and drives at them and runs down Moose, who is badly injured. In a vicious circle, near the end of the film, Genghis and his white friends take their revenge on Salim, destroying his car and nearly beating him to death. Here, racial conflict is being put on the front stage.

The occupations the Pakistanis carry on are manual or insidious ones. Nasser’s garage, launderette, etc are low-status businesses; Salim takes a risk in drug-dealing; Omar operates a launderette named “Powder” which hints its source of financing—the profits from Salim’s illegal drug business. They all make money in areas which do not command high respect. Omar regards the laundry as dirty work and hires Johnny to do it. Nasser and Salim can earn cash and property through efforts, but they cannot obtain their social standing in British society. One of the Pakistani claims: “What chance a racist Englishman has given us that we haven’t taken it from him with our hands?”

On the whole, the Pakistani characters are not depicted as figures of virtue. Represented as “drug dealers, sodomites and mad landlords” (Hill, 1999, p. 210), they are seen to be shrewd, greedy and tough. But as Kureishi points out, none of his Asian characters may be regarded as “victims” (Hill, 1999, p. 210). They are generally
successful businessmen, at ease with the Thatcherite enterprise culture. So, Hill points out that “a part of the film’s strategy is to use the business success of the Asian characters to invert old imperial power relations” (1999, p. 210). As Boyd Tonkin suggests, the film may be viewed as a kind of “revenge film” in which a contrast is set up between an unemployed white “underclass,” who aimlessly wander in the streets, and an Asian business class who have succeeded in becoming the new “masters” (Hill, 1999, p. 211).

So, social hierarchies (based on the subordination of blacks) are overturned in the film, and “we are reminded of Fanon’s argument that the colonized/subaltern perpetually yearns to take the place of the colonizer” (Kirk, 2003, p. 172). The Pakistanis passionately embrace the new enterprise culture as a way to “revenge” the racism they encounter.

By saying “typically English” to refer to Omar’s hiring Johnny, this friend is reminding of a history that Pakistanis used to be hired by the white to do all the manual work. But here, the stereotypical role is subverted. Though it is a love relationship between Johnny and Omar, Omar, the Pakistani, is obviously the dominating “boss man,” benefiting from the reversed colonial order and treating Johnny as someone from the “lower class.” As Nassar’s daughter sees and tells Johnny, “Omar just runs you around everywhere, like a servant.”

When Johnny observes that Omar is “getting greedy,” Omar’s response is fuelled with a sense of “racial victimization and business ambition,” or even of racial revenge: “I want big money. I’m not gonna be beat down by this country. When we
were at school, you and your lot kicked me all round the place. And what are you
doing now? Washing my floor. That’s how I like it.” The Pakistanis are clearly aware
“But we’re nothing in England without money.”

The film is brave and impressive with its depiction of the gay relationship and
love scenes. The relationship is not portrayed as a “problem” and the lovers are not
shown as “victims” of homophobia. Kureishi explains that he wanted the gayness to
be “taken for granted” rather than foregrounded as an issue. For Philip French, the
film celebrates “a gay love affair” that “transcends race, class, upbringing and social
chaos.” (Hill, 1999, p. 213) Omar announces to Salim that, in his opinion, “much
good can come from fucking.” The inter-racial relationship suggests how sexual
desires may permit the crossing of borders.

The ending is sad for Nasser, a close up of him shows that he is melancholy and
puzzled—“finished,” he says—left by both his mistress and daughter; but happy for
Omar and Johnny. At the end of the film, which is set in that little office at the back of
the laundrette, Omar tenderly cleans up Johnny’s wounds after his fights against his
white mates to rescue Salim. The last scene shows Johnny and Omar splash water
from the sink onto one another’s bare chests. So, racial tension is solved by the
homosexual love between Omar and Johnny, which crosses the barrier of race, class
and gender, a utopian resolution more like a “wish-fulfillment.” Frears explains that
the film was given a happy ending because “it would be too depressing without it”
and “It’s only at the very end that there is this flicker of happiness.” He thinks the film
is “more cheerfully defiant.” (Friedman & Stewart, 1994, pp. 227-228)
In conclusion, *My Beautiful Laundrette* is critical of Thatcherism and the materialism and selfishness which it generates in turning the society a cruel one with many young adults jobless and homeless; however, it also identifies that the enterprise culture provides opportunities for Asians to get through the barriers, make financial achievements and even change their social status. At the same time, it is also aware of how even the possession of money is not necessarily a defense against racism.

**Ken Loach and *Sweet Sixteen* (2002)**

Loach and his films.

Ken Loach is a leading exponent of realism. He is born from a working-class family and is a critically admired director and “an unwavering, outspokenly committed socialist” (Turner, 1993, p. 50), who uses documentary realist strategies to explore the inequalities and conflicts in societies, establishing a reputation for political awareness in his films. He can be said to be the only current British film-maker using class in an explicit political sense.

His continuous effort from his early television and film career in the 1960s right through four decades to the films of the 1990s and 2000s made him eligible for the claim that the continuing history of British social realism is inextricably linked to Ken Loach. Particularly, he provides something of a bridge between the New Wave films of the early 1960s and the films of the 1990s, almost “singlehandedly responsible for sustaining social realist texts” when British cinema was sacrificing social realism due to financial difficulties. In his 40-year directing career, the dominating aim to make “art in the service of the people” has remained consistent (Leigh, 2002, p. 178).
Loach’s realism is “realism with a cause, and few other current directors share his passionate commitment” (Brown, 2009, p. 35).

During the 1960s, he worked extensively in television and was noted for *Cathy Come Home*, which is about a homeless mother and was filmed for BBC2. Then he won high recognition for *Kes* (1970), a film which is set among a coal-mining community in Yorkshire, and looks sensitively at how a baby kestrel gives a young boy’s life a sense of meaning. Since the 1980s his films have engaged more closely with politics and society. *Looks and Smiles* (1982) considers the desperate choices open to two young school-leavers at a time when employment opportunities are few. For greater authenticity Loach used all amateurs from local communities of Sheffield (the setting for the film) to cast the film. Yet in the 1980s Loach was much silenced by censorship with his documentaries as a voice of “outraged dissent against Thatcherism’s onslaught on the trade unions and the impoverishment of the working class” (Fuller, 1998, p. 78). Aware of his own lack of success in the 1980s, Loach was eager to re-establish himself as a commercially viable filmmaker in the 1990s. He realized that he needed to adapt to some extent to a newly market-orientated British cinema or he would not be making films at all. So his later works more followed the mainstream traditions of narrative cinema. He added comic elements in some of his films to relieve the cruelty of misery and romance became a common plot seen to offer redemptive possibilities. His works in the 1990s reestablished Loach as a European filmmaker with a high international reputation and secured him relatively easy access to financial support.
Thematically, Loach's films are all politically charged and anti-capitalist. The struggle of the disadvantaged against an uninterested society is a theme common to many of his works, displaying a society split savagely into the "haves" and "have-nots." For Loach, "The subjects which have drawn me are those which relate personal and emotional life to a wider background--a class background and economic background" since "people's personal lives don't exist in a vacuum" (Hearse, as cited in Leigh, 2002, pp. 146-147). "It just grows ever more apparent," said Loach, "that there are two classes in society, that their interests are irreconcilable, and that one survives at the expense of the other" (Hayward, 2004, p. 266). His films in the 1990s are all much concerned with the underclass—casual workers, drunkard, single mothers, drug dealers, whose plight are seen as a heavy price unduly paid for the economic upheavals of the 1980s. Loach's works have always been pessimistic about the prospects of radical political change in Britain. The sense of political possibility is widely missing.

In *Riff Raff* (1990), Loach humorously depicts a group of building-site laborers and their work in converting a hospital into a block of luxury flats for the rich. The fear of unemployment and absence of trade union right have placed these casual laborers from Liverpool and Scotland in a disadvantaged and even dangerous position. They are at the mercy of the ruthless, cost-cutting employers who care nothing about the safety of working environment and simply want the job to be done as quickly and cheaply as possible. The builders work at their own risk and without insurance. One of them from Liverpool blames the Thatcher government, complains about work and
safety conditions and urges the men to organize. He is quickly sacked as a result.

Following the death of a fellow worker who falls from inadequately secured scaffolding, the protagonist Stevie and another worker take revenge. They eventually burn down the apartments they are building, which is active resistance against the employers. The film ends bleakly with the two staring into a flaming abyss. The final violent direct attack is “less a considered political act than a desperate hitting out at a system that they lack the power to change” (Hill, 1998, p. 18), an action of “impotent despair” (Wilson, 1991, p. 61). Much of the humor in Riff-Raff is “of a bitter and ironic nature” (Mather, 2006, p. 30).

*Raining Stones* (1993) is a tragicomic story exploring the effects of unemployment on a Catholic family in Manchester with anti-Thatcher political message. The jobless Catholic father Bob runs into debt and danger after taking out a loan to buy his daughter a communion dress. Bob’s obsessive determination to find money for the dress is shown as foolhardy as he has been warned many times that the expenditure is unnecessary and will lead him to debt. Yet his stubbornness is seen as understandable in a way as it symbolizes a desperate attempt of a father to “hold on to the last remnants of his sense of self-worth” (Hill, 1998, p. 20). Because of the debt (just a small sum), Bob is pressed and his wife and daughter are viciously threatened. He is finally driven into a violent attack on one uncaring loan shark, hitting his car and indirectly leading to the car-crash death of him. The action is taken by Hill as belonging to “individual acts of anger, rather than organized political activity, that now constitute resistance” (1998, p. 18). The film reveals the desperation of a
community whose people’s pride and dignity has been ripped away along with their jobs. The beginning of Bob and Tommy kidnapping a lone sheep from a farmer’s field to sell the meat for money is extremely humorous. The priest’s decision to hide the truth about Bob’s attack by destroying the evidences is extraordinarily warm and funny.

*Ladybird, Ladybird* (1994) is based on a true story. It examines the plight of a Liverpudlian woman in London whose four children are all taken into custody by the social services following a house fire taking place in a women’s refuge (where she is seeking protection with children from her abusive partner) while she is absent and leads to her eldest son seriously burnt. The heroine, Maggie, has suffered from a series of abusive relationships (for which she is blamed for not being careful enough in choosing partners). When Maggie starts a new life with Jorge, a mild political exile from Paraguay and a responsible man, and gives birth to their first child, the police and social workers come to investigate in the neighborhood and are told lies about Jorge beating Maggie. So they intervene and take the baby away. Their second child is taken away straight after the delivery, a scene extremely traumatic to watch. Quick to condemn, the social workers have no interest in Maggie’s miserable past: she has an abusive father, violent partners and was sexually abused as a child. The social workers are depicted as constituting “a malign presence, cruelly interfering in the lives of others and adding to their misery” (Hill, 2000a, p. 182). Despite the showing of Maggie’s roughness, the film “refuses to indict her as a bad mother and pinpoints how the obstacles to her achievement of happiness result from her lack of social and
economic power” (Hill, 2000a, p. 181). She is presented “as victim of her own emotional state, as much as of the state’s interventionist methods” (Francke, 1994, p. 47).

My Name is Joe (1999) is a story of Joe’s attempts to escape his alcoholic past and start a new life through his love affair with Sarah, a health worker. Joe used to be an alcoholic, but has quitted drinking and is developing a relationship with Sarah. His friend Liam, a member of the football team of unemployed men that Joe coaches, and his wife are in horrible debt due to drug taking and are severely threatened. To settle their debt, Joe agrees to do three drug runs for the local dealer. Sarah is outraged to discover the truth. Joe tries to explain, but finds their class differences too wide to unite them: “Ah’m really sorry, but you know I don’t live in this nice, tidy, wee world of yours. ...Some of us don’t have a choice. I didnae have a fuckin’ choice...Every fuckin’ choice stinks doon here.” The film ends with Joe returning to drink after the breakup and Liam hangs himself and a sad funeral. Williamson sees the message of the film as “don’t listen to middle-class do-gooders.” Through Sarah, the film tells us “the limitations of what even the most well-meaning of social and healthcare professionals can achieve.” (1998, p. 58) The film is dominated throughout by a sense of pessimism. Joe’s decision is seen not simply as a matter of personal morality but one that has been forced upon him by the socio-economic situation.

Loach continued into the 2000s with Sweet Sixteen (2002), which will be explored in the next part.

Stylistically, Loach has tried to make films that are “emotionally engaging and
analytical” (Leigh, 2002, p. 177). For Loach, “the desire to depict reality on screen overrode almost anything” (Hayward, 2004, p. 4). Loach’s cinematic style is documentary, marked by the strategy of observation rather than involvement. His films commonly use real-life locations that demonstrate the often grim actualities in which people live. They also employ a mix of professional and non-professional actors and actresses and Loach seeks to downplay the sense of an actor’s performance through improvisation and even surprise (an actor is sometimes kept in the dark about developments in the script). Techniques such as the avoidance of dramatic lighting and compositional effects or the use of unbroken takes are employed to maintain a degree of distance from the characters they observe. Quite often, his protagonists speak with a very strong local accent (e.g. the accent of the Glaswegian teenager in Sweet Sixteen) that is hard to comprehend, so when shown abroad, his films were often dubbed or subtitled. Those on screen appeared so real that the truth Loach was telling through drama was a genuine threat to the established order (Hayward, 2004, p. 3).

On Loach’s influence, it is worth noting that his commitment has not made much of an impact on British cinema audiences. Britain’s film culture in the 1990s “tolerates Loach’s spartan humanism, but does not endorse it” (Brown, 2000, p. 34). His films did not sell well in Britain, but won many top awards from European film festivals and did a lot better in European box-office.

Loach has been a determined and persistent fighter for social justice and fairness. He has never lost faith in his belief that film can play a role in changing
attitudes and that ordinary people deserve fairer treatment. His work has helped to sustain a critical and committed film culture in Britain despite everything. He quotes Milan Kundera’s phrase to define his fight as “the struggle of memory against forgetting” (Rowbotham, 2001, p. 87). Loach might seem to be naïve in his persistence, yet he is highly appreciated and widely admired throughout the world, which illustrates that maintaining his uncompromising political stand and independent filmmaking style had been a worthy effort, both for himself as well as for those who were not usually given a voice on screen.

Winning awards and nominations at Cannes, *Sweet Sixteen* continues Ken Loach’s devotion to social awareness.

*Sweet Sixteen* (2002).

*Sweet Sixteen* is a gritty film written by Paul Laverty and it is the fourth collaboration between him and Loach. The story is set in Greenock, a gray Scottish town down the Clyde River from Glasgow, a former shipbuilding center now depressed by unemployment and hopelessness. The strong political and cultural working-class community has disappeared. Gone with them was also the confident youth doing apprenticeships with money and disciple. Now, the jobs available were “crap”—like McDonald’s, call centers or one-day contracts; “drugs are the currency—more readily available than jobs” (Hayward, 2004, p. 255). Laverty spent quite some time there talking to drug-selling kids before writing the first draft.

Liam (Martin Compston) is a 15-year-old boy soon approaching his sixteenth birthday. He is waiting for the release of his drug-addicted mother, Jean (Michelle
Coulter), from prison where she is completing a prison term for a drug offence that her drug-dealing boyfriend, Stan (Gary McCormack), actually committed. In visiting his mother together with Stan and Liam’s grandfather Rab (Tommy McKee), Liam is forced by them to pass drugs (hidden in his mouth) to his mother for sale to the other women in prison via hugging and kissing her. Liam refuses and is hence beaten by the two men. When Rab throws him out of the house, Liam goes to live with his sister Chantelle (Annmarie Fulton), a single mother with her own apartment and a toddler, Calum. He longs for a normal family life and wants to live together with his mother and sister, but Chantelle wants nothing to do with her irresponsible mother. On a joyride with his best friend Pinball (William Ruane), Liam spots a caravan in a field beside a lake, which he is attracted to buy for himself and his mother. To get quick money, Liam and Pinball steal Stan’s heroin and deliver it around town. With the profit, Liam pays the first installment on the caravan. Later, when he offends the territory of a local gangster, Douglas (Jon Morrison), Liam is seriously beaten. But Douglas spots his enterprising spirit of mixing drug selling with pizza delivery and later hires him as a drug runner, but excludes Pinball, who feels hurt. Pinball steals Douglas’ car, breaks it against a glass wall and also burns the caravan. When Liam finds what has happened to his dear caravan, he blames Stan. Douglas buys a pizza place for Liam to run as a guise for delivering drugs. He also offers him a flat for his mother. Pinball hurts himself by cutting on the face. Liam calls an ambulance. Jean is set free, and Liam surprises her with the new flat. He holds a house-warming party at which Chantelle reluctantly joins. The next morning, Jean returns to Stan. Chantelle
tells Liam that Jean doesn’t love either of them. Realizing that Jean is controlled by
Stan, Liam stabs him with a knife Douglas had given him. It’s his 16th birthday.

The film touches upon a lot of the problems posing the old industrial cities. I
take the broken families and self-salvation through drug-dealing as two key themes
for analysis, as I see that the film is more about the lack—of love, of care and of a
long list of basic necessities for a child not yet 16.

**Broken families: The desperate need for mother’s love.**

Like Leigh, Loach’s films since the 1990s has shown more concern about
family, but his families are full of more serious troubles. Liam’s family is marked by
poverty, lack of care or love and by brutality. Liam has an abnormal and miserable
childhood marked by neglect and violence. His mother has not shouldered the
responsibility of taking due care of him and his sister. Liam has been put in children’s
home and has played truant often. At the start of the story, he’s not been inside school
for nine months. He’s been selling stuff since he was seven. He now survives by
peddling stolen cigarettes with his best friend and fellow truant, Pinball. Pinball
shares similar background. His father is a junker. Later in the film, when
sub-.wrapping drug into small bags, Pinball asks Liam not to worry about his
professionalism, as “I used to watch my dad do this sometimes. He was good at it.”

The mother’s present boyfriend, Stan, is a villain. Liam’s granddad is no better.
When Liam refuses to cooperate in smuggling drugs into the prison and, on coming
out, throws the gear away over the fence, the granddad and Stan even beat him
together and threaten to break his legs next time so that he will “be walking like
Charlie Chaplin!” Actually, violence has been a long-time nightmare haunting Liam and Chantelle. As Chantelle cries near the end of the story when Liam intends to beat her: “Just like Granddad, like our fathers! Like Stan! Like all the other losers!... Like our mam! Be one of them because that’s what you are!”

Growing up in such a background, for every kick and punch he endures, Liam has to be violent to defend himself. While nursing his wounds, Chantelle tries to persuade him out of violence. She refers to his frequent fights against his tormentors at the children’s home: “You didn’t fight them because you were brave; you fought them because you didn’t care what happened to you. That’s what broke my heart. ...How can you really care about us if you don’t care for yourself, eh? ...All wee Calum’s got in the whole world is me and you. Nobody else.”

Matthews argues that the mother’s neglect seems to inspire greater emotional attachment from Liam towards her, so “her benign neglect spurs him on to ever greater possessiveness and need” (2002, p. 56). In the prison visit, Liam gets to know that his mother is this time in prison for something set up by Stan. Stan wants her to be in to pass drug to the prison women so that he can get fortune off their boyfriends. This is what he can no longer bear: “You took the rap once for that bastard. This isn’t going on anymore. It’s finished.” Realizing that Stan’s influence and control is vicious, Liam is determined to rescue his mother from having to go back to Stan when she is released.

Determined to have a normal family life once his mother gets out of prison, Liam sets out to create a safe haven beyond their reach. But raising cash for his
caravan is no easy job for a teenager. Obviously the money he earns through selling stolen cigarettes in pubs with Pinball is far from enough for the down payment on the caravan, so he resorts to stealing gear (drugs) from Stan to fasten the speed at predictable risks. He also regularly sends his mum tape to cheer her up, telling her that he has a surprise for her when she gets out and keeps counting the days left: “Just 61 days, Mam. The day before my birthday.” He makes great effort in setting reconciliation between the alienated Chantelle and their mother. Yet Liam’s longing to reconstitute a family life is seen only as a fantasy. The emphasis is “upon people striving for some form of agency—above all, struggling to break with a generational heritage of violence, poverty, and the lack of love” (Bromley, 2003, para. 5). Pinball’s destruction of the caravan, though too cruel for Liam to bear, is reasonable in the sense that it presents the painful longing of the powerless to belong (Bromley, 2003, para. 11), as he cries to Liam: “I would have done anything for you.”

The caravan stands as highly symbolic. For Matthews, it is “the street kid’s version of an Arcadian idyll—plentiful fishing and plastic flowers on the doorway” as well as “the merest glimpse of freedom” (2002, p. 56), whose burnt destruction is to extinguish all hope. The caravan Liam spotted is with two bedrooms, telly, microwave, and beautiful lake view. Liam and Pinball picture a dream life here: “Imagine here at night with a clear sky. Wee fishing rod, couple of cans, couple of hens as well;” “No cunt telling you what to do;” “Paradise.” When he later visits prison, he is eager to show the photo to his mother and emphasize the property ownership: “It’s our caravan. Not the council’s, not the bank’s. It’s ours, Mam. I’ve
bought it... I've paid a deposit and a first installment...Nobody to annoy us, no junkies, no polis. Just me and you. And Chantelle and Calum, if they want... It's in your name, Mam. It's yours.”

But paying is no easy job; Liam has to collect £4,500 to be payable by the 30th of November. And he cheats his sister about the source of money, claiming getting money through selling vanloads of fags: “I’m a businessman.” The hardship with the payment makes Pinball’s burning destruction all the more pitiable, suggesting his crazy desperation.

Liam is also making great effort to unite the whole family. After he is offered a flat by Douglas, he tries to persuade his sister to move in to live together with him and their mother and to give the mother one more chance.

Chantell’s attitude toward the mother is full of resentment. She hates her so much that she does not want to have anything to do with her. As she tells Liam: “she didnae want me. She didnae want you.” When Liam tries to find excuse for his mother’s past neglect of his sister, stating “She was only a wee lassie then,” she confirms that “nothing’s changed!” Chantelle warns Liam to keep a distance as well. To this, Liam accuses her: “Because you’re not giving her a chance.” She is “scared” at Liam’s invitation of living together with mother and later reluctantly moves in for the housewarming night. When Liam knows the next morning that his mother is gone and enquires her, she answers with mocking anger: “Gone where she normally goes. The same ‘usual’ as always.” She asks Liam to give her up: “Liam, let her go. She’ll drive you mad.” Then she utters the harshest attack on the mother’s inability to care or
love: “It’s not that she doesnae care, she cannae care! She’s a fucking crazy lost wee soul and she’s gonnae ruin you too!” But Liam wouldn’t listen. He blames his sister for saying something nasty that drives the mother away. When the sister tries to stop him from looking for the mother by hiding one of his shoes, he even intends to play violence on Chantelle.

Liam is simply desperate for parental love from Jean. He goes to Stan’s place to look for Jean and asks her to leave with him so that “just me and you” stay together in the flat he has just got for “a fresh start.” He even begs: “Can’t you see that? I need you, Mam.” But Mother refuses to go, saying “Liam, you don’t understand.” Stan mocks aside that “You can send one of your fucking tapes” with “Mummy, I love you” cry. He then rudely orders Liam to “Do as you’re told. Leave.” This greatly irritates Liam, who finally loses his sense and stabs Stan angrily. It all happens on Liam’s sixteenth birthday.

The title of the film is sarcastic. Life surely isn’t sweet for Liam or his equally underloved mate Pinball. The mother in this film is even worse than the mother in Ladybird, Ladybird. Both have suffered from violent father and partners, but in Ladybird, Ladybird, Maggie’s love for her children is never doubted. She is only deprived of the custody right due to her once serious neglect (causing her son to be burnt) and all the time she has been trying to win back the children. But here Liam’s mother is simply not capable of loving her children. She is willing to stay in prison for something she did not do, though there must be some untold reasons behind, as she tells her son, “Liam, you don’t understand.” Jean is depicted as a typical loser mother...
image. With the absence of the mother almost throughout the film, "what Liam has been deprived of is his image of his mother" (Rolinson, 2005, p. 253).

The only sweetness comes from the sister. Chantelle is tender, loving, tough; "not just the stereotypical teenage, single parent but also the bearer of mothering and love throughout--a carrier of hope" (Bromley, 2003, para. 9). Time after time, like a battered boxer who refuses to give up, Liam returns to Chantelle, who "patches up his wounds and soothes the hurt" (Bromley, 2003, para. 9) She invites Liam to stay, but under strict pre-conditions of no swearing, no smoking, no farting, because "It’s bad for Calum." Her sense of responsibility towards her son is clearly illustrated in her determination to protect him from what she has suffered: “What happened to us isn’t going to happen to him [Calum]. Never. Over my dead body, and I swear it. I want peace in this house.” It is also shown from the fact that she is enthusiastic to do anything available to feed his son. Her dream to secure a part-time job in a call center is warm but bitter to audience. She treats the night class for the 0800 call center work seriously and proudly declares that “I came first in my test” and is “dead chuffed” that “I’ve got myself a job in a call center.” She even invites Liam to join the training. She shows deep worry and concern about Liam, “Liam, look at the state of you. Look at yourself. You gonna get yourself sorted out?... Promise me.” The sister is a kind of "substitute mother" (Rolinson, 2005, p. 253) to Liam, always there to care about him. But nothing can remedy Liam’s desperate need for love from his mother.

**Self-salvation: drug-selling.**

Drug crime is a theme throughout the film. Yet what’s unique here is that the
focus is more on what drug dealing/selling means for the dispossessed youth. Bromley argues that we seem to be told that, in a situation of deeply-structured inequality, "the only access to images of wealth and privilege for the 'underclass' is through theft or drug dealing--crime as the only career move possible" (2003, para. 4).

When child poverty is a big issue, especially in Scotland, crime is seen as the only available option. Besides crime for profit, it can also be just for fun as resistance, e.g. Liam directs a driver into crushing a policeman's motorcycle and steals the helmet. And sarcastically, one needs to treasure the chance, as Douglas tells Liam, "Listen, an opportunity like this for someone like you only comes once." In *Sweet Sixteen*, Liam's drug-selling is taken as a kind of self-salvation.

Desperate to try to build a proper family home, Liam needs money. In trying to acquire it, he displays wittiness and entrepreneurial skill that has little other outlet for him.

After he is kicked out by Granddad, Liam and Pinball spot with a telescope that Stan hides drug under some boards in the yard protected by dogs. Liam reckons that cutting in on Stan's heroin business is the only feasible way for fast money. So he breaks into Stan's yard at night to get the gear despite the obvious risk. Pinball joins him on the condition of sharing the profits by "50-50," which is very business-like. When they get the stuff, Liam and Pimple turn themselves into drug sellers and they are quick to learn. Again with the telescope, they monitor that in one afternoon, 42 people have come to Stan, and Liam decides to go short cut by cutting them off so that "we could do more business in an afternoon than we do in a week." Pinball is
afraid of the high danger, so Liam does it himself. But soon he is beaten to the ground by three guys with his gear snatched away. Then we see Liam rise up, chase, being beaten again, rise up again... This repeats several times until Liam gets back his gear when Pinball comes to his help. His tough spirit tells us his determination of not losing a penny for the caravan.

Their unregulated selling catches the attention of the local professional drug gangster Douglas and Tony (Martin McCardie). They catch them, check Liam’s arm and find he’s clean. “You may be a breath of fresh air, kid,” said Douglas, hinting that he can be a reliable seller (can’t be using and not selling). Pressed by the remaining mortgage, Liam now targets big and wants to win Douglas as a steady supplier. “If we prove we can do this—that’s a big fucking if—he’s going to get us a regular supply. The more we sell, the bigger our cut.” Liam ignores Pinball’s warning; all he concerns is how to do bigger and better: “We’ve got to prove ourselves. Sell more than anybody else without getting caught. We’ve got to move fast. That’s the secret.” Liam then smartly hits upon the idea of making use of pizza delivery—fast speed and good guise. He wins the cooperation of the local pizza delivery mates and they start to deliver drugs by hitching a ride on their mopeds. Liam compensates the late delivery losses of pizza boys with generosity.

Liam’s enterprising, inventive mind and his toughness soon impress and win appreciation of Douglas. When Liam is thinking of doing big together with Pinball in partnership, Liam is told to do alone. And he is put to serious trial: he is told to kill a man in a toilet with a lethal knife. With great nervousness and struggle, he passes the
trial. Douglas offers to supply drugs to him and buys the pizza place in Tony’s name for him to run in disguise. He asks him to buy new bikes, pick some good boys and run the business. He even offers him an apartment to shelter his mother. But he wants Liam to punish Pinball for destroying his car and club first before collecting the key. “An opportunity like this for someone like you comes only once,” Liam is told. So Liam has no choice but to go and report back that it is done.

As Liam climbs to higher levels of the local underworld, we can sense the irony here on the Thatcherite ethos of entrepreneurial self-help. If Liam and Pinball’s collecting 25 pence from kids in order to look at the stars through their telescope is clever self-help “business,” their later drug business is clearly not. It is revenge. Matthews argues, “When the highest legitimate goal we hear about is a part-time job at a call center, it isn’t remarkable that he should be embarking on a career as a petty gangster” (2002, p. 56). The solid advantages of crime for the culturally dispossessed are not just material, but also spiritual—security, status, companionship and even self-esteem.

The film also shows the reversal of generational roles. Children have to take on the role of adults, such as Liam and Chantelle. And in a bizarre way, it is Douglas who offers Liam a kind of “fatherly care,” providing him with a luxury apartment and designing him a promising future: “And if it works out and I think it will, Liam, you can buy it over a period of time.” And the reason is simple: “You work for me, I take care of you. As easy as that.” Bromley points out that, in a world lacking father’s love, “it is a profound irony that Liam’s only ‘fathering’ bond is with the man whose gifts
will help to destroy him” (2003, para. 8).

The story ends with Liam on the riverside, alone, fighting back tears. His sister phones him and asks where he is, he answers “I don’t know.” Then the sister tells him that everybody is looking for him and the police have been round. She regrets for him, “Oh, Liam. What a waste. What a waste. It’s your birthday, you’re 16. Did you know that? What are we going to do? Eh?” With the sad sigh, Liam ends the call: “Chantelle, my batteries are running down.” In the final scene, Liam, with his back facing the audience, gazes out over the river and faces his future. In the last crucial moment, it is the sweet sister, who earlier has told him that their mother is incapable of loving them, phones him to say “I love you, Liam.” The absence of his mother affirms Chantelle’s verdict and totally breaks Liam’s dream. We can easily imagine the immense sadness and despair in this 16-year-old boy. Liam’s desire to use his “head” instead of knife simply won’t work.

Stylistically, Loach used a mostly non-professional cast of young actors coming mostly from the deprived areas of Western Scotland where the film is set. They really gave the film a documentary-like feeling.

*Sweet Sixteen* was given an “18” certificate by the British Board of Film Classification mostly for its strong language, e.g. the frequent use of the word “cunt,” an act which was bitterly attacked. “It was ridiculous,” said the producer. “My son, who was eleven at the time, saw the film and said there was nothing that he had not heard in the school playground when he was eight” (Hayward, 2004, pp. 258-259). The classification was overturned to “15” by the local authority in Inverclyde Council.
where the story is set, so that those who were most prominently represented on screen could see the film in cinemas. Bristol made the same reclassification.

Films of Loach, Frears, Leigh's 1990s film *Naked*, Gary Oldman's *Nil By Mouth* all share a profound pessimism. The characteristic pessimism makes this group of films in sharp contrast with films of the optimistic "feel-good" films which will be dealt with in the next chapter.
CHAPTER VI

WORKING-CLASS IDENTITY IN 1990s SOCIAL REALIST COMEDIES

Working class representation was carried more strongly into the 1990s when the economic and social damage brought by globalization, local industrial decline and the restructuring of the labor market led to the redefining of British traditional working class as non-working “underclass” in a post-industrial context. Similar to the New Wave but different from the 1980s, the 1990s’ films were more characteristically “men’s films” with an obsessive focus on white, “male no-longer-working class” (Monk, 2000a, p. 156), projecting pessimistic images of alienation and masculine anxiety and a world of disintegration. Apart from the somber critical films by independent directors and the youth problem films, a group of feelgood comedies emerged, represented by *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, 1997), *Brassed Off* (Mark Herman, 1996) and *Billy Elliot* (Stephen Daldry, 2000). They created humorous and comically absurd moments within the serious context of unemployment and its effect on male characters. *The Full Monty* describes the job-seeking Sheffield steel workers regaining self-respect through collective stripping; *Brassed Off* depicts Grimethorpe miners in the process of pit closure regaining self-pride through their brass band championship in national competition. *Billy Elliot* centers on a young boy Billy, who
struggles to win the support of his widowed father and elder brother, both are on strike in the context of the 1984-5 miners' strike, for his talent as a ballet dancer and ends up playing the leading role in *Swan Lake*. This chapter will deal with these more commercialized comedies, or tragi-comics, that have found huge worldwide success, with focus on two films—*Brassed Off* and *The Full Monty*.  

Exploring the heavy issue of unemployment and industrial decay in a comic way runs the risk of appearing not serious enough or uncaring. Yet in the representation of working class, British cinema has had Ealing comedy of the 1950s as an important tradition, producing laughter through playing with notions of “English eccentricity.” The 1990s feel-good comedies have been widely seen as both a continuation as well as an extension of certain traditions of Ealing comedy (Mather, 2006, p. 29), for which they were also termed “‘neo-Ealing’ comedy-dramas” (Mather, 2006, p. 18).

But the tendency was more determined by the market-oriented nature of British film culture of the 1990s. In more fierce competition and broader cooperation with Hollywood, low-budget British films bore the pressures of commercialization and employed feelgood comic style for market success. Simon Beaufoy, screenwriter of *The Full Monty*, revealed in an interview that the humorous elements pervading *The Full Monty* were part of a calculated attempt to make the film more appealing to a wide audience.

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15 Hill regards these two films as “delayed” 1980s’ films due to the setting of deindustrialization and unemployment, yet he feels “it is unlikely” that the films “could have worked so effectively as comedy” if they “had actually been made during the early 1980s” (Hill, 1999, p. 168) when the struggle to prevent the closure of heavy industries was still ongoing. Monk suggests that in their consistent expression of the problems of the post-industrial male as problems of gender, the two films are “very much films of the 1990s” (Monk, 2000b, p. 279).
wider audience: “we did sit down and say, ‘Let’s see if we can make a film about working-class people which working-class people will actually want to watch.’ Uberto Pasolini...saw that the way to do this was to make it funny. Ken Loach’s work has got funnier and funnier over the years, because I think he’s realized that comedy is a way of pulling in audiences...It’s a way of sugaring the pill - and sadly you now have to use more and more sugar.” (as cited in Mather, 2006, p. 6) Beaufoy also complained that in so doing, “political messages have to be so hidden in films these days that they are almost invisible” and he saw Ken Loach’s *Riff Raff* (1990) as playing a “braver game” (as cited in Wayne, 2006, p. 290).

*The Full Monty* won the most successful box-office in mid 1990s. Funded and distributed by Fox Searchlight, it cost only £2.2 million in production, yet spent around £25 million in distribution and marketing, and took $211 million worldwide in box office (Dyja, 2010, p. 99). Anne Dudley won Academy Award for Best Music, Original Musical or Comedy Score, and the film won nominations for Best Director, Best Picture and Best Original Screenplay. It also won BAFTAs for Best Film, Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role (Robert Carlyle) and Supporting Role (Tom Wilkinson). *Brassed Off* was a less commercially successful film, but was quite popular at home and won much critical praise. Funded and distributed by Channel Four, the film cost about £2,53m and earned £3,388,319 in UK box office and $2.5 million in US box office (Dyja, 2010, p. 109). The film won awards in France, Germany and Japan, and some British awards of lower level than the BAFTA. The soundtrack album of the Grimethorpe Colliery Band sold 60,000 copies and was
nominated for a BAFTA. To boost sale, regional cultures of north England were packaged for visibility in American market. Location shooting was taken and relatively unknown actors were used for realism effect.

The two films share similar themes like unemployment, anti-Thatcherism, a northern community under threat, poverty and marital breakdown, suicide attempts, brass bands, collective support and a climax ending. Despite the feel-good mood, both films are in essence "elegies" for working-class (Dave, 2006, p. 61), and in this respect, Brassed Off is a far angrier film.

Brassed Off (Mark Herman, 1996)

The film was set in the small Yorkshire mining town of Grimley ten years after the 1984 miners' strike and tells the story of how the Grimley Colliery bass band, in existence for a hundred years as old as the mine and the only remaining source of community pride, competes for championship in the national brass band competition when the colliery community faces the threat of pits closure and unemployment. The Tory government is reviving a new round of pit closures and 7 pits have already been closed. The miners are now deciding whether to fight to keep the pit open or vote for redundancy. A few members are thinking of quitting the band as they cannot afford the weekly "kitty" payment, but are temporarily persuaded to carry on by their passionate band leader Danny (Pete Postlethwaite), a retired miner, and attracted by a newcomer to the band, Gloria (Tara Fitzgerald), the beautiful granddaughter of a former band leader. Gloria is returning to her home town to conduct a viability study of the pit for the British Coal Board. But she soon realizes that her report will not be
read as the decision to close the pit has been made two years ago. The brass band wins the national semi-finals, only to find that most miners have voted for redundancy so as to get the generous immediate redundancy payment. Danny, having worked all his life in the pit, collapses with pneumoconiosis and is rushed to the hospital. His son, Phil (Stephen Tomkinson), is in debt and loan sharks strip his house empty and his wife leaves him with the children. In great despair, Phil breaks down at a Harvest Festival clown performance, in which he attacks God for creating the heartless Tory Party, and he soon hangs himself at the colliery, but is saved. The band cannot afford to take part in the final in the Albert Hall in London. But Gloria contributes her unemployment pay-off money of £3000 to help. The band travels to London and won the competition. But now Danny realizes that it is a hollow triumph. The film ends with Danny making a powerful emotional winning speech on stage about how the miners have been betrayed and disposed by the Tory government and shocks the audience by refusing to take the trophy, though the trophy is reclaimed by other members.

The film develops clearly along two lines, the political, around the pit closure, and the cultural, around the colliery band. The former is heart-breaking whereas the latter is heart-warming. The film’s first 12 minutes economically introduces the major characters and with balanced weight provides us with the context of the imminent closure of Grimley Colliery, one of the few Yorkshire pits to survive the 1980s, and the community bond of brass band which is cherished by its leader above anything else. Then, to fit in with the comedy format, there is a gradual shift in scale and focus
which makes the band the central issue, trivializing the closure issue as a side line or a back drop. The world of the colliery brass band and its conductor is explored with comic and romantic sentiment, added with inspiring music. But beneath this surface line, the film takes basically a serious look at a British mining community and focuses on the stress and despair faced by the miners and their families as their source for making a living, the mine, faces closure. In so doing, it exposes the political and management strategy of choosing efficiency and profit over the welfare of the miners. Working-class identity is fully displayed in their response to the political and cultural changes.

The film begins in darkness, with a series of glittering spots gradually moving closer to us in a dark background, accompanied by the beautiful music of brass band. These images soon become identifiable as lamps worn by miners on their cap to lead their way out from the depth of the earth to daylight. The coal-digging together, the communal showers and fun-making are soon followed in contrast by women in the street protesting against the anticipated pit closure, to whom the miners wave to show respect on their way returning home from work. Gloria moves into the town, settling in a small inn. Then Vera (Sue Johnston) and Rita (Lili Roughley), both miner’s wife, were chatting over a backyard fence, stating their sympathy and support for the band to close if the pit shuts down, since there is no point in carrying on the one without the other. Between them a grey-haired man reading his popular paper speaks one sentence “You get used to it,” which seems to indicate the dilemma of miners in the face of

16 Quotations in this chapter with no citations are all taken from the scripts in the relevant films.
social changes wrought by unemployment. Then we have Jim (Philip Jackson) and Ernie (Peter Martin) discussing about quitting the band to avoid weekly payment, since they can only spend on "essential items." Next, we hear a more comprehensive coverage of the context through TV reporting: "We visit Grimley Colliery, which despite being one of the oldest and largest mines in Yorkshire coalfield has nevertheless become the most recent candidate for closure. Although the Grimley miners, and their wives, seem very determined to fight on and keep their pit open, a redundancy offer to the workforce is believed to be imminent. Other redundancy offers at neighboring pits recently have been too attractive to ignore. In the last few weeks, 7 pay-off packages have been offered to 7 pits. All accepted, leading to 7 closures." An urgency is established as "Representatives of union and management meet tonight to discuss the Grimley redundancy offer to be put to the Grimley miners." Between the reporting, we see women in the street chanting "The miners, united, will never be defeated." We also see Phil pressed by his wife to take redundancy payment. At the rehearsal, the band leader Danny tries to boost morale with his passion for music. With all contradictions displayed in the film's first 12 minutes, pace slows down for deeper exploration and representation.

The political.

With the political line, capitalist hypocrisy and Thatcherism are all under severe attack; working-class poverty and despair and working class consciousness are explicitly displayed.

The management, represented by Mckenzie (Stephen Moore), the managing
director of the Coal Board, is marked by shameless hypocrisy. The Coal Board hires
Gloria to conduct a survey on the future viability of the pit, and Gloria naively
believes that with her report showing Grimley as “a profitable pit,” she can “help it
stay open.” McKenzie’s proclaim on television that “Nobody wants Grimley to close”
is viewed by Gloria in her room. When she gradually senses the half-heartedness of
the management, Floria goes to McKenzie and is assured that her report is “vital” and
“absolutely paramount.” He tells her, “If this pit goes to review, and we hope it will,
we have crucial decisions to make and we can’t make them without detailed accurate
reports from highly qualified people such as yourself,” although he hints that the
business is “tricky.” When Gloria finishes the report and hands it in, nobody seems to
show any concern about it. Gloria is immediately awakened to realize that she has
been cheated and made use of. Reports “have to be seen to be written,” but “are not
written to be seen;” “no one will ever read.” When Gloria challenges McKenzie that
the decision to close the pit “wasn’t made today-it was made weeks ago,” to her
surprise, she is told the cruel truth that the decision was made “two years ago” and
“Coal, is history, Miss Mullins.”

McKenzie is “the smiling, insincere, manipulative symbol of the government”
who does his job “with the minimum of emotional involvement and the maximum of
efficiency” (Dyja, 2010, p. 112). He “oozes fake charm” (Dyja, 2010, p. 112) in
duping Gloria and cheating the public and suffers no moral guilt about making 1000
men redundant. He has full confidence in his vicious strategy of bribery at union
consultation and the outcome of miners’ decision turns out to be as he foresees. Shots
of his smiling face after being informed of the result of the ballot on his mobile phone indicate how false he has always been when he claims earlier that “No one wants Grimley to close.”

Capitalist management tries to disintegrate working-class solidarity with blackmail. So, miners are offered two options. The first one is favored by the trade union leaders; they can “vote to take pit to Review Procedure” so that they can get “a decent chance” of keeping the pit open. The second, they can “vote to take pay-off” and get stuffed. To lure the miners into voting for money, the management raises the redundancy offer to a further £3000, “from a twenty grand maximum to twenty three with a five grand sweetener” and makes it only a temporary offer. As explained by a union leader, “If you say no, they’re pulling any future offer down to a flat fifteen,” which is “tantamount to bribery.” Obviously the miners are “held to ransom” as the generous offer put on the table “comes with strings attached” (Dyja, 2010, p. 112). The redundancy payment is really “dirty money,” representing a ruling class seeking to divide and buy off the miners so that they will not vote for a review of the economic status of their pit.

So the miners face dilemma. On the one hand, they have a clear class consciousness of the cold-bloodedness of the management, which is clearly illustrated through the mouth of a union leader at the union meeting hearing about the offer: “It’s a profitable pit, this. There’s hundreds of years of coal down there, but it doesn’t seem to matter to them, bastards. We’re making money for’em, hand over fist, we are. And still they want to shut us down.” The union proposal asking miners to “Say no to
bloody blackmail and yes to keeping this pit alive” in ballot is warmly cheered. But on the other hand, they are pressed to take the money offer by the poverty-stricken economic condition. Phil is urged by his wife Sandra (Melanie Hill) to “Take money while it is still on offer,” before they are “out on bloody street.” The Thatcher attack on strikers and trade unions has removed their confidence and weakened their will. The shadow of the 1984 strike hangs over the film as a miserable memory, as Phil says “We didn’t do what they wanted in ’84... That’s eighteen months on bloody strike pay. With a wife, bloody kids, mortgage.” Phil was imprisoned for his union activities and dismissed by the pit in that strike. It took a year and half to get him reinstated, leaving him with debt he is “still frigging paying for.” Now the miners can’t see a sense of hope that they’ll succeed against the authority. So the miners represented by Phil are torn between the will to fight for principles and the will to survive. In the end, a majority of miners, 798--“four to one”--vote for redundancy in the ballot, much to the expectation and satisfaction of Mckenzie. Phil votes for money, but is full of frustration and anger towards capitalists and the Tory government. So, money “distorts the vote by making it an unreliable representation” (Dave, 2006, p. 63).

Andy (Ewan McGregor) is sadly heroic in declaring to Gloria that he will vote to keep the pit alive: “No hope, just principles,” a promise he keeps. He appears to be sharper than others in seeing through McKenzie’s trick on Gloria that the decision to close the pit has been made long ago-- “probably when you were at college,” and in accurately anticipating the ballot result--“Four to one it’ll go for pay-off.”
Working-class poverty and despair is also prioritized by the film, particularly represented by the suffering of Phil, indicating masculinity in crisis. The threat of pit closure undermines the men’s self-confidence and hardship in daily life throws them into despair. Phil’s difficulty is as his wife Sandra (Melanie Hill) lists when shouting to ask him to vote for the redundancy payment: “You have a wife and 4 bloody kids here, a house nobody’ll bloody buy, mortgaged up to the bloody hilt, loan-sharks on our backs, no bloody money, no bloody job, and what are you going to do?” In a local shop, Sandra is seen greatly embarrassed by her shortage of £1.5 to pay for the very essential groceries. After returning one item, she is still short of sixty pence, which Vera kindly allows her to give back next week. Sandra sighs: “Me and money, total frigging strangers.” In giving the receipt, Vera secretly passes a five-pound note to Sandra in sympathy. To earn some money, Phil works occasionally as a children’s entertainer and dresses up as Mr Chuckles in clown outfit. At one such occasion, he is observed by a mother paying him that being a clown isn’t his main job. Phil answers that he is a miner, and adds that “You remember them, love? Dinosaurs, dodos, miners.” His home is twice looted by moneylenders. The first time, Phil is just back from a clown performance and he rushes to stop them clumsily in huge clown’s feet. His made-up smiling clown face and funny movement is contrasted with those of the menacing loan sharks, creating a sense of a tragi-farcical situation. Phil is knocked to the ground by a punch in the face. The sequence ends with their threat that they’ll be back with truck for all his things unless he pays up. The second time the loan sharks simply efficiently take away everything in the home with the wife in tears and the
kids in terror, when Phil is playing in the semi-final.

His predicament is a result of the 1984 strike. The pass of ten years has accumulated his debt to the unbelievable amount of £12,000 due to “that interest” of loan sharks. His situation is further worsened when he purchases a new trombone in credit payment in order to please his dying father. The looting of his home by loan sharks leads to his wife’s departure with all the kids. Under the double pressure of family break-up and his father’s imminent death, Phil is on the verge of a mental breakdown, as is revealed by his absent-mindedness at job-finding club (ironically named the “Rescue Room”) built on the former pit-site and by his sitting miserably by a canal. There is no work of any substance on offer for the redundant men. He suffers enormous humiliation as a breadwinner, when he finally loses his “wife, kids, home, job, self-respect, hope.” So he hangs himself from the top of the pithead, but is saved. The scene from long shot of him hanging high up there in clown clothes to immediate close-up of him struggling with the noose around his neck calling “Help” is melodramatic, but chilling; “the joke isn’t funny anymore” (Dyja, 2010, p. 114).

Capitalist exploitation is cruel and cold-blooded. The mining job is dangerous and harmful. Danny appears to be dying from black lung which he has caught by his life-long work down the mine before retirement. And he is not alone in suffering from that. Gloria’s grandfather, Arthur Mullins, “bravest miner” in Danny’s words, had lungs packed in 1979. Danny tells his son when he is hospitalized: “I was alongside Arthur Mullins everyday of his working life. They say when they opened up his lung, there were nowt in there but coal dust. Slack. Slack everywhere. Took them a week to
get t'slab clean.” The final shot in the film is a close-up of Danny’s face, “a lifetime of striving and suffering engrained in his proud features” (Mather, 2006, p. 33)

Thatcherism is forcefully condemned through the discourse of the father and the son. Phil, after the loan sharks loot his house and his wife and children leave him, continues his clown performance as Mr Chuckles in church celebration of the Harvest Festival with children. In a profound state of personal despair, he breaks out with a fierce attack on the Tory Party and Mrs Thatcher. According to him, God created the Tory party in an irresponsible and vicious way. When his little assistant reported to him that “we’ve got all these bodies left, but we’re right out of brains, we’re right out of hearts and we’re right out of vocal chords,” God simply responded “Sew ‘em up anyway. Smack smiles on their faces and make them talk out their arses.” Thus God created the Tory Party. Then he continues to scold God for taking lives of good people, such as John Lennon, three young miners and his dad, but let “Margaret bloody Thatcher” live. Yet Phil’s attack is seen by Mather to be weakened by his guise as a clown, his rather inappropriate audience of a group of six-year-olds, and his state of nervous breakdown (2006, pp. 39-40). In contrast, Danny’s speech at the end of the film in the glamorous Albert Hall to a decent concert audience is seen to be “the greatest moral and emotional statement” (Dyja, 2010, p. 113). Danny has kept a detached stance toward the political and industrial confrontations. But in the end, he is shocked into reality by Phil’s suicide attempt and explodes in condemning the “bloody” Tory government, which over the last ten years “has systematically destroyed an entire industry” and mining communities “all in the name of progress.”
He also adds attack on the public’s general apathy toward working class fate.

In general, politically, the film is “less interested in mining than in what this work means to a community predicated on its availability” (Hitchcock, 2000, p. 25). Only a few seconds in the opening sequences and in the middle of the film are devoted to real miners at work, emerging blackened by the soot of coal and having group shower afterwards. The defeat of the 1984/85 national miners’ strike has led to the loss of working-class people’s power of political struggle. The political analysis is “broad brush and gestural” and class is “evacuated from both work and outside of work as a mobilizing factor in organization” (Bromley, 2000, p. 62, p. 63). More space is given to community life around the pit closure—the weakened and divided solidarity, the pain and despair of redundancy, the loss of self-respect and the destruction of community. In the context of job insecurity, weakened union leadership, many people resign to their fate, become depoliticized and can only resort to the cultural as resistance. Harry is an example. As his wife scolds him, “Ten years ago before the strike you were so full of fight, packed full of passion; now you just do nowt. All you do is blow your bloody trumpet.” To this, Harry’s response is: “But at least people listen to us.” The film does show some human costs of closure in a few powerful and moving scenes, but this is somewhat eroded by the sentimental magical resolution in fantasy and victory, with the defeated workforce overshadowed by the victorious band.

**The cultural.**

The cultural line develops around the brass band and the mining community.
Hoggart in *Uses of Literacy* observed that working-class culture was in terminal decline. Yet Macnab drew our attention to the fact that *Brassed Off* “suggests how prolonged its dying throes have been” (1996, p. 44). The colliery brass band is seen as the cultural embodiment of the history and traditions of industrial communities, suggesting local pride and masculinity. In the case of coal miners, it symbolizes a class-specific form of solidarity in the face of a dangerous and exploitative occupation, providing an outlet for men in ups and downs. In the film, Danny, the conductor of the band, delivers several speeches in camera close-up defending devoutly the brass music.

Danny persists in following his dream of winning a national championship, even though he is deathly ill with “black lung.” For him, the band is “one thing more than owt else here that symbolizes pride.” So the pit under threat is a minor issue compared with regional and national band competitions and is a “separate” matter. Acknowledging the reality as “worrying times,” he draws members’ attention to the band’s long history of “[o]ver a hundred years” from 1881, in which the band experienced “two world wars, three disasters, seven strikes, one bloody big depression” and “played on every flaming time.” The band will be the only one reminder of what he terms a “hundred bloody years of hard graft.” He takes great pride in seeing the band now entering the national semi finals and is capable of going through to the Albert Hall in London for the first time in its history. For Danny, “This is music, and it’s music that matters.” When his son, also in the band, tells him that “I love the band. We all do. But there’s other things in life, you know, that’s more
important,” he simply responds that “Not in mine, there isn’t.”

Danny’s passion for the importance of music and his striving for excellence is “rooted in a respect for northern working-class traditions of self-education, and of communities who refuse to be ground down by external pressures” (Mather, 2006, p. 33). As he speaks to his band, “They can shut up the unions, they can shut up the workers...they’ll never shut us up. We’ll play on. Loud as ever.”

The competition scenes set in fourteen Yorkshire villages act like carnivals with numerous trade bands marching and playing proudly, displaying a sense of a thriving local brass band culture and community spirit. During such performances, may be due to pints of beer, the Grimley band produces some inharmonious tunes and Phil’s old trumpet falls apart. Danny is horrified by the casual attitude and ashamed that audiences are “Laughing...bloody laughing at us.” For Danny, the band’s disintegration represents a lack of respect for the beauty of music, and an offence for working-class predecessors of the band. Bromley infers a deeper implication of this poor performance as the “emasculations” of the work force (2000, p. 62)

Coming back, Danny wants his debt-ridden son to buy a new trombone: “you’re a bloody good trombonist lad, you need a bloody good trombone.” But Phil replies, “I’m not forking out for a new trombone just for one performance.” Yet the father’s deathly ill coughing prompts Phil to buy a new trombone to “make him die happy” as Phil tells his son, putting a down payment earned from clown performance without informing his wife.

The band and its “surprisingly rousing and emotional” music (Macnab, 1996, p. 247
44) seem to serve as the last straw miners can cling to in a postmodern environment for community and collectivity. The cultural is highlighted to warm people’s heart whereas the political is overshadowed as a doomed cause. Gloria’s audition is intercut with scenes of the union representatives and the Coal Board officials negotiating together. The eulogistic music performed by the band completely covers men’s voices in the crucial discussion. We only see union representatives angrily waving arms, but never hear what is actually argued. Alexander Walker in his *Evening Standard* review of *Brassed Off* suggested that “Loach wouldn’t have missed this class-confrontation opportunity” (as cited in Mather, 2006, p. 36). The implication of the sequence appears to be that “nothing that is said by the union officials can deflect the moves afoot to close down the mine” (Mather, 2006, p. 36). The music chosen for the audition is from *Concierto de Aranjuez*, written by a Spanish composer during the Spanish Civil War. It is thought to suggest a desire by the makers of *Brassed Off* to “imply a link between the struggles of the Republicans in the Spanish conflict… and British miners made redundant since the 1970s” (Mather, 2006, p. 35).

Similarly, the semi-final performance sequence is interwoven with scenes around the pit ballot results, which happen simultaneously—the announcement of 798 votes for redundancy, the different reactions of the miners, Sandra’s despair at discovering Phil’s credit buying note when washing his clothes, Mckenzie’s happy face when informed of the result, and men emptying Phil’s home with a truck. Miners and town-folk are portrayed walking in slow pace and heavy footsteps, in silence and with heads down, an image of immense sadness. The sublime music and the winning
of the semi-final with 198 points appear hollow when the band returning home is greeted by words in red “We fought and lost” written on the Grimley Colliery sign board and a town in mourning, a bitter irony and contrast to the band which has just fought and won their semi-final. Shot from behind, Danny walks away alone from the crowd and suddenly collapses to the ground in front of their eyes. The band, led by Phil, rush to his aid, their worried faces convey a vivid sense of the urgency and despair. At this moment, “personal crises and social tragedies are inextricably linked” (Mather, 2006, p. 38). When Danny is hospitalized, Harry organized a performance of “Danny Boy” outside the ward building with the lighting by their mining caps, which is turned off in the end, creating a darkness of sadness.

It is the cultural that offers a utopian solution to an unsolvable problem. The climax of the film comes when the band is determined to do a good job “for a thousand redundant miners and one poorly one” at the Royal Albert Hall in London. William Tell Overture “surprisingly thunders out with rage and power” (Dyja, 2010, p. 114), suggesting “lowly members of the community rising to stake their rightful place in society” (Mather, 2006, p. 49). Harry (Jim Carter) replaces the sick Danny as conductor and conducts in a charismatic and impassioned style. In the middle of the performance, Danny, who escapes from hospital, emerges onto the stage. When the Grimley Colliery Band is announced the champion of the national brass band competition, the miners win back their dignity, respect and pride in the applause of audience. Danny’s lifetime aspiration is seemingly accomplished. So the narrative “seems to have solved an economic predicament through a humanist gesture to
community spirit” (Hitchcock, 2000, p. 25). But this is as far as cultural consolation can go. Here, an ironic turning point appears as Danny goes to the front of the stage and delivers a bitter speech about his newly developed understanding about the real meaning and worth of music in the midst of mass unemployment and dashed hopes. He tells the hall audience (and the film audience in extension) that they are refusing the trophy: “This band behind me will tell you that trophy means more to me than owt else in the whole world. But they’d be wrong. Truth is, I thought it mattered. I thought that music mattered. But does it? Bollocks! Not compared to how people matter. Us winning this trophy won’t mean bugger all to most people. But us refusing it, like what we’re going to do now- well then it becomes news, doesn’t it?” After a pause to attract camera attention, he targets the Tory Party for his fierce attack: “... over the last ten years, this bloody government has systematically destroyed an entire industry. Our industry. And not just our industry. Our communities, our homes, our lives. All in the name of progress and for a few lousy bob.” Then he draws audience attention to the band’s pit closure a fortnight ago and criticizes public apathy toward miners’ miserable fate: “Another thousand men lost their jobs. And that’s not all they lost. Most of them lost the will to win a while ago. A few of them even lost the will to fight. But, when it comes to losing the will to live, to breathe, the point is, if this lot were seals or whales, you’d be up in bloody arms. But they’re not...They’re just ordinary, common or garden honest, decent human beings. And not one of them with an ounce of bloody hope left. They can knock out a bloody good tune. But what the fuck does that matter?” The speech ends with Danny gasping emotionally and close to tears.
From music matters to people matter, the public display of anger and dismay from a meek retired miner makes the message all the more powerful. And the sudden shift of mood from buoyant, inspirational music to angry discourse condemnation which denies the film an optimistic or hopeful conclusion makes the surprising ending all the more shocking.

The band succeeds in winning the competition, but has failed in the effort to keep the local coal mine in operation. The men thus meet with triumph and disaster simultaneously, but in essence the triumph is emotional and symbolic whereas the disaster is economic and fatal.

Working-class solidarity and collectivity is much prioritized in the film. While political solidarity is disintegrated by the forceful management and weak union leadership represented through the dirty pay-off money, the traditional working-class culture of collectivity and community spirit is presented as superior in the film. The working-class men are frequently seen to visit the pub drinking and playing together, to have regular band practices and rehearsals in their practice room; their wives chat at the backyard. After the failed suicide attempt, Phil, when found sitting sadly by a canal, is pushed for a drink with the team by Jim and the gang, despite his admission that he has voted for the pit to close. Dave drew our attention to the binary opposition of the vicious taking by pitiless neo-liberal market and its representative, the pit manager Mr McKenzie, vs. the working-class collective spirit of humanized giving. The giving includes: the payment from band members to their collective “kitty;” the “credit” given to Phil by the music shop; the “collection” to buy a gift for the
hospitalized, dying Danny; Gloria's donation; and the loan/gift given to Sandra in the community supermarket. Such kinds of giving are “non-productive expenditure” aimed to “sustain precious rituals of working class socialization.” It represents “a rejection of the competitive individualism of the market and symbolizes a working-class moral economy whose values are co-operative and communal” (Dave, 2006, pp. 63-64). The band solidarity is the most inspiring. However, on balance, it is a bit idealistic and utopian. Gloria’s donation repeats many similar endings in English literature where a legacy or a fortune solves those unsolvable harsh social problems.

**The role of women.**

Women in *Brassed Off* are placed in subordinate and marginal positions, except Gloria. The community under threat is a men’s world. Women are not allowed to play in the colliery band and are excluded from the working-men’s club. A performance trip is “traditionally...a male-only excursion.” Despite this, the female characters are represented rather positively.

First of all, they are firm supporters of the just cause of miners. They run rallying tents with slogans like “Women Against Pit Closures” and protest in the colliery streets chanting “The miners, united, will never be defeated.” Their enthusiasm is respected by the men, although their behavior is seen to be naïve by some wiser male characters, who comment that women are “pissing in the wind, like the rest of us.” Harry’s wife is actively involved in such activities and her scolding Harry of losing the spirit to fight seems to take effect as Harry eventually regains it to take over Danny’s conductor role in the final competition. Two wives dress in purple
and later even dye their hair purple, the color of the band uniform, as a gesture of solidarity and support for the band, despite one of them has asked her husband to resign and not to handing over any kitty money.

Phil is urged by his wife Sandra to vote for money and Sandra later leaves Phil in hopelessness. But her such behavior can win our sympathy as we see that she almost has to bring up the kids with no financial support. She is quick in realizing her misunderstanding of Phil, as her son Shane informs her that the father buys the trombone not for himself, as she has thought, but to please the granddad to die happy. The son seems mature beyond his age, seeing through his father’s covering of economic dilemma and persuades his mother “I don’t like seeing Dad sad, Mam, but I’d sooner see him sad than not see him at all.” The question the eight-and-a-half-year-old Shane asks his mother “How the hell do you die happy?” is heartbreaking for his mother as well as for the audience. The film finally gives us a happy resolution to Phil and Sandra’s break-up, with Sandra saying “That sounds tempting” in response to Phil’s invitation “I have got a chair now” (in his empty house).

Gloria represents a modern new woman, educated out of the working class and economically independent. There is an element of fairy-tale in the way that she is depicted. Gloria is first “introduced as a love interest and sex object” (Dyja, 2010, p. 115), subjected to male gaze and sexist humor (referred to as “Gloria Stits”). Her attractiveness is the reason why some band’s men decide not to resign. Then, when she is seen to have a “management logo on her key ring,” she is objectified as a class
enemy of the male working community, despite her claim to them that “I am on your side; I always was.” Andy is mocked by his mates as “sleeping with the enemy.” Gloria appears naïve and politically insensitive. When Andy tells her that the decision to close the pit has been made long ago—“probably when you were at college,” she retorts “don’t be ridiculous” in disbelief. But when she finally discovers that her report is really a public relations gesture to cloak the management’s trick as Andy has predicted, she immediately resigns. In the end, she becomes a savior, almost a saint.

When the band men are worrying about breaking Danny’s heart who “is coughing up coal” by not competing in London, Gloria hands over what she calls the “dirty money” of her sack-off payment—a check of £3000, to enable the band to travel to the Albert Hall to attend the final. By being “a ‘magical donor,’ a helper and facilitator” (Mather, 2006, p. 40), Gloria wins the respect and trust of miners and is treated as one of “us.” So, the success of the men is also “dependent upon the involvement of women” (Hill, 2000a, p. 185).

Gloria’s relationship with Andy forms a romantic sub-plot necessary for a commercial film. She seems to play the upper hand all the way through. At the beginning, she pretends not to remember the name of Andy—her teenage lover; in the middle, she easily rekindles the love fire by asking him for a cup of coffee in her room which she does not really have—“a euphemistic cup of coffee” (Dyja, 2010, p. 115); in the end she hints Andy to kiss her by commenting on Yorkshiremen’s traditional lack of showing emotion. Her resignation makes her a loyal and more equal partner for Andy, so she wins love through downward mobility.
Gloria typically represents the postmodern rising women. Her class mobility gives her a power of choice which is exercised positively; her donation of a good sum of money to fund the band trip demonstrates her economic power: though unemployed, she is confident that she will be able to find a job soon.

The film ends with the band, as ex-miners, journeys home in a victory celebration on an open top bus through the darkness of a London evening. As they pass the Westminster parliament building, Danny suggests playing what he terms as “Land of Hope and bloody Glory” to “make them listen for a change,” implying the loss of social justice as a Thatcherite legacy. The emotional rendition of “Pomp and Circumstance” continues into the closing credits. The captioned postscript undercuts the comedy-fantasy to a great extent: “Since 1984, there have been 140 pit closures in Great Britain at the cost of nearly a quarter of a million jobs.” The band is finally seen fading away into the darkness of a London evening towards a gloomy future.

In conclusion, Brassed Off embodies enough necessary ingredients to be a typical working-class film, though the claim that “it comes close to being socialist” might be arguable. The film is “a powerful tribute, impossible to watch without tears at times, to a dying way of life” (Bromley, 2000, p. 63). However, with the stereotypical and commodified representation, it is seen as more like “a period piece, almost a costume drama” (Bromley, 2000, p. 63). A heavy subject-matter is dealt with in feel-good brass music and arousing emotions.

The Full Monty (Peter Cattaneo, 1997)

The film is set in the post-industrial city of Sheffield in West Yorkshire and tells
the story of a group of unemployed steelworkers who learn to do striptease to earn a living. Sheffield was once a prosperous steel city, but now it has fallen into ruins with the steel factories closed and thousands of men losing their jobs. Gary, also called Gaz (Robert Carlyle), is a former steelworker and about to lose his son because he cannot pay for the joint custody. His former co-workers are also going through difficulties: Dave (Mark Addy) is depressed and convinced that his wife is not interested in their marriage any more; Gerald, their former foreman, has been lying to his wife for six months about his unemployment; and Lomper (Steve Huison) has to take care of his elderly mom and is suicidal (attempts to gas himself in a car). When passing by the local work men’s club holding a women’s night only for the performance of the Chippendales, an all-male striptease troupe, and seeing many women paying for it and hysterically cheering it, Gaz hits upon the idea of copying their fortune. So he persuades his mates through all kinds of means, including trouble-making at Gerald’s job interview. The four of them come together and recruit Horse (Paul Barber), who is black and slightly older with good dance moves, and Guy (Hugo Speer), who cannot dance but is exceptionally “well-endowed.” This is an unlikely team because they have neither good looks nor excellent dance skills, so Gaz realizes that they have to offer something special to lure a lucrative audience. Hence, the guys are going “the full monty,” which means going totally nude! Gaz proceeds to advertise with posters and he announces to women on the street that their show will be more worth watching than the Chippendales because they will go “the full monty.” The police raid and arrest for indecent exposure during an “undress” rehearsal brings unexpected publicity
for these “steel strippers” and boosts tickets sales. The film ends with the men’s performance and the last shot in freezing frame of “the full monty” with their front facing the club audience but their back towards the cinema audience.

While Brassed Off sets its story in the middle of a cruel industrial dispute and exerts direct attack on Thatcherism and the management, The Full Monty is a follow-up story set in a post-industrial context, providing a portrait of the consequences of Thatcherism in a already much deindustrialized community and involving the search for new forms of livelihood. In content, direct reflection of politics is an obvious absence. Stylistically, it is a funny lightweight comedy. But beneath the surface, like Brassed Off, it explores quite serious issues. There is a more intense crisis in masculinity centered around shame and loss of self-esteem. And while Brassed Off focuses on Danny, Phil and Gloria, The Full Monty pays attention to all six members of the stripper team. With regard to themes, Peter Cattaneo, director of the film, says in the foreword to the published screenplay: “Issues of male identity, gender roles, body politics and the effects of long-term unemployment are dealt with ...” (as cited in Bromley, 2000, p. 64). For Hill, the “connection between unemployment and the erosion of masculinity becomes central” (2000a, p.184). Monk lists “the unemployed males’ desperation for work, loss of self esteem and consequent relationship difficulties” as key focus of the film (2000a, p. 161).

The film begins with a promotional documentary feature Sheffield—City on the Move (Coulthard Productions, 1971). The male voice-over narrates the prosperity, livelihood and joys of Sheffield based on an infrastructure of steel: “Welcome to

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Sheffield! The beating heart of Britain’s industrial North! The jewel in Yorkshire’s crown is home to over half a million people, and thousands more flock here daily to shop and to work. All this is built on Sheffield’s primary industry, steel. The city’s rolling mills, forges, and workshops employ some 90,000 men and state-of-the-art machinery to make the world’s finest steel. From high-tensile girders to the stainless cutlery for your dining table. But it’s not all hard work for the people of Steel City. They can spend the day lounging by the pool, watching one of our top soccer teams, or browsing in the shops. But when the sun goes down, the fun really starts in the city’s numerous nightclubs and discotheques. Yes, Yorkshire folk know how to have a good time! And it’s good times for the city’s housing, too! Sheffield leads the way in town planning. Victorian slums have been cleared to make way for the homes of the future. Thanks to steel, Sheffield really is a city on the move!”

The film presents a sunny city with fountains, indoor shopping centers, football, almost tropical parks, swimming pools, the bright lights and neon signs of Sheffield’s nightlife, and more importantly, shots of steel foundries and men at work.

Then with the big characters “25 years later” on screen, the film cuts immediately to the contemporary reality of the city in sharp contrast, with shots of a disused steel factory and idle workers. Gaz and Dave, accompanied by Gaz’s son Nathan (William Snape), are attempting to steal a girder to sell as scrap metal. The son complains that this isn’t what other boys and their fathers do when they are together. Having once been employed in this very factory “for ten years,” the men are now reduced to petty thieves surviving on its remains. A rehearsing brass band
associated with the factory (the British Steel Stocksbridge band) is seen passing and taken by Gaz as “the only thing round here,” echoing the band culture in *Brassed Off*. This sharp contrast implies how two decades of Conservative policies have eroded the city’s prosperity and its steel industry, leading to an important theme of the film: anger and despair towards deindustrialization which has turned working class into the underclass. Thematically, the film develops around three lines: crisis in masculinity, cultural resistance through job innovation of striptease, and reversal of gender roles.

**Crisis in masculinity.**

While crisis in masculinity in *Brassed off* is mainly in the aspect of losing breadwinning power, the issue in *The Full Monty* is presented as multi-dimensional centered around shame.

Gaz is ashamed of being unable to look after his son and prove his worth to his ex-wife Mandy (Emily Woof). He is desperate to maintain his relationship with his son Nathan. Mandy has settled with a new partner in a more affluent part of town. She threatens to rid Gaz of the right for joint custody through legal procedure unless he pays his maintenance share of £700. Gaz also cannot afford his son to watch the football match between Sheffield United and Manchester United. So Gaz is mad for cash. As he explains to his son, he intends to take striptease “so as you and me can keep seeing each other. They're trying to stop us, you see.” Meanwhile, Gaz is embarrassed about not being able to pay the £100 deposit for their performance venue. His desperation leads him to reluctantly take Nathan’s precious bank savings when Nathan insists. Gaz is mentioned by his son as having stayed some time in prison. Now he continues
to hold an amoral attitude to petty crime, secretly picking rusty girder and encouraging Dave to steal the *Flashdance* video and later a black suit for Lomper’s mother’s funeral from the supermarket where Dave has just worked as security guard, displaying explicit underclass features. Stealing, for Gaz, is “liberating” as he tells his son.

Dave seems to have lost his self-esteem and is ashamed of lacking sexual appeal to his wife. He becomes increasingly self-conscious about his body size and tries dieting. He feels that with his jobless status plus his weight problem, he cannot possibly be attractive to his wife. His depression kills his sex drive and his poor self-image makes him fearful that his wife Jean will leave him. Throughout the film he is labeled as “a fat bastard,” which normally he can easily laugh off when he has a job. The idea of stripping heightens his anxieties. He wants to earn money and show his worth but he cannot. He reluctantly takes security guard work, but quite clearly this does not help his esteem. His problem is as Jean notices: “it’s like he’s given up. Work. Me. Everything.” But she does not know how to help him. In the private bedroom, Dave even asks his wife whether she has been out with a black bloke, implying his feeling of sexual inadequacy. Dave’s lack of self-confidence hurts deeply his wife and their marriage.

Gerald, the former foreman, is ashamed about being unemployed. He has been out of work for six months, but has not dared to inform his wife. And the longer he delays, the more difficult it becomes. So he pretends to go out to work each day and tries every effort in an attempt to maintain his traditional breadwinning role and the
living standard of his family. Indeed, we see him seriously applying for jobs and going through an interview. He is annoyed at the disturbance by Gaz and Dave during the interview. When he feels that his performance has been fatally ruined, he is near the stage of breakdown. In chasing them for a fight, he calls them "bastard," and tells his pressure of responsibilities: "I've got a standard of living! Responsibilities! I was on me way up! I am on me way up! It was my first interview in months!" Finally some men sent by loan sharks come to loot his home and his wife learns the truth.

Lomper, at the beginning part of the film, attempts to kill himself by inhaling poisonous fumes in his car, but is rescued by Dave. Ironically, he has a job as a security guard of the disused steel factory and even plays in the works band. Yet the job is of low esteem as Gaz sighs: "No wonder he wants to kill himself" after knowing his work. He appears to be a social misfit and a loner without a single friend. He lives at home with his elderly mother, who needs being looked after by him. Later he is shown to have homosexual tendency as he takes the opportunity of escaping from a police raid to kiss and fondle Guy.

As their innovation is amateur striptease performance, their attention is naturally diverted to the scrutiny of their own bodies. Dave is extremely nervous and uneasy that his overweight body cannot live up to feminine ideals. In a dance practice at Gerald's home, when Gerald consoles him that "Fat is a feminist issue," Dave replies "What's that supposed to mean?" implying that he takes it as a universal issue also applicable to men. In another scene when the men are practicing again in Gerald's house, making use of his wife's sunbed and exercise bike and are looking at
a copy of the woman’s magazine, *Cosmopolitan*, Lomper’s comments on women having too big tits inspires them to consider how they will be looked at in much the same way as men have traditionally looked at women. Their masculinity crisis around the body is more overtly conveyed. Dave expresses deep fear not only about himself, but also about other team members: “what if next Friday 400 women turn round and say ‘He’s too fat, he’s too old and he’s a pigeon-chested little tosser,’ What happens then, eh?” After that, Dave wraps his stomach in cling film. Horse is worried about having “a doggy hip” and uses a penis enlarger (a pump) in a vain attempt to “live up to the bawdy connotations of his name” (Luckett, 2000, p. 95). Among them, Guy has a perfect body, worthy of male pride. He is muscular and “well-endowed.” When he shows his penis at the audition, the men are speechless at the size and Gaz exclaims, “Gentlemen, the lunchbox has landed.” Yet, ironically, Guy turns out to be gay and later gets close with the rather pale and weak Lomper.

News about doing the full monty frightens everybody. When Gaz says that “We’ve gotta give them more than your average ten-bob stripper,” everyone shows worrying concern about his own “willy,” which would be “A laughing stock. Totally!” Yet Gaz justifies that “folks don’t laugh so loud when you’ve a grand in your pocket.” Three days before the performance, Dave quits the group and takes on a security guard job in a supermarket. When the men are arrested by the police for indecent exposure during another rehearsal in the disused steel factory, their project seems doomed, but is rescued by the newspaper publicity.

At the final stage, Gaz, the initiator of the whole venture, ironically refuses to
get on stage when he sees men in the audience, not “Women only!” as their poster defines. His shout—“It’s suicide! That’s what it is! Suicide!”—reveals his lack of confidence with his body. Only with his son’s encouragement and assurance that his ex-wife’s partner does not come that he finally joins others.

The crisis in masculinity also leads to the infantilization of unemployed males and the reversal of generational roles (Bromley, 2000, p. 64). In the film, the unemployed men are childlike, behaving like adolescents. They wander in the streets and play in children’s playground (sitting on swings). They wait for Gerald in a children’s playroom. They act like undisciplined schoolboys in the job club, playing cards and having fights. To ruin Gerald’s interview, they distract him with a puppet-show battle, which takes place outside the window behind the backs of the interviewer, using his beloved garden gnomes to attack each other. Gerald finds himself fatally distracted, especially when one gnome smashes another. So we see an angry and emotional Gerald condemning their lack of concern: “Bastard! That were mine, that job! You don’t give a toss! You’re kids!...Why did you do it?” Gaz and Dave later apologize by sticking it with superglue and buys him a four-wheel toy cart.

The men also hold very funny rehearsals at various places. For Caplan, the fact that everywhere seems to have become a playground for them serves to highlight that “they no longer have any place in which to be grown-ups” (1997, p. 43).

Gaz’s little son Nathan conversely seems to be the most mature male character in the film, behaving like an adult. He shows understanding of his father’s love for him by staying with him a lot, disapproves of his father’s striptease idea, his petty
crime of stealing girder and his suggestion of gatecrashing football matches, and is willing to pay for Gaz’s venue deposit. He also “acts as Gaz’s conscience” (Dyja, 2010, p. 104). When Gaz hesitates at last minute, it is Nathan who successfully brings him onto the stage by helping him win back self-confidence with such words: “I’m gonna get really annoyed with you. They’re cheering out there. You did that. Now get out there and do your stuff.”

Bromley’s statement best summarizes the state of men: “The male responses are seen to be, variously, depressive, suicidal, child-like and regressive, self-pitying or fantasy-adjusted” (2000, p. 65). This crisis in masculinity is deep and fatal. As Gaz comments to Dave at the job club about a woman’s urinating standing up, “when women start pissing like us, that’s it. We’re finished, Dave. Extincto. ... A few years and men won’t exist, except in a zoo or summat. We’re not needed no more, are we? Obsolete. Dinosaurs. Yesterday’s news.” “Like skateboards,” Dave adds. The determining role of economic base is recognized. When Gaz challenges Dave for allowing his wife watch striptease: “where is your pride?” Dave says “It’s her money.”

**Cultural resistance: job innovation for post-working class.**

Unlike *Brassed Off*, which has direct anti-Thatcherism attack, the political in *The Full Monty* seems to be an absence. Work scene only appears for a few seconds in the 1971 promotional documentary. Although Gary and his friends are out of work and lead a desperate life, they do not resort to any political actions or voice any vicious political condemnations. There is no mention of trade unions or other
organizations for workers; the working men’s club is shifted for striptease entertainment; and the job center where the redundant meet is not treated seriously. Like *Brassed off*, community spirit functions not in political struggle, but only in cultural resistance and self-healing. Bromley has a point in suggesting that the film “removes class as a dimension of analysis, which means that the interests of capital in de-skilling, downsizing and privatizing remain an ‘absent content’” (2000, p. 65), though the statement that this is due to foregrounding of gender and identity politics is highly arguable. According to Bromley, in appropriating the slogan “the personal is political,” “the political has only a muted presence” (2000, p. 65) throughout the representation.

The political anger in the film is communicated via a more indirect critique reflected in their attitude toward work and more mocking cultural resistance toward Thatcherite ideology through doing striptease.

Gaz’s attitude toward work is thought-provoking. Though desperate for money, he constantly challenges the postmodern order by refusing to take on what he regards as low-esteem poorly-paid menial jobs. His wife pushes him to get any job available and suggests giving him one in the packing section of her factory at £2.50 per hour, but it is turned down by Gaz, describing the kind of job as “£2.50 an hour in Black Hole of Calcutta,” disposable and under-paid. Later, in attempting to borrow money from Mandy for venue deposit, he again rejects her offer of work. In so doing, Gaz tries to keep his dignity as an experienced skilled steelworker.
In the film, the job of security guard is frequently taken as a reference example to convey Gaz’s attitude. It has actually been an expanding kind of occupation in postmodern society. At the beginning after they have saved Lomper’s life and known that Lomper is a security guard in the disused steel factory, Gaz sighs: “No wonder he wants to kill himself.” Then, when Dave quits the team due to lack of confidence with his body for the full monty, he immediately gets a security guard job at a supermarket. Gaz tries to take him back, saying “you’re worth more than that.”

Gaz and his mates are not treating reemployment seriously. Gaz invites his son to accompany him to the “job club,” saying “That’ll be a right laugh.” The interview prank is followed by a fight between Gerald and Gaz, “accentuating the impression of a school classroom situation getting out of control” (Mather, 2006, p. 44). Though this can be taken by the authority to blame the redundant for their lack of self-responsibility, we can detect the sense of despair and depression amongst the men beneath the surface of childish mischief and abrasive banter. The prospect of “decent” jobs for them looks dim.

Gerald, Gaz’s former supervisor, forms a contrast in attitude toward looking for reemployment. His active and serious approach accords with what the dominant ideology approves as individual responsibility. What Gaz and Dave see as fun with their prank to ruin his interview is felt by Gerald as sheer cruelty. With apology from Gaz and Dave, Gerald agrees to be the choreographer, coach and a dancer of the group. Finally he discovers that he has got the job despite the prank. This conversely implies that management work is less rare.
On the other hand, Gaz demonstrates his elastic mind, keen vision, and smart leadership qualities. The loss of work deprives men of a public space, “feminizing them and turning their interests towards their bodies” (Luckett, 2000, p. 95). Having an excess of free time and an absence of money, the ex-workers are forced to look more closely at themselves. The case is quite like the punk subculture of the 1970s, in which jobless youth only had their personal bodies to own and make use of. The 1990s witnessed the thriving of male striptease as a lucrative business, typically represented by the Chippendales. Gaz is smart to realize that putting on a successful performance not only can earn quick money but also is an alternative way to reclaim identity, pride and self-worth. When they see the female crowd watching Chippendales striptease, Dave figures out the potential profit of ten quid per ticket for a thousand people, and Gaz instantly comes to the conclusion that “It’s worth a thought.” He persuades his mates by luring with profit: “Folks don’t laugh so loud when you’ve a grand in your pocket.” Ironically, Gaz’s entrepreneurial zeal and free market economy success via the male striptease performance shows him “taking on rather than embracing the core of Thatcherism” (Dyja, 2010, p. 103). As the writer of the screenplay points out, “literally and metaphorically men were being told to shape up, get fit, get smart, and get sexy” (as cited in Bromley, 2000, p. 65). The only way out seems to be an individual enterprise, finding a niche and increasing your market chances. But the team does not seem to have discovered an easy way to “lottery” wealth as they cannot live on a once-only performance. Their popularity is not due to
self job creation, but the audience’s emotional admiration for their courage. What is unsolved is how long the new self-respect and reflexivity will survive.

The loss of public space leads to more male body-consciousness. The redundant masculine bodies change into male strippers and by the close have succeeded in what Herbert Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1955) described as the aim of “making the human body an instrument of pleasure rather than labor” (as cited in Mather, 2006, p. 50). Dyja explores the significance that “Perhaps their striptease symbolically releases them from having to take on any job, in the reluctant way Dave worked as security guard, and quite literally liberates them by shedding the constraints of a uniform and revealing their manhood” (Dyja, 2010, p. 107). The stripping of security guard uniforms in the final scene is further suggested by Bromley to be “a significant comment” on the low esteem of the job—poorly paid and ununionized—and also about “stripping off traditional male body insecurities” (Bromley, 2000, p. 66).

In this job innovation, community collective spirit is much highlighted. But this collectivity is not political; only the works band is still going, seen several times playing seriously, carrying on the working-class cultural tradition. The de-unionized working class members have lost its ability for collective action and even the capacity to identify their common interests. The film makes great effort in providing collective solutions to personal problems. Where once the steel works gave men their livelihoods and a common bond, it is now gone forever. What can unite them now are the job club, the dole queue and the striptease rehearsals. Lomper gains a new sense
of meaning and confidence in life from community friendship. At the beginning of the film, he intends to commit suicide, but is rescued by Dave. His pitiful remark “Haven’t got any mates” leads to Gaz and Dave offering him immediate friendship. Then through integration into the stripper team, he identifies his homosexual orientation and eventually finds happiness in his relationship with Guy. Gerald is another example. Despite his consciousness of his different status from all others as he claims “I used to have a proper job,” he is increasingly attached to the team and even allows the mates to practise stripping off in his front room. Their expected exposure is unexpectedly interrupted by the arrival of loan sharks, who threaten to take away the house belongings as Gerald owes them £120. At the crucial moment, in an extremely funny way, a half-naked Dave tells the men to “Put down and piss off,” and at once all team members stand in a line, the sight of which indicating a homosexual orgy party encourages the debt collectors to quickly flee away. However, the reprieve is only temporary as Gerald’s possessions are eventually taken away from him. Gerald only owes them “120 quid,” but they are taking his belongings away as “second-hand.”

Bound by the common mission of fulfilling a successful performance, the group is seen to be always together in the films. As Caplan observes, *The Full Monty* is “about group therapy, in both visual and narrative terms. Conversation, admission of need and collective action provide the only solutions to these men’s situation. Talking, training, attending funerals or stripping, they are framed and filmed as a cohesive (if volatile) unit.” (1997, p. 43) Yet paralleling this collective solidarity, it is worth
pointing out that the men take up more responsibilities than the angry young men of
the 1950s, and are even more home-centered than them. Many of the group scenes in
the New Wave tradition of poetic realism with “that long shot of our town from that
hill.”

The final full monty performance ending is amusing and powerful and has been
much commented upon. Dave returns for the big night and Gaz overcomes his last
minute nervousness, encouraged respectively by the wife and son. In front of an
excited crowd, the men go on stage and conduct their performance accompanied by
the beautiful sexy song *You Can Leave Your Hat On* sung by Tom Jones with great
machismo. The old steelyard works band, in which Lomper is a member, is there
providing the musical accompaniment. The six performers wear a costume similar to
Dave’s security guard uniform. Dave introduces their act by stating that they may be
neither pretty, good, nor young, but “We’re here. We’re live, and for one night only
we’re going for the full monty!” For their sheer bravery, the audience cheer with
applauds. The group dance in their amateur steps and step by step take off their ties,
shirts, leather belts, trousers and throw them respectively to the crying crowd. The
ecstatic audience include performers’ wives, the police who have arrested the strippers
and a few men. There are reaction shots at key time of audience who are specially
related to performers on stage, e.g. shot of Mandy enthusiastically cheering Gaz’s
arrival and close-up shot of Linda hiding her face in Dave’s shirt which she catches.
By the time the thongs come off and the hats cover the dancers’ private parts, the men
swing their bodies with buttocks facing the audience in a move that brings the men
into a formation, with smirks on their faces. The crowd is reaching a feverish pitch, chanting “Off, off, off.” Then the men turn to face the audience and as the music stops they toss their hats into the air and are caught in the famous teasing “full monty” freeze-frame shot with the image filmed from the rear. Tom Jones sighs off the last line with an extended cry, playfully instructing “You can leave your hat on” when in fact the hat is flying.

With the success of the performance, the men seem remasculinized. They are back where they belong, centre stage, no longer marginalized in their own club as in the opening scenes. So, having reinvented themselves, class is back and men are in demand, the focus of attention, with a new kind of self-esteem as women come to working-men’s club “Cos of us. Men.” In their first practice, the audience laugh at them. This time they are not “laughed at, but laughed with” (Bromley, 2000, p. 67). Different from female stripping, the decision to expose themselves to the full is made by the men themselves. By showing their manhood in a public space again, the unemployed “boys” have become “men” again. The reconstruction of masculinity around men’s bodies drives away their shame about it and resumes the tradition of celebrating of the male body for working-class pride. As Dave tells the audience, “we may not be young, we may not be pretty, we may not be right good, but we’re here.” The posters advertisement “Hot Metal--We dare to be bare!” suggests the message that these men are “not the scrap which they initially feel themselves to be, but hot and malleable material indeed” (Caplan, 1997, p. 43).

However, such remasculinization “feel-good” ending is naturally ambivalent
and flawed. Hill notes that the final screen scene avoids the full frontal nude display as the film’s title promised and as a female stripper might have been expected to do. The effect of this is to “rescue the characters from the degree of indignities which such shots would have entailed” (Hill, 2000a, pp. 184-185). Despite the freeze frame that “literally fixes the moment of triumph,” the performance can be no more than “a one-off event and not a permanent solution to the men’s economic problems” (Wayne, 2006, p. 295). Monk is more critical of the film’s politics and argues that the ending that the ex-steel workers appear to remould themselves “with only temporary pain” into paid performers in “the creative and entertainment industries” is “problematic” and represents a Blairite celebration of neo-liberal entrepreneurialism. The film proposes a career “that replaces the sale of labor with the commodification of the body.” (Monk, 2000b, p. 285). In short, in return for their re-masculinization, the ex-steel workers have commodified themselves and have been commodified.

Being creative and entertaining can be nothing but utopian solution. While it can be seen to be promoting the ideology that an individual can try all kinds of things for making a living, beneath this surface we see the inappropriateness of the model. To completely undress is not something dignified for masculinity pride as the final rear shots hints. The kind of performance cannot last long as they do not have the build of professional strippers; so it is not applicable to more working people. Common sense would teach the general public that the film’s identity reconstruction through the full monty and once-only gimmick lack universality as this is really not the sort of thing that real working-class can do for salvation. Reg (Bruce Jones), the
first applicant at the audition and is desperate to try anything for money, simply cannot overcome the psychological unease and is unable to transform taking his clothes off into an entertaining performance of stripping. He performs with unenthusiastic hesitation and soon halts the audition. In a medium close-up shot, the camera observes his uneasiness with the demands of stripping. He is similar to Phil in *Brassed Off*, who also lacks enthusiasm in reinventing himself as Mr Chuckles. As we are sure that Gaz and his mates cannot overcome their financial difficulty through this only-once performance, the fantasy solution can be viewed more as black humor, taking sarcasm as silent political attack and striptease as cultural resistance toward the ruling class, suggesting the missing of any hope for more sensible and dignified solutions.

**Reversal of gender roles.**

The representation of male-female relationship is marked by a reversal of gender roles as well as the continuing subordination and marginalization of women. It is widely acknowledged that this post-industrial male trauma was contrasted by the reversal of gender roles (Hill, 2000a, p. 184; Luckett, 2000, p. 95) with the shift in employment patterns. Women begin to enter spaces previously occupied by men and sometimes “at the expense of men” (Bromley, 2000, p. 65), “exacerbate[ing] men’s plight” (Luckett, 2000, p. 95). A blurring of male/female place and space can be identified.

Women are shown generally to be confident with jobs and have a sense of pragmatic realism sadly lacking in their male counterparts. While Gaz and Dave steal
girder from the empty factory where they once worked, their wives all work full
time--Mandy, Gaz’s ex-wife, looks like having a senior job in a factory and Jean
works in a decent supermarket. Mandy lives in a modern, detached house with her
new affluent middle-class partner and a new car. She is annoyed by Gaz’s lack of
responsibility and general immature attitude to work and persuades him to
realistically take any job available.

Male striptease performance seems to have become a growing industry and
men’s traditional territory--the working men’s club has been taken over by women as
the venue for watching male strippers. So now men strip for money while women pay
to watch, arousing a reversal of the male gaze. In such a women-only night at the
beginning of the film, women pay for the male striptease show by the famous
Chippendales, and they speak about sex, talk dirty and enter men’s toilets in a way as
bawdy as the men they are replacing. They use men’s toilet (the only available in a
working men’s club) and a woman is illicitly observed by Gas as urinating standing
up, representing “a symbolic appropriation of phallic power” (Hill, 2000a, p. 184).
Though the scene seems quite surreal, the action leads to Gaz lamenting for man’s
obsoleteness and passing as dinosaurs, a condition imposed on them by the economic
developments that create a feminized society. The traditional male gaze of women as
sex objects (e.g. Gaz and Dave’s points-scoring system of women who pass them by,
Lomper’s comment on female body in Cosmopolitan) is transformed in self-reflection
into men scrutinizing their own bodies. At the end of the story, this gaze further
develops into the female gaze of men as sex objects, through which the working men
have taken the club back, symbolically winning the battle over territory, though not through work, but through entertaining. We do not learn whether Gaz wins Mandy back by the end of the film and I see it as unlikely as the dance cannot play magic, but surely she is pleased that Gaz has finally made an effort and achieved something.

Crisis in masculinity has led to breakdown of communication between men and women. Dave's inferiority conscience causes his sexual impotence and his timidity in being open to his wife about happenings around him. His wife Jean is later suspicious of him having an affair when she sees him coming back late all those nights and finds a red thong. It is only then that Dave is forced to explain that he is doing stripping with Gaz and other mates:

Dave: "we'd make a bob or two taking us clothes off...We weren't that bad. Only I couldn't, could I?"
Jean: "Why not?"
Dave: "Well, look at me. Jeanie, who wants to see this dance?
Jean: Me, Dave. I do.

With this exchange of heart, their relationship is resolved. Jean's love immediately restores Dave's confidence, implying that men need women's love and encouragement in their effort to re-masculinize.

Gerald and Linda represent a traditional couple with Gerald as breadwinner and Linda as housewife. Linda displays materialistic or consumerist passion. She is shown as loving luxurious furniture and housing facilities. She continues buying goods and is even booking skiing holiday on Gerald's Barclay credit card, without knowing that Gerald has been out of work for six months. When we seem to feel that she is all to
blame for Gerald’s misery, the film ironically tells us that Linda’s desire for material goods and holidays is not as great as her desire to know the truth:

Linda: And this has been going on how long?
Gerald: About six months.
Linda: I can cope with losing the sunbed. Car. Television. I can even cope with the shame of everyone watching this. But six months! Six bloody months! And you wouldn’t say to me, to your wife.
Gerald: I thought you liked them.
Linda: No, Gerald. I’ve never liked ’em.

This breakdown in communication seems to lead to an ultimate tragic ending of the marriage. Gerald is thrown out by Linda. Unlike other mates who are childlike, Gerald is very patriarchal, clearly knowing his family duties. As he tells Gaz and Dave, “I’ve got a standard of living! Responsibilities!” The trouble with him is that he does not know how to communicate with his wife. He wants to shoulder everything alone so that his wife would “never have known.” Linda at least can be blamed for her insensitiveness to Gerald’s pressure and depression.

The position of women in The Full Monty is more complicated than that in Brassed Off. Apart from women being depicted as the reason for men’s dilemma by economically squeezing them out of jobs, they are also associated with consumerism, such as Gerald’s wife Linda (Deirdre Costello), or snobbish upward mobility, such as Gaz’s ex-wife, Mandy, which aggravate the problems of men. Linda’s lust for consumer goods seems to prevent Gerald from informing her of his unemployment. Yet, such misogynist depiction is later counterbalanced. Linda is not that materialistic as she values honesty and truth more than consumer goods. Mandy is commented as
“one of the least likeable characters in the film” to change by Hill (Hill, 2000a, p. 185). All through the film, Mandy is portrayed as snobbish, hostile, and unsympathetic, breaking with Gaz for a middle-class partner and even taking legal action against Gaz’s joint custody. She presses Gaz to take any low-paid job. At the police office, she mocks that Gaz’s “great money-making enterprise” equals to “pornography” and challenges that “Still think you’re a good father?”, to which the son lends his support for the father: “He is trying.” Yet, whatever is said about it, she finally appears at the club without letting his partner come (excusing that it is women-only) and becomes a part of the cheering crowd, thus achieving “proletarianisation” (Hill, 2000a, p. 185) at the film’s end. Dave’s wife Jean (Lesley Sharp) is treated more sympathetically as a loving and understanding wife. At the final performance, Jean catches Dave’s shirt and Mandy gets Gaz’s belt, things thrown by them to the audience. Such ending suggests hope for better mutual communication and understanding. Wayne is right in suggesting that Mandy’s final presence “provide[s] moral support,” but he goes too far in suggesting that it “hint[s] at a family reconciliation” (2006, p. 295). On the whole, women remain peripheral to the film’s main action. There is no female character as important as Gloria in *Brassed Off*.

The film is much commodified for wider appeal across country, class, gender and age. Humor, or comic element, is taken as one effective strategy. In *The Full Monty*, serious social issues are tackled in a gentle, warm, yet somewhat aching sense of humor. The men’s vulnerability and dilemma are transformed into “an affirmative
upbeat story of masculine reinvention” (Wayne, 2006, p. 294).

Scenes around the men’s stripping practices are all funny. In the first scene, Gaz tries stripping alone--in car headlights, cigarette in mouth, to the music of Hot Chocolate’s “You Sexy Thing.” When he tries to take his shirt off, he burns himself with his cigarette, and the shirt gets caught and the dance steps come to a sudden stop. Meanwhile, we hear the scratching sound of the record needle. In the dole queue scene, the steel strippers unconsciously begin to practice their moves, lured by the radio music of Donna Summer’s disco classic “Hot Stuff.” So the training has taken effect. In the third scene in Gerald’s home where the men strip to their diverse undies is visually amusing and made more so when the loan sharks are threatened away by the half-naked men.

The most aching humor is around Lomper’s suicide. Dave drags Lomper out of his carbon-fumed car, but Lomper blames Dave for saving him, so Dave pushes the ungrateful Lomper back into the car and drags him out again. Afterwards, Dave, Gaz and Lomper, sitting on a hill, jokingly chat about the best way for Lomper to commit suicide. Suggestions include shooting himself, finding a big bridge to do “bungee jumps, only without the bungee bit” and drowning himself, but all seem impractical because there is nowhere for Lomper to find a gun, he can’t stand heights and he can’t swim, to which Gaz responds “You don’t have to fucking swim, you divvy.” The final suggestion is for Lomper to “Stand in the middle of t’ road and get a mate to drive. Smack into you right fast”, but Lomper answers “Haven’t got any mates.” Gaz immediately offers friendship: “We just saved your fucking life, so don’t tell us we’re
not your mates!” and Dave offers to run him down soon. As Caplan points out, “Laughter at pain can be beneficial or harmful here” (1997, p. 43).

Besides humor, the mood of nostalgia is also significant. This nostalgia arouses audience emotions not so much around industrial jobs as around the lost homosocial communities and the powerful emotional bonds associated with them. It is this arousing of emotion around the idea of men as a community under threat, Clair Monk argues, that explains the widespread appeal to a 1990s’ international male audience far broader than just the working class (2000b, p. 280). The nostalgic comic element is also appealing to a rather stereotyped image of working-class life that was common in the 1940s, people laughing and joking through hard times. Yet beneath the humor, the political message is blunted by nostalgia rather than sharpened by satire.

Songs chosen to match men’s dancing--Donna Summer’s *Hot Stuff*, Hot Chocolate’s *You Sexy Thing*, and of course, and Tom Jones’ *You Can Leave Your Hat On*, all popular songs in the 1970s--have more sex appeal and more youth appeal than the visual images and also generate a feeling of nostalgia for “the good old days”. They are used somewhat ironically, as the men are far from sexy and do not leave the hat on in the end.

The film reimagines traditional working-class community with a better inclusiveness than films of Ken Loach and *Brassed Off*, in which gay and black characters are absent. *The Full Monty* has Horse and the brass band leader as black, Lomper and Guy as gay. Racial interactions are quite utopian. Horse is completely assimilated; he and his relatives are positively stereotyped as acquiring natural rhythm
and keeping a close-knit family. Nevertheless, such depictions can only be postmodern ornament intended for a unifying image. As Hill points out, the black characters “are simply accepted as a part of the drama without it becoming an issue or problem” (Hill, 2000a, p. 186). This multiculturalism “evacuates ethnic difference, transforming it into taste or style” (Luckett, 2000, p. 97). The film’s display of the two gay characters quickly turning into a hand-holding couple is also utopian and problematic.

In conclusion, Brassed Off and The Full Monty are two community-centered feel-good comedies with a more global appeal. While the former offers more a gritty harsh commentary on the impact of Thatcherism on traditional working class industries and tells a world we have lost, the latter makes more use of light humor in place of overt political criticism. What attracts the attention of both films is the erosion of traditional forms of working class masculinity and male dignity and no solution is offered except cultural resistance and collective consolation which is seen as largely utopian. In each film, beneath the cheerful bluster, “a much darker, sadder story is being told” (Macnab, 1996, p. 44). Both films reflect gender politics and the empowerment of women after feminist movement and The Full Monty shows better concern about postmodern hybridity in race and sexuality. Bromley is critical that “class analysis, rather than class signifiers” is an “absent content” in the films (2000, p. 67).

Continuity and Change in Working-class Identity: Theme Analysis

Crisis of identity: from proud workers to humble “underclass.”
Much has changed in the experiences of working class in the 20th century. The Documentary Movement in the 1930s produced working class as heroic labors in a collective sense. With full employment and general affluence, the New Wave films in the late 1950s and early 1960s presented confident, masculine, though discontented and rebellious young workers, such as Arthur and Joe. Then faced with the effect of Thatcherite deindustrialization, films of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s focused on the pitiful redundant and the mounting pressure on them, most typically represented by Phil who loses his “wife, kids, home, job, self-respect, hope” and by workers deformed as performers. The works unanimously articulated a “sense of loss” (Kirk, 2003, p. 78). Compared with the sense of loss of politics in the New Wave films, this time it’s the loss of job or income, political power, union support, and the associated loss of family, traditional community, traditional male role, and etc. So the loss of so many factors all together has contributed to the loss of old form of working-class identity. The films are seen, to varying degrees, “elegies for an older, industrial, northern working class” (Dave, 2006, p. xiii).

Huw Beynon described the world of neo-liberalism which started with Thatcher’s policies and continued in Blair’s Britain as a world in which a “growing complex of jobs and labor contracts” have combined with “gender and ethnic difference” to produce a “mosaic” of fragmented labor that is not easy to represent in “simple images” (Beynon, 2001, p. 38). So, some films since the end of 1990s have explored the new image of workers on the fragmented neo-liberal labor market. Human Traffic (1999) and Late Night Shopping (2001) present youth with “McJobs,”
a kind of casualized and “flexible” working practice of low prestige, low pay, and more intense exploitation. The characters in the two films try a variety of jobs such as seller in store, staff at fast-food restaurant, supermarket shelf-stacker, hospital cleaner, worker in micro-electronics factory, and operator at call center. They do not identify with their jobs. Nina even celebrated unemployment in Human Traffic. In Late Night Shopping, all the young people take monotonous work in the night, which is unpleasant and greatly affect their life, e.g. Sean and his girlfriend are never in their shared flat at the same time because of their work. Illegal immigrants are most likely to undertake such works, as shown in Dirty Pretty Things (2002). In Sweet Sixteen (2002), the job of operator in a calling center is the most Chantelle can dream about. With no solutions available, the films always carry a sense of pessimism. An irreversible trend is that the working class dignity and pride are gone for ever with the wind. Because of the various kinds of losses, the working class is imaged as victims in the films.

Crisis in masculinity: the gradual loss of confident aggressiveness and sexuality.

The New Wave films provided uninhibited display of masculine energy and sexuality, represented most prominently in Arthur Seaton’s forceful, muscular physique in Saturday Night and Sunday Morning. But in the 1980s and 1990s, industrial decay and mass unemployment undermined the traditional working class masculinity linked with pride in hard, physical labor, family feeding and trade union power. Thus, in focusing on working class in the north of England, films of the 1990s,
“to an almost unprecedented extent...seemed preoccupied with men and masculinity in crisis” (Monk, 2000a, p. 156). They show a deep concern about male disempowerment—the loss of economic power, gender privilege and working class male community, providing sympathetic portrayals of working-class men as “physically redundant in the workplace and emotionally retarded in the home” (Hallam, 2000, p. 266). Albert Finney’s Arthur with “vivid masculine force of the body” is physically undermined, transmuted into “the scrawniness of Robert Carlyle as Gary in The Full Monty or Stevie in Riff-Raff (Ken Loach 1990) (Luckett, 2000, p. 95) or the nasty women-basher of Ray in Nil by Mouth. There are more images of men who are sexually inadequate, fat, gay, not working but entertaining. Family violence, drug and alcohol abuse are seen as symptomatic of a crisis in masculinity.

The profound “gender anxiety” resulting from economic re-structuring is widely reflected in the images of “gender reversal” with strong female characters often counter-posed with weak, socially impotent men. Clair Monk criticizes that The Full Monty and Brassed Off focus so much on masculinity in crisis that they reduce “the economic oppressions of unemployment” to “gender oppression by women” (2000b, p. 282), which greatly weakened the sharpness of the social message.

The role of women.

Women have generally been in subordinate position in working class films and their screen image has been more negative or more positive to different extent. In New Waves films, there are such positive minder image of Alice in Room at the Top and Audrey in The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner, but more often women
function either as elusive objects of desire or as a threat to masculinity—through their obsession with marriage, motherhood and “settling down”—or as agents of consumption. Narratives were centered on the devaluation and punishment of women (e.g. for adultery), displaying an obvious misogynist tendency.

This gender gap was somewhat covered in the 1980s by more positive female-centered films which reflect the growing importance of women in the workforce and in society as a whole, e.g. Letter to Brezhnev (1985), Rita, Sue and Bob, Too (1986), Sammy and Rosie Get Laid (1987). Teresa in Letter to Brezhnev is seen as taking the traditionally “masculine space” for leisure, drinking, talking dirty, looking for sexual encounters casually. Depiction of women in High Hopes and Life is Sweet is more balanced, so we see the loving and caring Shirley and Wendy in the two films.

In films of the 1990s and 2000s, old misogyny continued, though weaker, but with a new hostility toward the reversal of gender roles being added. Women’s inroads into white-collar and service jobs were generally viewed as worsening men’s plight. In The Full Monty, Gaz’s wife and Dave’s wife all have jobs and are enjoying life, but the husbands can’t. Women were portrayed as passionate consumers, unsupportive of their husbands in Brassed Off and The Full Monty, as the victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse in Naked and Nil by Mouth, as lacking motherly duty in Ladybird, Ladybird and Sweet Sixteen. Women are not capable of resistance or rebellion faced with family violence in Naked, Nil by Mouth and there is an “Ambiguity of Critique” in such films (Monk, 2000a, p. 163). The absence of fathers in New Wave films is replaced by the absence of Billy’s mother, who is dead and
totally unmentioned and we can’t see any miner’s wives involved in the strike in *Billy Elliot*. Unlike *Brassed Off*, their effort is totally ignored.

The apparent ascendancy of women in the post-industrial workplace heralded a resurgence of masculinism and misogyny, though this time it was “cloaked in post-modern irony or humor, or justified in terms of a backlash against the gains of feminism” (Monk, 2000a, p. 163). In fact, the exercising of power over women by the working class heroes (both verbally and physically) may be read as a compensation for their actual social and political impotence.

**The de-politicization of the working class.**

Andrew Higson argues that the history of British realism is the history of “the changing conceptualization of the relation between the public and the private, between the political and the personal” (1986, p. 83). To great extent, British social realist tradition has been characterized by a movement away, since its very early stage, from the public and the social (the working class at work, struggles connected to the wider society or community) to the private and the personal (the focus on family or personal life and problems with little reference to social, political and economic conditions). Class consciousness against capitalist exploitation and against Thatcher’s neo-liberalism was clearly revealed, yet on the whole social issues are explored through familial and personal relations. Generally there has been few representation of work in working-class films. In the 1960s it is because of consumption; in the 1980s and 1990s, it is because of lack of work. Working-class identity is more constructed by consumption and entertaining (the performing working class) rather than
than production.

The documentary’s distanced public gaze was soon replaced by the individuated private looks of the New Wave. The narratives were organized around a single central protagonist, and no longer required a multiplicity of plot lines. In the face of affluence and mass culture, the “focus on cultural aspects tended to preclude work” and the “focus on the discontented male involved a downplaying of collective conditions and actions” (Hill, 2000b, p. 251).

The anti-Thatcherism films of the 1980s and 1990s seemingly rediscovered the political dimension, e.g. *High Hopes* and *Brassed Off*, and especially Ken Loach’s films. The emphasis of *Riff-Raff* is firmly upon the world of work and class politics rather than leisure, but most of Loach’s films focus on the working class as individual victims. The miners’ strike as working class resistance is mentioned directly in *Billy Elliot*, but only indirectly in *Brassed Off*.

The trend of identifying working class in domestic and familiar terms was more pronounced in the 1990s. *The Full Monty* typically acknowledges economic and political causes only as taken-for-granted background, if at all. The central problem that both *The Full Monty* and *Brassed Off* address is not so much unemployment itself as its psychic and emotional effects. Gary Oldman’s *Nil by Mouth* is a semi-autobiographical tale of a working class family in which abuse and violence is cycling from generation to generation. Thematically, the film is not concerned with social, political and economic inequalities lying behind alcoholism and domestic violence, taking alcoholism as a family disease, not a societal one. By focusing too
tightly on individual’s personal or family life, these social problems become personal problems. For example, the drug abuse in *Nil by Mouth* and *Trainspotting* can be attributed to individual’s lack of discipline.

Similarly, Julia Hallam notes that films of the 1990s constructed their images of the working class through “their relation to consumption rather than production, purchasing power rather than labor power” (2000, p. 261). This is also true to the 1980s films. In *High Hopes*, it is the difference in consumption (domestic interiors, or dressing) that indicates the different social status of the three families.

The focus on the private and the personal has been regarded as weakening the political and social messages of the texts as they “focus on the individual or family and their struggles without making connections to wider political, economic and social factors” (Lay, 2002, p. 121). Poverty, unemployment and social exclusion are not treated as the driving forces, but merely as contributory factors to family troubles, so that it is the working class families that have failed, not the state or capitalist society.

Samantha Lay is critical of the trend towards autobiography and nostalgia. She believes looking back instead of looking at the contemporary settings from a highly individualized perspective can be seen as further undermining a sense of the “public” (Lay, 2002, p.123, 107). However, it is also argued that the lack of party politics in working class films, in another way, by virtue of the language and the lives they uncover, “might be seen to have political ramifications. You seldom see these people or hear this language, and this in itself harbors a political message” (Mcfeely, 1997).
Community and solidarity.

Collective experience is not a characteristic of British social realism. In general, class has been mainly presented as an individual and moral, rather than collective or social/economic experience. In other words, social issues are explored at the micro level of character, rather than the macro level of the social. The blame is thus more often on the weak characters of the individuals. Rather than questioning class inequalities, these films appear to advocate escape from the confinement of working class position as the only feasible solution.

The Grierson’s documentaries aimed to represent the society at large rather than particular individuals. British films in the Second World War period attempted to project a sense of collectivity on the screen, multiplying the number of central characters. In contrast, the New Wave films rested little on the collective experience of working-class life, seldom showed their characters at work, playing down class inequalities, and promoting what John Hill described as an “accentuated individualism” (Hill, 1986, p. 143). In so doing, the possibility of collective struggle are excluded. Since the 1980s, with the deindustrialization, the representation of the older working-class communities—especially northern ones—has effectively disappeared, replaced by the cold and indifferent neighborhood in *High Hopes* (1988) and community in decay in *Sweet Sixteen* (2002).

However, in the late 1990s, male togetherness was given positive values in the comedy films like *Brassed Off* and *The Full Monty*, marking a superficial return to class-consciousness and collectivity repressed in the 1980s. So, in *Brassed Off*, the
brass band is able to go on to claim victory in the national championships despite the coming closure of the pit. In *The Full Monty*, the unemployed community gain respect through doing collective strip show. And it is through involvement in the group that Dave is able to regain his sexual potency and Gaz wins the respect of his son. In this wishful solidarity, even middle-class or upwardly mobile characters are shown to return to working-class communities, reinventing the cross-class union in wartime films.

These comedies, similar with TV soap operas like *Coronation Street*, present a geographically-bounded working-class community in which everyone appears to know everyone else, reminding us of Hoggart’s version of pre-war working-class community. They celebrate the recovery, in a post-industrial context, of the collective spirit. Hill holds that the idea of working-class community is mobilized “less in the service of class politics than as a metaphor for the state of the nation” (2000a, p. 183). He argues that such depiction and emphasis “give voice to a certain yearning for ‘national wholeness’ in the face of economic and social divisions and the rise of self-interested individualism that characterized the Tory years” (2000a, p. 184). Monk comments that both films appeal to emotions that “the male social and emotional bonds once associated with the workplace and the working-men’s club are threatened, mourned, struggled for -and finally restored.” (2000a, p. 161)

The concern for the decline of the traditional working class initiated in the New Wave films was sustained in films of the 1980s and 1990s. However, the old anxiety about the corrupting effects of consumption or embourgeoisement was replaced by
the new anxiety about the damage wrought by de-industrialization, mass unemployment and poverty. The brass band has been appreciated through all decades as a symbol of authentic working class traditional culture. In *A Kind of Loving*, it was treasured by Vic, but devalued by Ingrid and her mother. In *Brassed Off* and *The Full Monty*, the brass band is revived to suggest local pride and the centrality of masculinity, both phenomena eroded by the hegemony of the south. In the former, it is glorified, but in the latter, it is seen sentimentally as the “only thing left going here.”

**Youth unemployment and subcultural resistance.**

The working class youth experienced shifts and fragmentations of deindustrialization in direct material, social, economic and cultural forms. In addressing the anxieties of young male audience, the youth underclass films presented joblessness and social exclusion as taken-for-granted facts with no history, no proposed solution and no expectation of change. With detached irony, they framed the male underclass (their drug-taking, petty crimes) “not as a ‘social problem,’” which requires a solution, “but as a subcultural ‘lifestyle’ with certain attractions for a young, post-political male audience” (Monk, 2000a, p. 160). Instead of attempting to arouse consciousness or anger, *Trainspotting* (1996) and especially *Twin Town* (1997) encourage subcultural dissent and escape from the demands of adulthood, women and work with their story of heroin users and petty criminals, although irony is never absent from this framing. Beynon sees their exploration of the under-side of British society as through the use of “black humor” (2001, p. 39). But Loach’s *Sweet Sixteen*
deals with the issue in a serious way, encouraging people to trace the reasons behind Liam's tragedy. For Hall, there is simply no "subcultural solution" to working-class youth unemployment, educational disadvantage, dead-end jobs, low pay and the loss of skills (Clarke & Hall, 1976, p. 47).

**Cultural hybridity - the intersection of class with other identities.**

Since 1980s, echoing the postmodern shift of concern from working class to other marginal groups, working class has been represented in the form of cultural hybridity. Filmmakers began to explore the intersection of class with other identities such as race, gender, and sexuality best represented in such films as *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987).

Stuart Hall argues that "the postmodern subject" is conceived not as having "fixed, essential or permanent identity" but rather as assuming "different identities at different times" (as cited in Hill, 1999, p. 207). Concerning the multidimensional identities, Rani's identity, in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, is not simply a working-class Asian, female, or lesbian, but one which is "overdetermined" and shifting. Hill agrees with Bhabha on that the identities in these films are not then simply overlaid, or added on top of each other, but are themselves "interstitial," formed, 'in-between,' or in excess of, the sum of the 'parts' of difference" (Hill, 1999, p. 208).

Central to the films *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* is the insistence upon difference. In line with Hall's idea of the "living" of "identity through difference," the films stress upon heterogeneity without any attempt to give expression to one "authentic" or "essential" "black" or "Asian" experience, or offer
straightforward “positive” images (Hill, 1999, p. 209). In these films, the dealing of homosexual relationship is also designed to be taken for granted as “difference” rather than as “problem.”

This tendency of showing cultural hybridity continues in the 1990s, but the strength is somewhat weakened. Jorge in *Ladybird. Ladybird*, a political exile from Paraguay, is positively depicted. He is the one who attempts to cooperate with the social services, who “brings his intellect to bear on the case, ...not out of cowardice, but in order to survive” (Francke, 1994, p. 47). In *Brassed Off* and *The Full Monty*, we see unemployed black and gays but there is not much difference between their life and the life of the white male workers. Racial interactions are quite utopian. For Luckett, the “strategy of inclusion” subsumes cultural difference for an exotic, updated national image; yet the “multiculturalism” is “superficial” and only exists “at the level of the unifying image” (2000, p. 96). Paul Dave agrees that *The Full Monty* relies on a “facile populism and multiculturalism” which act to conceal class struggle and continuing ethnic division and conflict (2006, p. 70).

**Diversity in solutions.**

In tackling working class problems, no real solutions can be given. In New Wave films, resolutions include social conformity, escape through climbing the social ladder, or rebellion. And it is common for the desire for escape to prove impossible, or to demand too high a cost. Films since the 1980s have also involved diverse kinds of endings.

*Mike Leigh’s antagonists more often take life as it is, value family and endure
with positive attitudes, though his *Naked* is more tragic. Loach and Oldman’s films are social tragedies, showing men caught in circumstances they cannot change; the central protagonists mostly face defeat in the end with absolutely no hope of escape. For Joe in Loach’s *My Name Is Joe*, “Some of us don’t have a choice. I didnae have a fuckin’ choice.” In Oldman’s *Nil by Mouth*, Ray’s alcoholism, drug abuse and violence render the whole family vulnerable. *Sweet Sixteen* breaks our heart with the impossible dream of the 16-year-old Liam to live together with his mother. *My Beautiful Laundrette* by Stephen Frears offers solution of gay love, suggesting how sexual desires may permit the crossing of borders and provide forms of connection which subvert conventional social divisions or pieties. As Omar announces to Salim, in his opinion, “much good can come from fucking.”

The 1990s commercial comedies offer more positive resolutions, transforming the problems of male unemployment, economic hardship, loss of self-esteem, and etc. into up-beat, feelgood stories. Working-class characters regain male pride and dignity through collective actions and mutual support, a tendency identified by John Hill as “utopianism” (2000a, p. 178). Through re-establishing the bonds among men, the two films have achieved the recovery of masculinity and community, and even mark a return to the class consciousness and collectivity repressed in the 1980s. So, utopian fantasy is used to relieve the stress, hardship and agony. Such resolution is naturally ambivalent. Claire Monk complains that *The Full Monty*, along with *Brassed Off*, seeks to resolve the problems of class disadvantage in terms of gender relations and the “healing powers” of the all-male group (2000b, pp. 280-282). Hill sees the explicit
reliance on fantasy as "an acknowledgement of the very 'impossibility' of escape, a 'magical' resolution to conflicts which remain unresolved, and an ironic recognition of the actual impotence" (1999, p. 170). So the solutions offered can only be symbolic and inevitably problematic.

In 2000, *Billy Elliot* brought the old theme of personal escape into full play with the glamorous success of the working class ballet star Billy. The final scene of strong and broad-shouldered Billy doing a high masculine vertical jump glorifies masculinity, yet obviously Billy's escape can only by personal and rare. *Happy Go Lucky* (2008) explores how one, who still stays at the lower social stratum, should live in today's society with a proper attitude. While Billy escapes by resorting to individual talent and sticking to one's own belief and with the help of the working-class community, Poppy in *Happy Go Lucky* escapes through her irrepressible happy-nature and optimistic life attitude in coping with the hard reality.
CHAPTER VII

IDEOLOGY, CULTURE, IDENTITY:

ANALYSIS OF WORKING CLASS REPRESENTATION

This chapter will analyze working class identity in post-war social realist films within the context of post-war political ideology and cultural condition using British Cultural Studies as theoretical framework.

The logical connection between film and society has been widely acknowledged. Aldgate & Richards are more wholesome in suggesting that the cinema functions “to reflect and highlight popular attitudes, ideas and preoccupations, and to generate and inculcate views and opinions deemed desirable by film-makers,” as well as to “act as a potent means of social control, transmitting the dominant ideology of society and creating for it a consensus of support” (1999, p. 2). Stuart Hall in “Culture, the Media and the ‘Ideological Effect’” identifies three ideological effects under capitalism. The first appears to be that of “masking and displacing” of class domination or the class-exploitative nature of the system. The second is that of “fragmentation or separation” of the collective interests of the working classes. The third is that of “imposing an imaginary unity or coherence on the units so re-presented” under such ideological totalities as “the ‘community,’ the ‘nation,’
'public opinion,' 'the consensus,' the 'general interest,' the 'popular will,' 'society,'
'ordinary consumers.'” (Hall, 1977, p. 337)

This chapter intends to deconstruct British working-class screen identity to see
how far they reflect historical change, what common “structure of feeling” of
filmmakers leads to the common features of each cycle of representation, and to what
extent the identity reinforce or undermine the dominant ideology. The analysis will
make substantial reference to Hoggart, Williams and Hall’s writings.

The New Wave Representation: The Ideology of Affluence and the New Left

Hall on affluence, embourgeoisement and consensus.

The post-war social development was characterized by three dominant
sociological terms of the time: affluence, embourgeoisement, and consensus. The
Conservative Right argued that “economic growth dissolved the old class structure
and created new social groups, in particular affluent workers and the technical
intelligentsia, whom a dynamic Toryism could attract” (Gamble, as cited in Hill, 1986,
p. 7). In such a context of political agreement, “it became plausible to suppose that the
consensus between the parties . . . reflected a consensus in the nation. In the spectrum
of political opinion from right to left, the majority of the electors had moved towards
the middle, the breeding ground of the floaters, leaving only minorities at the
extremes . . . Success in the political market now seemed to depend on capturing the
centre and winning the support of the floaters” (Gamble, as cited in Hill, 1986, p. 7).

At the same time, affluence was dismantling old class barriers, “embourgeoisifying”
the old working class with rising living standards and an accompanying conversion to
“consensual” middle-class values. In *Resistance Through Rituals*, Hall et al. argue that the whole debate depended crucially on the validity of these three common-sense concepts.

In *Resistance Through Rituals*, which Hall edited, Hall thinks affluence, embourgeoisement, and consensus are highly ideological terms “woven together into an all-embracing social myth or ‘explanation’ of post-war social change” (Clarke & Hall, 1976, p. 21).

“Affluence” refers to the postwar economic boom of full employment, rise in income and mass consumption, especially working class consumption. In general terms, it is an inarguable fact that the years 1951-64 experienced greater improvements in living standards than at any other time in this century. Between 1951 and 1963, wages rose on average by 72 per cent while prices rose by only 45 per cent. In 1961 the working week was reduced from 48 to 42 hours. The worst of the housing shortage was cleared over; in 1954, 354,000 new houses were built compared with 284,230 in 1947 (the best year of Labor’s term). This was added by some important extensions of the Welfare State and educational expansion, with about 6000 new schools and 11 new universities. (Lowe, 1989, p. 575).

However, the other side of the coin revealed that the affluence as a matter of fact developed from the improvement in world trade (e.g. the fall in world commodity prices), rather than government policies of economic restructuring or long-term investment. The “stop-go” fiscal policies\textsuperscript{17} carried on by the governments actually

\textsuperscript{17} For details of the “stop-go” economy, see Lowe, 1989, pp. 576-577.
hindered the country’s economy. Soon, in the early 1960s, the economy seemed to be stagnating. There was the balance of payments crisis in 1961 and subsequent imposition of a pay-pause, credit squeeze and higher taxation. By early 1963, almost 900,000 people were out of work (Lowe, 1989, p. 578). Due to its unwillingness to devalue the pound and its high expenditure on defense (7-10 per cent of GDP) to maintain global power, Britain was repeatedly troubled with the balance of payment crisis. Facing increasing competition in world markets, it was losing its share of world output and exports. Its level of investment and economic growth was low by international standards. So, British economic growth only looked impressive in isolation, but lagged far behind almost all her main industrial competitors. The Conservative governments’ devotion to “stop-go” economic management was seen by Pinto-Duschinsky as “the sacrifice of policies desirable for the long term well-being of a country in favor of over-lenient measures and temporary palliatives bringing in immediate political return” (as cited in Clarke & Hall, 1976, p. 23). For example, the “give-away” inflationary budget of April 1955 was followed by a snap April election, and then by the deflationary autumn “cuts” after the election and hence the stagnation of 1956. As such, Britain’s affluent “miracle” was rested upon purely “temporary and fortuitous circumstances” (Clarke & Hall, 1976, p. 23).

So, for Hall et al., “affluence was, essentially, an ideology of the dominant culture about and for the working class, directed at them (through media, advertising, political speeches, etc.)” in order “to give the working-classes a stake in a future which had not yet arrived, and thus to bind and cement the class to the hegemonic
order.” In so doing, the ideology of affluence “reconstructed the ‘real relations’ of post-war British society into an ‘imaginary relation.’” So, affluence is a “full-blown ideology” or myth used to conceal real inequalities. (Clarke & Hall, 1976, p. 37) By the end of 1960s the dominant ideology of affluence no longer held hegemonic sway.

“Consensus” refers to the broad “agreement” across political parties and the electorate after 1945 on constructing postwar British society along lines such as the welfare state and mixed economy. Even a political term “Butskellism” was coined from the surname of R. A. Butler (Churchill’s Chancellor of the Exchequer) and Hull Gaitskell (leader of the Labor party 1955-1963), to show that this was a time of consensus politics. On the basis of the war-time practice of political coalitions, economic planning, and enforced egalitarianism, the post-war Labor governments (esp. between 1945 and 1951) conducted social reforms of welfare safety-net, mixed economy of private and public ownership, and etc. The Conservative governments after 1951 largely complied with this notion of “a ‘reformed’ capitalism, a socially-mindful capitalism with a ‘human face’” (Clarke & Hall, 1976, p. 23). Anthony Crosland argued that “capitalism is undergoing a metamorphosis into a quite different system” (as cited in Laing, 1968, p. 14). The success of Conservative management seemed to prove their superior fitness to run a welfare capitalist system, and to negate the need for Labor’s continuing commitment to public ownership of the economy. The Labor leadership, on the other hand, in trying to attract votes from outside the working class, became less radical in posing party opposition.
Hall et al. acknowledged the tendency in party politics toward the politics of the center, but he saw the fragility of this consensus as revealed “in the nature of the party struggle” during these years and challenged the Conservative superior fitness for governing the country. He agreed with Duschinsky that despite the continuous Tory rule for 13 years, “the political battle was desperately close throughout the whole period” (Duschinsky, as cited in Clarke & Hall, 1976, p. 23). The notion of a political consensus obscured the fact that the Conservative survival was largely rested upon the vote-catching “politics of bribery” most notoriously exemplified by Sutler’s purely expedient pre-election budget of 1955. Even despite the “politics of bribery,” for the whole 13 years of Tory rule, practically half the electorate voted against the Tories at each election. As Goldthorpe et. al. found out in their survey, “the large majority” of the affluent workers “were, and generally had been, Labor supporters” (1969, p. 172). So Hall et al. recommended reading “consensus” in a different way “as betokening a waiting attitude by the British working class (often mistaken at the time for ‘apathy’) which an effective lead to the left by Labor at any point in the period might effectively have crystallized in a different direction” (Clarke & Hall, 1976, p. 24).

“Embourgeoisement” refers to the erosion of the working class and reunification of British society around middle-class values, an assumption of “classlessness.” With rising living standards and educational expansion, the concept suggests that working-class life and culture was losing its distinctive features, with the members assimilated into middle class styles, aspirations and values. Embourgeoisement centers on the meritocratic ideology of social mobility primarily through the
education system and views consumption as an important indicator. Though having some real basis, Hall held that embourgeoisement was "the most constructed term of the three," since "the frailties of the other two terms were compounded in it" (Clarke & Hall, 1976, p. 24). It should be understood as an ideological term, rather than a matter of fact.

He made reference of the empirical research by Goldthorpe et. al. which shows that "embourgeoisement" is far more limited in scope than imagined by its promoters: "what the changes in question predominantly entailed was not the ultimate assimilation of manual workers and their families into the social-world of the middle class, but rather a much less dramatic process of convergence, in certain particular respects, in the normative orientations of some sections of the working class and of some white-collar groups" (Goldthorpe et. al., 1969, p. 26). He asserted that, looking at the Goldthorpe and Lockwood's "affluent worker" from the perspective of the later 1960s and 1970s and at the sustained wage militancy and militant shop-floor union organization, "the whole 'embourgeoisement' thesis looks extremely thin and shaky" (Clarke & Hall, 1976, p. 25).

Absolute increases in income and wealth did not mean automatic decrease in relative inequalities. As a matter of fact, increase in income, shifts in occupational structure or changes in value located more movements within classes. Social democratic policies for meritocratic advancement through expansion in education, while benefiting a minority of working class, benefited more of the middle class. The fundamental relations of power and wealth remained unchanged and hard to challenge.
As Westergaard and Resler detected, despite some redistribution of income following the Second World War, the overall pattern is that of "continuing inequality" (as cited in Hill, 1986, p. 9).

Hall had argued as early as in 1958 in his essay "A sense of classlessness" that popular cultural transformations had not seen class differences disappear, as was commonly assumed. Rather "classlessness" was an ideological effect of the new consumer culture, promoting a sense that increasing access to commodities had driven away working class poverty. Actually, the purpose of a great deal of advertising was to break down the class resistance to consumer-purchase which had been an integral part of working class consciousness. He used the Morris advert as an example to illustrate his point. The Morris advert "When you buy your second car, make sure it's a Morris" was "far from innocent." The personal pronoun "you" constructed the worker "as a freely choosing individual rather than a communal member of the working class." Such adverts "erode[d] class alliances and, therefore, the possibility of resistance." (Procter, 2004, p. 18)

Through these three terms, Hall et al. sought to demonstrate that while there was a "real basis" for all three terms in the postwar economic boom, it had not produced the classless society many commentators claimed it had, with "the stubborn refusal of class" to "disappear as a major dimension and dynamic of the social structure" (Clarke & Hall, 1976, p. 25). The general rise in living standards obscured the fact that the relative positions of the classes had remained virtually unchanged. Hence "affluence" and "classlessness" are "full-blown ideologies" which worked to
“cover over the gaps between real inequalities and the promised utopia of equality-for-all (Clarke & Hall, 1976, p. 37). The role of “affluence” and “embourgeoisement,” as an ideology, was to “dismantle working-class resistance and deliver the ‘spontaneous consent’ of the class to the authority of the dominant classes” (Clarke & Hall, 1976, p. 40), since with a “classless” society, there seemed no need preaching class consciousness.

In Resistance Through Rituals, Hall also identified the rise of working-class youth as a dramatic representation of social change. He quoted Colin MacInnes who speculated that “The ‘two nations’ of our society may perhaps no longer be those of the ‘rich’ and the ‘poor’..., but those of the teenagers on the one hand and, on the other, all those who have assumed the burdens of adult responsibility” (as cited in Clarke & Hall, 1976, p. 27). While the disappearance of class was intensely arguable, there seemed no doubt that youth was making an impressive appearance. Alongside the social rise of working class man, youth caught media attention through leisure consumption, subculture style and managed to establish a distinctive cultural identity. As Harry Hopkins puts it, “Never had ‘Youth’-- with the capital ‘Y’-- been so earnestly discussed, so frequently surveyed, so extensively seen and heard” (as cited in Hill, 1986, p. 10). The Angry Young Man novels and plays quickly discovered and presented the youthful energy and rebelliousness. New Wave films affirmed this and popularized the images.

The cultural concerns of the New Left.
The New Left was represented by scholars such as Richard Hoggart, E.P. Thompson, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, who explored British working class from cultural aspects and inspired people to broaden their notion of British culture. The New Left emerged after Russia’s invasion of Hungary, an event which was considered so immoral by Communist Party members such as E.P. Thompson and John Saville that they responded by resigning from the party (along with 7000 others) (Hill, 1986, p. 26). Discontented with both the “barbarities of Stalinism” and the debilitated politics of the Labor Party, these scholars initiated a new magazine *New Left Review* and started studying working class mainly from the perspective of culture. On the other hand, with the working class transformed from primary producers to key consumers, the new climate of consumerism in postwar Britain gave a blow to the traditional Left. It challenged their faith in the working class capacity for a socialist revolution. Their concern then was shifted to the effects that working-class “affluence” and an Americanized mass culture might have on traditional working class communities and politics.

Under the dominant discourse of “affluence,” “consensus,” and “embourgeoisement,” the political and economic aspects of the issue of class seemed settled facts. Culture became a key arena for contestation about the disappearance (or not) of the British working class. Even the New Left took the economic affluence for granted, though dismissed it as a myth. It was the moral and cultural aspects that were now open to question. Perry Anderson observed, “As material deprivation to a certain degree receded, cultural loss and devastation became more and more evident and
important” (as cited in Hill, 1986, p. 26). So the New Left scholars such as Hoggart and Williams provided views of seeing the working class culturally in their respective works The Use of Literacy (1957) and Cultural and Society (1958)—influential and founding texts for the New Left, as well as for the discipline of Cultural Studies which emerged at this period. Stuart Hall, from the late 50s, began to be engaged with the New Left in the serious analysis of the new consumer society and the popular cultural forms and lifestyles associated with it. Thus class as economic category or political entity yields to class as primarily cultural identity (Kirk, 2003, p. 59), for which the New Left were criticized as “being more of a cultural than a political movement” (Procter, 2004, p. 14). Yet a significant contribution of the New Left was to demonstrate that popular culture is itself political and that “cultural politics” (culture as politics) should be taken seriously as culture is not a secondary reflection of economic conditions, but a constitutive dimension of society, a view challenging the reductionism and economism of Marx’s base-superstructure metaphor. Both Hoggart and Williams were concerned with the erosion of the traditional working class and its popular culture. Williams even went as far as rejecting mass culture as the culture of the working class, “arguing that it was not produced by them, but for them” (Kirk, 2007, p. 65).

For Hoggart in Uses of Literacy, traditional working class culture developed from working class communities which were bound together by material hardships. In these communities, the individual’s most valuable resources were collective: family, community, and a shared culture of mutual support and of resistance with a clear
sense of “us” and “them” class divisions. As working-men’s lives were mainly defined by work, characterizations of the traditional working-class community and its culture were masculine and work-related ones. But now, rise in income and housing relocations into new estates which isolated them were feared to be breaking the ties of such community. Modern mass-produced goods as well as consumerism were offering new aspirations and new temptations. Affluence and the new mass culture were undermining the old values and destroying traditional working class cultural life, as could be seen in Hoggart’s portrait of the “juke-box boys...who spend their evenings listening in harshly lighted milk-bars to the ‘nickelodeons’” (Hoggart, 1998, p. 189) and in his observation that “[t]he hedonistic but passive barbarian who rides in a fifty-horsepower bus for three pence, to see a five-million-dollar film for one-and-eight-pence, is not simply a social oddity; he is a portent” (Hoggart, 1998, p. 191). Hall saw that the worst effects of the new “mass culture” was “its tendency to ‘unbend the springs’ of working class action and resistance” (Clarke & Hall, 1976, p. 19). Hoggart’s book crystallized the fears about the erosion of working class culture with the shift of focus from work to leisure. The writing set in the traditional Northern working-class community was “a nostalgic affirmation of the values and strengths of a way of life whose imminent passing it lamented” (Lovell, 1990, p. 360). Hoggart’s community was the one experienced in childhood, and remembered with affection. The point of view of The Uses of Literacy was Hoggart’s own—a working-class scholarship boy whose education had taken him away, literally and culturally. It was an insider’s view from outside.
For Williams in *Culture and Society* (1958), the crucial distinction between bourgeois and working-class culture is “between alternative ideas of the nature of social relationship,” not evidence as housing, dress and modes of leisure in which industrial production tends to produce uniformity (p. 325). The bourgeois social relationship is marked by “individualism,” in which each individual is “free” or has “a natural right” to pursue his own development (p. 325). The reforming bourgeois modification of this version of society is “the idea of service” (p. 325). This can be sharply-contrasted with the idea associated with the working class: “an idea which, whether it is called communism, socialism or cooperation, regards society neither as neutral nor as protective, but as the positive means for all kinds of development, including individual development... Improvement is sought, not in the opportunity to escape from one’s class, or to make a career, but in the general and controlled advance of all... Not the individual, but the whole society, will move.” (p. 326) In short, working-class culture is “the basic collective idea, and the institutions, manners, habits of thought and intentions which proceed from this” whereas bourgeois culture is “the basic individualist idea and the institutions, manners, habits of thought and intentions which proceed from that” (p. 327). The culture which the working class has produced since the Industrial Revolution is “the collective democratic institution, whether in the trade unions, the cooperative movement or a political party” (p. 327). Working-class culture is “primarily social (in that it has created institutions) rather than individual (in particular intellectual or imaginative work)” (p. 327).
In *Culture and Society*, Williams also offers his unique understanding and critique of the idea of individual opportunity—climbing the social ladder. The social conscience of this idea requires the service from government only in providing such a ladder, in industry, in education and elsewhere, and in extending the ladder to the working class. Yet, for Williams, the ladder image is "a perfect symbol of the bourgeois idea of society, because, while undoubtedly it offers the opportunity to climb, it is a device which can only be used individually: you go up the ladder alone" (p. 331). He therefore objects to this ladder version of society as it "weakens the principle of common betterment, which ought to be an absolute value" and as it "sweetens the poison of hierarchy" (p. 331).

The major directors of the New Wave films were associated with the New Left and quite some script writers belonged to the Angry Young Man team. Deeply carried by social democratic concerns, they projected a broad social awareness and general sense of political responsibility in filmmaking. Anderson attacked traditional English cinema as "snobbish, anti-intelligent, emotionally inhibited, willfully blind to the conditions and problems of the present, dedicated to an out-of-date national ideal" (McFarlane, 1986, p. 137) and called for a more socially conscious and responsible British cinema as well as for personal vision. He declared that "I want to make people—ordinary people, not just top people—feel their dignity and their importance" (Hill, 1986, p. 128). This determination to put working-class characters on the screen confirmed their humane values and the value of a "socially committed" cinema.

The representation in New Wave films.

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The New Wave films contributed to the accurate portrayal of British working class in the changing conditions of affluence and consumption. In so doing, there was a prominent structure of feeling to convey the sense of social rise of new working class with their ample masculine confidence, youthful sexuality and rebelliousness as well as the sense of frustration and alienation they felt in the time of change. Responding to the affluence and political consensus of the time and echoing the cultural concerns of the New Left, there was also the structure of feeling to articulate the sense of loss of politics, the loss of radical intent on the part of the working class and of a deep anxiety about the decline or demise of traditional working class culture under the threat of the mass culture consumption. The protagonists all display mixed feeling toward the ideology of affluence and toward working-class consumerism.

What New Wave films depicted was not the traditional working class, but the rise of new working class—the affluent workers. The protagonists are mostly benefiting from the affluence of the time, e.g. rich income, secure employment and diversified choice of consumption. Occupational and educational change leads to better chances of limited upward and outward mobility.

Arthur Seaton, an efficient and well-paid worker and big-spending consumer, is a typical example for the new affluence. Murphy comments that “terribly limited in his sensibilities’ and ‘narrow in his ambitions’ though he is, Arthur is still able to take advantage of full employment and a fat wage packet to assume a belligerent, devil-may-care attitude to the world” (1992, p. 30). For working-class grammar-school boys like Joe and Vic, they don’t have to follow their father’s
footsteps into mines and factories and have moved into comfortable white-collar jobs and thus are good examples for embourgeoisement. Joe’s final success in marrying Susan and climbing up is sincerely congratulated upon by his colleagues, which shows wide public approval for working-class entitlement for betterment. In 1950s British society, his ambition is reasonable and legitimate. In *A Taste of Honey*, the stark economic necessity cut against the gain of the ideology of affluence.

On the whole, the New Wave films conformed to the dominant ideology of affluence. This is vividly displayed through the lifestyle of Arthur, Joe, Frank, Colin’s mother and the new housing estates enjoyed by Doreen and Ingrid’s mothers and which can be afforded by Arthur and Doreen in the near future. However, echoing the sociological denial of classlessness, the films undermined the dominant ideology of embourgeoisement and more reflected the illusionary nature of such ideology. As I have explored in Chapter IV, class difference and antagonism is clearly shown in *Room at the Top*; class consciousness (of economic exploitation) and class hatred are explicit in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*. Embourgeoisement is denied and seriously mocked in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* and is seen to be won at huge cost in *Room at the Top*. In all these films, whether overt or implicit, the class structure in British society is seen as an important cause of alienation felt by the protagonists. The suffocating and tiresome work for Arthur, the bleak, drab living environment for all protagonists, the sense of hopelessness felt by Colin, and of perplexity felt by Joe, all influence their conception and behaviors. As Street has observed, “the existence of a
Labor Government did not mean that class divisions were eroded, and many sections of the working class still experienced profound economic difficulties despite the media's obsession with affluence” during this period (1997, p. 80). With protagonists like Arthur, Joe and Frank who earn a relatively satisfactory amount of income, the money seems comparatively meaningless to them: “it is something to be spent or wasted” (Shafer, 2001, p. 7). For those who sincerely seek outside mobility, the social hierarchy is too rigid for them to breach, as Joe is told in Room at the Top in reference to Susan Brown, “That’s not for you, lad.” Despite Joe’s bitter protest that “it’s old fashioned, all that class stuff,” all these representations provided evidence to the persistent class system in Britain, and negated the “classlessness.”

Concerning working-class desire for upward mobility into the middle class, different explorations have been given. John Braine, author of Room at the Top, pointed out, “Most ambitious working-class boys want to get to hell out of the working class. That was a simple truth that had never been stated before. The English working classes are the least politically-minded in the world; they always have been. Give the English working-class man half a chance and he becomes a bourgeois.” (as cited in Murphy, 1992, p. 13) Film historian Anthony Slide also shared the view: “the British working class has one overall ambition—to become middle class…” (as cited in Shafer, 2001, pp. 7-8). Yet Raymond Williams in Culture and Society is against such assumption. He is against the suggestion that “the working class is becoming ‘bourgeois,’ because it is dressing like the middle class, living in semi-detached houses, acquiring cars and washing-machines and television sets,” arguing that “[t]he
worker’s envy of the middle-class man is not a desire to be that man, but to have the same kind of possessions.” He holds that the English middle class tend to think of themselves as a standard and to suppose that the working class is “desperately anxious to become just like itself.” Long deprived of the means for material wealth, “[t]he great majority of English working people want only the middle-class material standard and for the rest want to go on being themselves.” (1958, pp. 323-324) Such contradictory feelings are clearly reflected in the deep confusion and alienation felt by Joe and Frank. Hall views the limited mobility as involving the young people “valuing the dominant culture positively, and sacrificing the ‘parent’ culture” accompanied by “a distinct sense of cultural disorientation” (Clarke & Hall, 1976, p. 51). While this is largely true, however, in breaking away from traditional working-class and being adrift in a world where the rules are uncertain, they also retain a defensive affection for old values.

Changing trends in production, increasing social and geographical mobility, urban redevelopment and mass culture were breaking up traditional or “old” working-class marked by the intimate relationship between work and cultural identity, and the “proletarian consciousness” characteristic of the “occupational community” especially in industries such as mining. The identity of the rising affluent or “new” working class was characterized less by work or production than leisure, patterns of consumption and entertainment. Thus, as Colin Sparks has observed of the work of writers like Hoggart, there is a significant absence of a discussion of work and trade unions in their consideration of patterns of working-class culture (Hill, 1986, p. 154).
This shift of concern of the New Left and the sense of loss of politics are reflected in the New Wave films, which acknowledged, if not consolidated, the dominant ideology of affluence and consensus. The political field simply has to be given up by the Left. Many of the New Wave films are less concerned with “a reassertion of the continuing gap between capital and labor” (Hill, 1986, p. 174) than with exploring the transformation of working-class life in the face of affluence and consumerism. Politically, the working class tends to be represented as largely “inert and conformist” (Hill, 1986, p. 174). Industrial action and collective activity are hardly possible alternatives; only individual working class members may rise above or rebel against the general condition. So in the films we see little depiction of radial class politics or radical class conflicts. Strikes is a rarity which only appear in I’m Alright, Jack, in which it is shown to be laughed at, with union leaders depicted as clowns and workers as lazy greedy trouble-makers. The targets for political anger are generally ambivalent, directed towards authority or establishments and continuing social injustice. Conscious of economic exploitation, the protagonists can only exert passive resistance by choosing not to have a job or not to work too hard. This evident lack of collective political response to alienation and exploitation in New Wave films constituted a recognition that collective potential had been harnessed by the false promises of affluence, which had improved material aspects of working-class life but robbed it of the possibility to forge a political economy and culture more definitively of its own. The protagonists’ anger and personal revolts assert their “working class consciousness” and present a challenge to the conformity of the Conservative 1950s,
but that's as far as they can go. As Hill commented, "The class war" might not be quite over in Macmillan's sense, but it certainly has become contained and constricted" (1986, p. 174). The prevalence of individualism caused the lack of group depiction of working-class characters in New Wave films.

Under the influence of the New Left, the New Wave films privileged the representation of the working class from cultural aspects, shifting the emphasis on work and production in the Documentary tradition to leisure and consumption. Alan Lovell notes how the concerns and representations of *The Uses of Literacy* can be seen in the films of the British New Wave. They share a "structure of feeling" defined as "a sympathetic interest in working class communities, [combined with] unease about the quality of leisure in urban society" (as cited in Lovell, 1990, p. 358). Hoggart's hostility to the new materialism, to affluence and to the homogenizing effect of the mass media was also widely shared by the mainly left-wing directors and script writers of the New Wave. As Hill points out, respect for the traditional working class and hostility to the corruptions of modern mass culture is "a tension... which is characteristic of the work of the 'new wave' as a whole" (Hill, 1986, p. 152). The New Wave films show that the post-war explosion of material and cultural goods, while representing social progress (affluence), leads to the erosion of traditional values and therefore arouses concern about the decline or demise of the traditional working class associated with work and community and anxiety about the growing "corruption" of the working class by consumerism. Yet the working class themselves are not to blame for the "corruption,” because they have their situation settled by
other forces. Doreen’s aspiration for a new housing estate in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* is reasonable for the time.

Women played a vital role in the post-war affluence not only because of their contribution to the rise in household income with their job earnings but also because of their patterns of consumption. But in New Wave films female characters are endowed with subordinate role and the representation of their relationship with “affluence” is less female labor than female consumption. Women are degraded to consumers. The female “consumer” imagery is simply portrayed as the target for the objection of the male anger. On the whole, the portrayal of women is negative and “dismissive.” The dominant ideology in British society of the time was still to see women belonging to domestic sphere. A variety of stratagems were designed to encourage women back home from work, especially in the fields of psychology and social welfare. Thus it was not surprising for the New Wave films to reveal misogynist tendency and a failure to acknowledge the changing social and economic role of women in British society other than as consumers. Placed in social and historical context, they could be seen to be “confirming, rather than querying and challenging, the dominant ideological assumptions about a ‘woman’s role’” (Hill, 1986, p. 174).

The New Wave films also reveal a general conservative mood, represented in the treatment of sex relationships, the subordinate position of women, and the conservative endings of stories. The conservative resolutions favored were “remarkably consistent with the ideological values and assumptions of the period.”
The male protagonists' settling down for marriage suggests their conformity to the social mainstream and signifies a kind of "closure" of their personal revolts of cultural resistance. Morally conservative solutions are chosen for female characters concerning the expression of their sexuality, e.g. Brenda's returning to her husband and avoiding the abortion.

The treatment of sex in New Wave films is featured with an honest exploration of sexual relationship, which was more permissive than past decades due to the changing time and the baby boom, and which was tolerated and guided by the BBFC. However, sexual "permissiveness" in the 1960s was only in relative sense and was far from rampant. Unwanted pregnancy was certainly a very real fear for many women in the early 1960s, and most of the cases resulted in marriage. This is all indicated in New Wave films despite all the lure of greater sexual explicitness.

The major directors of the New Wave films, as working class "scholarship boys" who climbed up, are "the university educated bourgeois making 'sympathetic' films about proletarian life but not analyzing the ambiguities of their own privileged position," according to Roy Armes (as cited in Hill, 1986, p. 133). They offered an "outsider's view" which tended to romanticize individual male working-class figures rather than presenting radical viewpoints. As a result, the significance of class relationships was obscured and sexual attitudes had a rigid conformity.

In conclusion, the New Wave films echoed the progressive trend of the British Cultural Studies to extend to the working class and achieved a breakthrough in the positive, dignified and more rounded representation of working-class identity. They
“assisted in ‘opening up’ the British cinema with their innovatory contents and more socially enquiring attitudes” (Hill, 1986, p. 174). However, Hill has a point here in suggesting that the films were, in the end, “something less than radical” as the ideas and politics which they inherited from the ‘Angry Young Man’ and the New Left were still “shaped and structured by the dominant discourses of ‘affluence’” (Hill, 1986, p. 174). For me, I see a reasonable balance in the representation between the power of the dominant ideology and the cultural rebellion/resistance of the Left.

Films of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s: Neo-liberalism and Working-class Identity

The post-war social democratic political consensus remained a cardinal principle of British public life until 1979, when it was abolished and ever since replaced by Thatcherite New Right political and economical ideologies. Mrs Thatcher has given the “swing to the right” “a powerful impetus and a distinctive personal stamp” (Hall, 1983, p. 19), remarkably reversing the whole postwar social democratic trend and rolling back the historic gains of the labor movement and other progressive forces, such as full employment, welfare state and the “caring” society. The opposition of the Labor and trade union movement were effectively disorganized. Labor was split and transformed; the labor movement was undermined through exploiting the unpopularity of the trade unions. Unemployment was deliberated created and made use of to compel workers to accept the harsh reality of low wage settlements or the dole queue. Mrs Thatcher massively transformed the country, shifting the balance of political forces “in favor of capital and the right” (Hall and Jacques, 1983, p. 13). Through ideologically moulding the return to possessive
individualism and free-market competitiveness “look like ‘common sense’” (Hall and Jacques, 1983, p. 14), Mrs Thatcher established and consolidated the hegemony of neo-liberalism. Blairism of the New Labor Party was not much different in the main direction, though some effort was made to balance a bit the weight of equality of opportunities. Tony Blair’s Cool Britannia is a vision of a middle-class nation built on “creative” entrepreneurialism.

**Neo-liberalism, authoritarian populism and Blairism.**

Neo-liberalism, or “neo-liberal” capitalism, has been clearly defined by Paul Dave. “Neo” signals “the return of ‘free’ market after the post war interlude of social democratic regulation.” “Liberal’ signals that any such regulative, welfarist tampering with the market is to be viewed as an infraction of the ‘liberty’ of capital.” (Dave, 2006, p. xiii) Neo-liberalism, in its ideology and practice, seeks to “replace society with the market” (Dave, 2006, p. 46).

The context for neo-liberal ideology is that capitalism has transformed into post-Fordist production, a stage which is called by Wood as the “commercialization model” of capitalism (as cited in Dave, 2006, p. xiv). In this model, the importance of production is eclipsed; emphasis is laid on commerce, trade and finance services. In the cyber-assisted world, wealth is now believed to be created by the market itself and by the flow of finance capital. So it seems that capitalism has successfully emancipated itself from the labor of the working class, whose value can be ignored.

Neo-liberalism has immense ideological impact. In this “post-historic, post-political reality of capitalism,” it is the capital, not labor, which is viewed as “the
exclusive origin of social wealth” (Dave, 2006, p. 161). So the location of social value is generally shifted away from labor, and decisively towards capital. The New Right managed to promote the ideology of “irresistible capitalism” and “politically finished proletariat” (Dave, 2006, p. 161). Labor is demanded to adapt to flexible employment and to engage with capital outside the regulative, welfarist activities of the state or trades union. Jobs are not only “not for life”, but also “not for the ‘working class’ at all” (Dave, 2006, p. 161). The widening inequalities between the beneficiaries and victims of neo-liberal capitalist modernization have been ideologically underscored in New Right political discourses as a division between “winners” and “losers,” with the latter viewed as the “undeserving poor.”

So the vast number of laborers nationwide is “to be consigned to the historical dustbin” through the long process of de-industrialization and the creation of a north/south divide. In 1989, Alan Sinfield observed that unemployment in Britain was not just a consequence of recession. Out of the unemployment rise between 1979 and 1983, “40 to 50 per cent has been variously estimated as due to government policies” (1989, p. 254). Tom Nairn suggested that Mrs Thatcher’s economic policy was “no more than an attempt to utilize the recession to hasten and complete the dominance of financial capital. The apotheosis of ‘Freedom’ is de-industrialization…” (as cited in Kirk, 2003, p. 78).

For Stuart Hall, “it is difficult to call an economic strategy which results in some four million unemployed and the shutting down of substantial sectors of the
economy, a ‘success’” (1983, p. 12). Yet Mrs Thatcher successfully consolidated social support or “consent” through authoritarian populism.

On national identity, inheriting a land caught in “British Disease” of slow development, high inflation and industrial disputes of the 1970s, Mrs Thatcher strived to cut across divides and conflicting interests and unite people through mobilizing populist patriotism and a sense of belonging around identity politics, with the focus on the nation and ideas of Englishness. The official interpellation of “We British” represents a cultural and political hegemony which “facilitates the articulation of a selective past for the construction of an acceptable present” (Kirk, 2003, p. 165). People are constructed in alliance with the new power bloc in a great national crusade to “make Britain ‘Great’ once more” (Hall, 1983, p. 30). The Falkland crisis was constructed ideologically into a war of populist patriotism.

Economically, Mrs Thatcher wisely and effectively translated hard-faced economic doctrine into the language of “experience, moral imperative and common sense,” substituting the “caring society” with an alternative ethic of individualism and competition” (Hall, 1983, p. 28). The national economy was debated on the model of the household budget—“You can’t pay yourself more than you earn!!”—and “being British” became once again identified with the restoration of competition and profitability (Hall, 1983, p. 29). The essence of the British people was identified with self-reliance and personal responsibility, as against the image of the over-taxed individual and welfare-dependent. This assault, not just on welfare overspending, but on the very principle and essence of collective social welfare—the centerpiece of
postwar consensus politics—was mounted through “the emotive image of the ‘scrounger’: the new folk-devil” (Hall, 1983, p. 29).

Politically, Thatcherism launched a fierce attack on “the State,” which was transformed into “the enemy.” It is “the State” which “has over.borrowed and overspent; fuelled inflation; ... above all, interfered, meddled, intervened, instructed, directed - against the essence, the Genius, of The British People.” It is time, as she says, with conviction, “to put people’s destinies again in their own hands.” (Hall, 1983, p. 34) In the polarization of “state” and “people,” Labor is made to equal the state, which is “the bureaucratic embodiment, the powerful organizing centre” (Hall, 1988, p. 23) whereas Mrs Thatcher, “grasping the torch of Freedom with one hand,” is seen to identify “with the people” (Hall, 1983, p. 34).

In ideologically identifying with “the people,” Mrs Thatcher once told the readers of Woman’s Own: “Don’t talk to me about ‘them’ and ‘us’ in a company... You’re all ‘we’ in a company. You survive as the company survives, prosper as the company prospers—everyone together. The future lies in cooperation and not confrontation.” (Hall, 1983, p. 31) Thus the traditional binary opposition of “them” and “us” was easily replaced with the high-sounding “we—the people” in a particular relation to capital: dominated by its imperatives (profitability, accumulation); yet identified with it. This ideology is what lay behind the “share-owning democracy” Mrs Thatcher practiced.

Socially, Mrs Thatcher was hostile to collectivism of all sorts. In a September 1987 interview with Women’s Own magazine, she lambasted people for looking to
“government” or, worse, “society” for solutions to their personal problems and delivered her most notorious statement of her conception of society: “[W]ho is society?...There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first.” (as cited in Mandler, 2006, p. 232)

Mrs Thatcher’s way of dealing with the miners’ strike of 1984-5 can be seen as a typical example of how she maneuvered neo-liberalism and authoritarian populism to full extent in the “national” interest of the capital. The 1974 miners’ strike has been accused of “holding the nation up to ransom” by the then Heath government. So this time, to arouse stronger national antagonism, the Thatcher government charged that the government and indeed the whole society is now “run by the trade unions.” (Hall, 1988, p. 26) Ideologically, the striking miners were designated and condemned as the “enemies within” (Mandler, 2006, p. 232) and those who did not withdraw their labor were thus, in Thatcher’s words, “working for Britain”—a mode of identification with the state (Kirk, 2003, p. 167). To fully defeat the miners, after 1984, subsidies had been provided to other energy sources, such as gas and nuclear power, so that they could compete with coal, which is ironic for neo-liberal free market principle. As Seumas Milne points out, at the time of the large scale pit closures of 1992, there was a “sea-change in popular attitudes” towards the strike of 1984 (as cited in Dave, 2006, p. 64). A ruling-class conspiracy was sensed. The Tories’ economic arguments against the miners (the National Union of Mineworkers) were easier to be seen in 1992 as part of an ideological offensive of a ruthless class war.
In The hard road to renewal: Thatcherism and the crisis of the Left, Hall holds that traditional class alliances had become unstable and contradictory. The old political identities were collapsing; there was no such thing as a unified working class to be rescued. For him, Labor was very much split: “Socialist Man, with one mind, one set of interests, one project, is dead” (Hall, 1988, p. 169). And Labor was too weak to face the challenge to the left which Thatcherism and the New Right posed directly. The Labor Party, the labor movement and the left had “no national paper...[n]o powerful journal of opinion, no political education, no organic intellectual base from which to engage popular consciousness...” (Hall, 1988, pp. 73-74). Hall insisted that the renewal of the Left could not simply be thinking and acting in the same way “only more so, harder, and with more ‘conviction’” (Hall, 1988, p. 11), but that it had to begin by learning from the lessons of Thatcherism.

In late 1980s, a decade before Tony Blair became British Prime Minister, Hall and Jacques wrote of the danger “that the Left will produce, in government, a brand of New Times which in practice does not amount to much more than a slightly cleaned-up, humanized version of that of the radical Right” (1989, p. 16). This is not for the first time that Hall’s prediction about contemporary British politics appeared prophetic and turned out to be true later. New Labor under Tony Blair appeared to have learned Thatcher’s lessons only too well. It won a landslide victory in the 1997 election, building support through presenting itself as a “modernizing” catch-all party. Yet it is largely agreed that the success was more based on ideological wordings than substantial economic policy changes. The re-branded, re-packaged Labor Party
displayed its capacity of quickly imitating Mrs Thatcher and entering into the ideological struggle over image and imagery.

The attempt, for Hall, has been less to re-articulate the new times for the Left, than to re-occupy the old terrain of the Right. In his 1998 essay “The great moving nowhere show” (Hall wrote “The great moving Right show” in 1979), Hall argued that at global and domestic levels, the neo-liberal “turn” which Thatcherism made had not been radically modified, not to mention reversed. It seemed that the economics of neo-liberalism had become unquestionable and unchallengeable; there was not much room left for Blair. The pressure for the left to modernize was so enormous that old thoughts like class and left politics were dismissed as redundant. The pessimism was shared by many more academics. Chantal Mouffe described Tony Blair as Thatcher’s final victory and Isaac Julien saw New Labor’s reign as “really just business as usual” (Julien, 2001, p. 181). Julien felt that the neo-liberal shift is unstoppable and more class divisions and problems will be created.

The ideology of Blairism was centered on the imagery of “Cool Britannia”--a vision of a middle-class nation built on “creative” entrepreneurialism. The rebranding of Britain proposed by think-tank Demos involved the ridding of Britain’s international image as “a backward-looking island immersed in its heritage...bogged down by tradition, riven by class and threatened by industrial disputes” and promoting a new Britain as a highly creative and diverse country, innovative, dynamic, forward-looking and optimistic (as cited in Monk, 2000b, p. 283). The “modernized” new British national identity Blair wanted to build, as analyzed by Driver and Martell,
mainly emphasized three aspects, namely, “patriots and populists in the ‘giving age,’” “creative Britain” and “the young country” (2002, pp. 145-148). By “patriots and populists in the ‘giving age,’” Blair positioned the Labor Party as the “patriotic party” with a strong sense of history and tradition, as a “People’s party” (with the “people’s budget”) serving public good and aimed to inspire a sense of community by appealing to national pride underpinned by the collective values and institutions such as social justice and National Health Service. By “creative Britain,” Blair meant to tap the potential of the British nation as an inherently creative people for the historical inventions initiated in Britain. Lastly, “the young country” indicated the characteristics of being creative, inventive, dynamic and forward-looking which Blair wanted the country to be associated with in globalization age. So New Britain was marked by the Blairite repression of class.

The ideologies of Conservative Thatcherite neo-liberalism and New Labor Blairism have had much impact on the representation of class across a range of different types of film, from art cinema of Loach and Leigh to the more commercial mainstream films of the 1990s.

**Anti-Thatcherism of independent filmmakers: Leigh, Loach and Frears.**

Thatcherism, despite its powerful ideological intepellation, did not command popular ideological appeal among leftwing intellectuals and large section of the working class, failing to win over their “hearts and minds” (Hill, 1999, p.29). Although Thatcher did not create a favorable climate for the film industry (abolishing the quota system and the Eady Levy, and privatizing the National Film Finance
Corporation), her policies did help create the subject for British directors. The intense and unwavering hatred for Margaret Thatcher ignited the creativity of Britain’s filmmakers to new heights, offering “a viable alternative to officially sanctioned versions of the truth” (Friedman, 1993, p. xix). More social realist films which are anti-Thatcherism or with anti-Thatcher sentiments were produced.

In the words of Peter Wollen, “independent filmmakers of the eighties reacted strongly against the effects of Thatcherism. They responded to the imposition of market criteria in every sector of society, to political authoritarianism, to the ‘two nations’ project of Thatcherism, and to the leading role of the City” (1993, p. 35). Stephen Frears chose the feature film to attack Thatcherism, claiming that his film *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* was “an attempt to bring Margaret Thatcher down” (Dixon, 1994, p. 233). Hence, Lester Friedman argues that what united the British directors during the 1980s was “their revulsion, to one degree or other, for the ideology of Thatcherism” (1993, p. xix). Leonard Quart sees that the “film renaissance” of this period was “one of the more positive by-products of the Thatcher ethos, though in an almost totally oppositional and critical manner” (1993, p. 17). The films made in response to enormous social changes under Thatcherism are, “if not completely socially committed, at least socially aware” (Lay, 2002, p. 82).

One of the most effective anti-Thatcherism products is Mike Leigh’s *High Hopes*, in which class difference is a central theme. Leigh’s interest in class is solid. As he explains himself: “This is a deeply class-ridden society like nowhere else, and everything resonates around that. Since I make films which are about England,
because I'm specifically concerned with creating a real world, implicitly and inevitably, problems of class are part of the texture.” (as cited in Watson, 2004, p. 185)

His concern about class leads to the comment of his works by Dennis Potter as “often in the minefields of English class consciousness” (as cited in Watson, 2004, p. 12).

*High Hopes* provides serious attack on Thatcherite greed, possessiveness and selfishness represented by the “new rich” couple and the upper-middle-class couple. At the same time, it glorifies the working-class consciousness for equality and fairness and working class human kindness and sincerity typically represented by Shirley and Cyril. The focus of the film is on the ordinary, the everyday, the family, the relationship, the lifestyle. Hill points out that no equal attention is paid to work or the community surrounding the work. In so doing, the film then offers “less an attack on the economic hardship suffered by the losers” in Thatcher’s Britain than “a critique of the cultural ‘barbarianism’ associated with its economic beneficiaries” (1999, p. 193). Leigh is concerned about conflict and tension of different classes, not just of working class figures. The working class he picks up in his films are not the traditional enterprise workers of collective labor, but mostly the isolated labor of service industry. So we sense from his films an end to the working class as a collective force in the 1980s. Besides, in *High Hopes*, working-class consumption of the 1960s is also gone, replaced by the middle-class consumption.

Ken Loach made directly political documentaries in the 1980s. For him, the experiences were frustrating and restrictive. His documentary *Which Side Are You On?* about the miners’ strike in 1984-5 was censored and rejected by London Weekend
Television's South Bank Show (though later shown on Channel 4). In order to get his message across to more people, he slightly modified his style in the 1990s. Since the de-politicization left no hope for successful collective political struggle or radical political change, even Loach turned to depend on individual experience, and began to avoid political consciousness or seeking for any political solution in his films. Active individual fighting back in the films only led to worse-off dilemma; and personal "escape" was impossible.

Pessimism is the dominant mood for Loach's films in all the decades. His political pessimism extends to the prospects for any social democratic, cross-class solidarity in the face of neo-liberalism's impact on the most vulnerable sections of the working class. *Ladybird, Ladybird* and *My Name is Joe* both demonstrate how working-class dilemmas tend not to be amenable to the solutions offered by middle-class, professional intermediaries associated with the welfare state. However, the determinist pessimism of a film like *My Name is Joe* needs to be seen as a response to the moralizing prejudices and class antagonisms fostered by the illusions of unconstrained individual choice that have flourished under neo-liberal political regimes--illusions which support the ideology behind that paragon of poor choices, the "underclass."

In the new millennium, Loach's films continue to draw attention to the losers in society. *Sweet Sixteen* is a warning to anyone who thinks that kids who drop out of school and grow up to be drug addicts and drug dealers have only themselves to blame. What's particularly disturbing and sad is that Liam and Pinball, two teenagers,
instead of being protected, are actually made use of and even ruined by the adults close to them. Drug selling becomes the reachable business for decent life.

For Peter Mathews, “A certain lack of novelty is the price Loach pays for his conviction that human misery is systemic. The basic rules of capitalism haven’t changed, and he keeps plugging away at that unfashionable truth for the few who care to listen.” (2002, p. 56) His films all address the limited choices facing those at the bottom of the society.

Race began to draw serious concern in the 1980s. Several films were to subvert and extend prevailing definitions of the working class with acute and complex portrayals of race, ethnicity and national identity, e.g. My Beautiful Laundrette, Queen and Country. What’s so unique about Frears’ My Beautiful Laundrette is that class is seen as a more determining factor than race in a film about the colored. In a culture hegemonized by neo-liberal capitalism, enterprise culture is identified. For example, My Beautiful Laundrette is critical of Thatcherism, materialism and the selfishness which they generate, but the enterprise culture is taken as providing opportunities and furnishing the Asian immigrants with status. Those who embrace the enterprise culture have learnt, as Nasser puts it, how to “squeeze the tits of the system” and they embrace it to win wealth as “revenge.” Enterprise culture is also shown in Riff-Raff; the hero is divided between self-interest and the collective struggle for survival. He dreams to become a successful businessman by selling boxer shorts and set up his own market stall, but is no nearer his goal at the end of the film than at the beginning.
Paul Dave suggests that *My Beautiful Laundrette* “proposes a liberal-libertarian ‘politics of irony’ that has a relationship of flat rejection towards traditional forms of left politics grounded in class” (Dave, 2006, p. 97). The film is critical of the social inequity and brutalization of life in Thatcher’s England, but it does not intellectually explore “an alternative political vision” and that absence of political certainty “is in itself an eloquent statement of where the Left stands in the late eighties and early nineties” (Dixon, 1994, p. 248).

**Entertaining working-class images: the “feel-good” comedies.**

**Postmodern commodification of the “underclass.”**

In the 1990s, although working class had been marginalized in British politics and social life, in film it seemed to become an icon or marker of Britishness for export to the international market. Films like *The Full Monty* or *Trainspotting* were widely consumed in both the UK and the USA.

The tendency was promoted on two grounds. One is the self-adaptation of the British film industry. Faced with deepening Hollywoodization of British cinema and more intense cultural globalization, the British film industry since the 1980s had adopted art cinema strategy to promote national cinema by avoiding direct competition with Hollywood. The strategy aims “to differentiate itself textually from Hollywood, to assert explicitly or implicitly an indigenous product, and to reach domestic and export markets through those specialist distribution channels and exhibition venues usually called art house” (Crofts, as cited in Hill, 2009, p. 15). With the unique British class culture, the working class was taken as “recognizably British”
codes or icons that could be highly marketable to ensure cinematic success. So British working class transformed into profitable “exportable” images to be consumed.

The other is New Labor’s rebranding of Britain into an imagery of Cool Britannia of a competitive and innovative enterprise economy in the late 1990s. Monk sees the close association of the commodification of underclass films with the inherently market-driven “modernizing” project adopted by Tony Blair’s New Labor Government. This is reflected in the paradox that the focus on underclass “on the whole supports this projection of an optimistic, ‘modernized’ Britain rather than undermining it” (Monk, 2000b, p. 283).

The films were marketed on a highly stylized and stereotypical set of class images, with the focus on the traditional industrial regions (esp. northern England) and traditional jobs (e.g. iron and steel, coal mining), reinforcing the notion of what is national can become international. The films celebrated locality, yet at the same time commodified the cultural identities of the working class, re-packaging their experiences for sale in the global marketplace and “post-modernizing” the cultural landscapes of such cities as Sheffield, Liverpool and Glasgow.

*Neo-liberal self-help and enterprise culture.*

Within the “millennial” ideologies of neo-liberal capitalism, *opportunities* demand strenuous efforts of self-reinvention. Success seems to depend on “a relationship in which there is nothing the worker will not do or be asked to do, and in which there is nothing that the magical world of neo-liberal capitalism will deny such compliant workers” (Dave, 2006, p. 71). While in the deindustrializing elegies like
_Brassed Off_, unemployment is still seen as a sign of political crisis, representing a break in the lives of traditional industries and communities, in _The Full Monty_ unemployment is viewed more as an accepted challenge to labor and as a structural part of new, post-industrial labor markets. It is the unemployed individuals who should try every means to meet the challenge. _The Full Monty_ explores unemployed workers putting on a show of striptease which is “a pitiless test of the willingness to do whatever it takes, in the name of self-help” to seek magical fortunes (Dave, 2006, p. 71). So in the film we see Gaz calculating the monetary rewards of stripping in terms of a miraculous multiplication sum.

In neo-liberalist ideology, unemployment is changed from a vicious structural problem of capitalist system into simply a problem of training. A Department of Employment advertisement from the late 1980s went like this: “Let’s train the workers without jobs, to do the jobs without workers” (Dave, 2006, p. 62). So the unemployed needed to learn and adapt themselves to jobs without workers--those new kinds of jobs, which are in reality the “Mcjob”—casualized and “flexible” working practices of low pay, low prestige and most exploitation, e.g. the security guard job, the packing job in _The Full Monty_ and the kind of jobs featured in _Late Night Shopping_. Such ethos shifts the responsibility as well as the blame away from the government and management onto the jobless underclass themselves. Yet, in denouncing the security guard job, Gaz is actually trying to keep his dignity as an experienced skilled steelworker.
The job center in the past was now changed into the mandatory "job club" in *The Full Monty* for the unemployed *The Full Monty* (in *Brassed Off*, it is "Rescue Room"). Like the change of "Unemployment Benefit" into "the Job-seeker's Allowance," such clubs are reoriented according to neo-liberal principles to "place greater emphasis on self-help and responsibility as opposed to entitlement" (Dave, 2006, p. 72). The club is for training and exchange of information, but the workers play cards in it as a kind of resistance. Gerald, Gaz's former supervisor, forms a contrast in attitude toward looking for new job. His seriousness toward filling forms, attend interviews all comply with the mainstream desire of self-help in enterprise culture.

*The Full Monty* projects creative entrepreneurial values. As Monk comments, "if these guys (skinny, fat, middle-aged, unsexy) can succeed as male strippers, it surely follows that Britons (or anyone) can make a success of any enterprise" (Monk, 2000b, p. 284). Hence, leaving the underclass is "simply a matter of exercising free choice" (Monk, 2000b, p. 285).

*New-Labor optimism.*

The historical context for the feel-good comedies is the collapse of heavy industries during the Conservative Thatcher and Major administrations. Yet the films actively work to "heal the wounds" through "a Blairite vision in which 'Things Can Only Get Better'" (Lay, 2002, p. 122), offering utopian solutions to the dilemma of protagonists. Tragi-comic scenes dominate the film as the pain of divorce, unemployment and attempted suicides are explored through humor. Eventually the
redundant workers meet the challenge and endure, though through becoming performers. The highlighting on working-class endurance, imagination and survival is also the way Hollywood has best dealt with the world of labor. So the New Labor optimism goes hand in hand with the American dream.

*Imagined community.*

The realist comedies display the imagery of northern working-class community, which "regain their pride through a healthy burst of team spirit" (Beachment, as cited in Mather, 2006, p. 5) This collectivity/community is so out of step with the historical context that it attracted wide critique. Paul Dave sees it as representing an imagined community of inter-class and cross-class solidarity (2006, p. 11). Julia Hallam sees it as representing a "hankering for the spirit of Ealing ghosts," that is to say for "an idealized image of a nation united by adversity" (2000, p. 267). Hill detects in it "a certain yearning for 'national wholeness' in the face of economic and social divisions and the rise of self-interested individualism that characterized the Tory years" (2000a, p. 184). In the films, middle class or upward mobile characters such as Gerald, Gaz's ex-wife Mandy in *The Full Monty* and Gloria *Brassed Off* are all willingly incorporated into the working-class community. From such, the films can be read as "calling on the assistance of superficial, multicultural images of collectivity in order, like New Labor, to banish an older world of class and class conflict, and move into a stylish, modernized future" (Dave, 2006, p. 61).

*Working-class poverty and capitalist exploitation.*
As illustrated above, working-class comedies manifest much dominant neo-liberal ideologies that had been prevalent for over a decade. But on the other hand, they also successfully exposed the poverty and tragedy of working-class families. Unlike the New Wave films, there is now little sense of the corrupting effects of affluence or embourgeoisement. What is foregrounded is the damage wrought by de-industrialization, mass unemployment and poverty typical of the Thatcher years. Phil's poverty, breakdown and attempted suicide, Gaz's inability to find money for joint custody of his son and the stealing of girder iron, the "funereal" facial expression and pace of the miners after the vote for redundancy, Danny's collapse and subsequent illness, all display to us a elegy of the post-industrial "New Times." Loan-sharks behaving cruelly is a common scene both in comedy films as well Loach's films.

Despite the feel-good mood, the comedies present masculinity in crisis of the 1990s workers. The continued success of consumerism in the absence of any real work produces male trauma concerned with the sense of loss of bread-winning power, sexual attractiveness and a social space. Pictured as "Nostalgically patriarchal, impotent and domestically confined" (Dave, 2006, p. 61), we see a working class struggling to cope with economic dilemmas and reserve their last bit of dignity and respect.

Capitalist exploitation and cruelty was severely attacked. Brassed Off reveals to us indirectly what happened to the coal industry after the 1984 miner's strike through the characterization of the pit manager McKenzie. The neo-liberal market and Mr
McKenzie are seen as pitiless toward working class sufferings. Danny's "coughing coal" breaks the audience's heart. Mather notes that Danny's sentiments and denouncement echo the observations of Raymond Williams in a *New Socialist* article written during the miners strike of 1984-85 in which he rebukes "the logic of a new nomad capitalism, which exploits actual places and people and then ... moves on" (as cited in Mather, 2006, p. 41). *Brassed Off*, in attempting to balance the relationship between the political and the cultural, ultimately proves that culture has no value and cannot function without the support of the economic base. However, in displaying the liveliness and longevity of brass band (existing even after the closure of workplace), working-class traditional culture is given due value and appreciation.

**The powerful effect of comic satire.**

Monk argues that the commodification of the underclass in such comedies is "symptomatic of the abandonment of the project of a socially committed British cinema" (Monk, 2000b, p. 277). Lay also comments that "class politics as a major preoccupation of British social realist texts have been abandoned in favor of autobiography and nostalgia" (Lay, 2002, pp. 122-123). While they all have a point here, I would argue that the effect of comic satire can be as powerful taking into consideration of the large number of audience they reach. So in this post-working class age, so long as humor goes hand in hand with satire, all should be welcome.

**For Williams' “Equality of Being:” The Need of Cultural Policy Support**

Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society* argues, "The only equality that is important, or indeed conceivable, is equality of being" (1958, p. 317). A common
culture is not an equal culture, yet equality of being is essentially necessary to it. In acknowledging human individuality and variation, inequality in the various aspects of man is seen to be inevitable, yet inequality which "denies the essential quality of being" is "evil" and intolerable as it "rejects, depersonalizes, degrades in grading, other human beings" (1958, p. 317). "The struggle for democracy is a struggle for the recognition of equality of being, or it is nothing" (1958, p. 337).

British cultural studies academics see the present suffering from social deprivation of British working class more from the cultural perspective of "dignity" and "respect." Throughout the two world wars and the immediate postwar decades, the lower classes were widely revered for their courage in battle and their stoicism in peace. Values such as "solidarity, thrift, cleanliness and self-discipline" were regularly identified as characteristic of them. But this is no longer the case in the present post-industrial and post-modern stage. Mount argues that, for the ultimate deprivation that the English working class has suffered—in fact the consequence of all the other deprivations—is "the deprivation of respect" (Mount, 2004, p. 108). Annette Kuhn sharply points out, "Class is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your psyche, at the very core of your being. In the all-encompassing English class system, if you know that you are in the 'wrong' class, you know that therefore you are a valueless person." (as cited in Lawler, 2000, p.117)

The New Right has relentlessly politicized poverty, with their ideology of the "undeserving" and "unrespectable" poor working class. Michael Young, in his satirical book *The Rise of the Meritocracy*, which is a history of English education
between 1870 and 2003, challenged the decency of meritocracy ethos. "Today the eminent know that success is just reward for their own capacity, for their own efforts, and for their own undeniable achievement. They deserve to belong to a superior class." Their social inferiors are also inferior in the two vital qualities, "of intelligence and education." (as cited in Mount, 2004, p. 59) So the lower classes have an inferior status not as in the past because they were denied opportunity. Both Young and Mount uttered their suspicion and denunciation that the emphasis on meritocracy is intended to throw the responsibility and blame on the poor themselves.

The working class of late capitalism is experiencing a pressing existential crisis. They no longer have the power to make effective revolt. In a culture hegemonized by neo-liberal capitalism, despite all its benefits, working class face its cold indifference which is hard to cope with, both in theory and practice. This cruel dilemma must be seen and understood through whatever sources of media communication. "Class is not a thing but a relation and one that puts a heavy burden on representation" (Hitchcock, 2000, p. 23). Stuart Hall has categorized theories of representation as "reflective, intentional, or constructionist" (Hitchcock, 2000, p. 22). Edward Said from a different aspect has argued, "the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging" represents a crucial mode of cultural hegemony (as cited in Kirk, 2003, p. 187). From such, the significance of representation can be easily understood. For the working class subjectivity, they "must be seen in order to confirm that class is there and negotiable in stable and unthreatening ways. The 'must be seen' of working-class subjectivity is intimately connected to modes of representation and
power.” (Hitchcock, 2000, p. 21) Here, I am strongly for Tony Bennett’s stand in “Putting Policy into Culture Studies”\(^{18}\) and would argue for state cultural policy support for the screen representation of working-class identity, as this will bring concern about the dignity of working class. This is logical and feasible in the sense that cinema not simply reinforces dominant ideology, but also reflects the humanistic structure of feelings of (left-wing) filmmakers.

In British film industry, the debate about film as business or film as culture is never-ending. The common agreement in the 1990s film culture seemed to be that film is both business and culture, though the weight lay much more with the former. Caught between the European cultural mode of film production and the Hollywood business mode, the necessity for a national cinema which can represent the different components of the national whole has been confirmed by the government agencies as well as filmmakers. The conviction that films should also be a moral force with a social purpose, rather than being merely entertainment, is shared to varying degrees by almost all the filmmakers. “The realist tradition from the 1930s to the 1990s has always been promoted in terms of cultural value, pitting the authentic, indigenous culture of ‘ordinary people’ against the Americanized culture of glamour, spectacle, commercialism and mere entertainment.” (Ashby & Higson, 2000, p. 9). So, cultural policy support has an essential role to play here. But having said that, we need to also acknowledge that commercialization is a powerful trend of the postmodern age. So the incorporation of diversified styles of representation is reasonable in order to win

\(^{18}\) Among his arguments, Bennett calls for “intellectual work calculated to make more strategic interventions within the operating procedures and policy agendas of specific cultural institutions” (1992, p. 32).
audience, so long as it shows concern about the disadvantaged "one-third" of the population.

To conclude, this chapter argues that continuity and change in major themes of working-class identity in post-war social realist films from the New Wave to the present have reflected and reinforced dominant ideological position; but at the same time conveyed more left-wing progressive views. Identity is an important matter as individuals and groups want to be seen and considered as possessing cultural significance and dignity. The neo-liberalism of the New Right is making capitalism irresistible and the proletariat politically finished and culturally dwarfed. So, cultural policy support for socially purposive British national cinema is crucial here to keep social realism as a democratization of representation of national cultural life as well as a sustained concern for working-class dignity.
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Class matters not only in sociological sense, but also in cultural sense. In Britain, there has been a rich tradition of social realist film-making from the documentary movement in the 1930s to the present, playing a crucial role in the construction of working-class identity.

The Grierson Documentary Movement contributed tremendously to the humanist and social democratic representation of working class, presenting the dignity and heroism of labor. This resulted from a social democratic consensus in the 1930s based around “the middle way” between unrestrained capitalism and a nationalizing socialism (Addison, 1994, p. 35). Then in the 1950s, the call for “social extension” by the New Left helped to consolidate social realism as a way of artistic expression. Because of this “social extension,” social realist film has become a proud tradition and a special national color for British cinema, almost a brand.

British New Wave cinema was born out of the social and cultural changes of the late 1950s that embraced the rise of working-class affluence, the emergence of a distinctive youth culture, the passionate anger of the Angry Young Man, and the revival of the intellectual left. The films portrayed the social rise of new working class
in the changing conditions of affluence and consumption. *Room at the Top* (Jack Clayton, 1959) and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz, 1960) display the ample masculine confidence, youthful sexuality and rebelliousness as well as the sense of frustration and alienation of their protagonists in the time of change.

The New Wave films so accurately and powerfully caught the mood of time that their dominating status was widely acknowledged. An article by a film critic wrote that “A British film nowadays, if it is to be taken seriously, must set its scene among the more or less rebellious young people of the industrial North or Midlands; it must be tough, realistic, iconoclastic (possibly nihilistic, too) and thoroughly working class” (*The Manchester Guardian*, 25 September, 1962; as cited in Walker, 1974, p. 68).

Brown notes that this history includes an iconography: “Think British realism, and you think inevitably of kitchen sinks, tall chimneys, cobblestones, railway arches, bleak stretches of moor or beach, graffiti-lined council estates, people and landscapes placed in spare and striking juxtaposition. You also tend to think black-and-white: the perfect color scheme for gloomy skies, smokestacks and poetic melancholy.” (2009, p. 29) This fits more with the New Wave films. In later decades, styles have been much diversified.

Representing the rising postwar new working class, the New Wave protagonists are confident about the social change for betterment and proud of or dignified about their class background despite the frustrations they experience. Joe in *Room at the Top* claims “I am working class...and proud of it!” Jimmy Porter in *Look Back in
Anger is a university graduate but chooses to run a market stall to show solidarity with the working class.

But such confidence or pride has disappeared in the working-class films since the 1980s. Films since the 1980s have focused on the exploration of the damage brought by de-industrialization, mass unemployment and poverty, showing life as a difficult struggle in a society dominated by social injustice and greed and projecting pessimistic images of masculinity in crisis. In the 1990s, substantial attention has been given to the “underclass” rather than the industrial workers with decent jobs. More focus was on masculinity crisis, projecting victim images of masculine anxiety, alienation and social impotence. The serious social criticism films represented by High Hopes (Mike Leigh, 1988), My Beautiful Laundrette (Stephen Frears, 1985), and Sweet Sixteen (Ken Loach, 2002) by independent directors are bleaker and angrier films, whereas the commercial comedies of the 1990s represented by The Full Monty (Peter Cattaneo, 1997) and Brassed Off (Mark Herman, 1996) transform gritty underclass material through humor and utopianism into an appealing, profitable and exportable commodity.

The works unanimously articulated a “sense of loss” (Kirk, 2003, p. 78). Compared with the sense of loss of politics in the New Wave films, this time it’s the loss of job or income, political power, union support, and the associated loss of family, traditional community, traditional male role, and etc. All these factors have been essential for the construction of working-class identity. So the loss of so many factors all together has contributed to the loss of old form of working-class identity. The
films are seen, to varying degrees, “elegies for an older, industrial, northern working class” (Dave, 2006, p. xiii).

In short, from statements, such as, “I’m working class and proud of it” in *Room at the Top* (1959) to “We’re obsolete. Dinosaurs. Yesterday’s news.” in *The Full Monty* (1997), the working class experienced heartbreaking transformation from an identity of masculine energy, pride and dignity to “underclass” collective shame and loss of respect.

The way of defining working-class identity after the Second World War has been continuously dominated by consumption rather than production, by the private and personal rather than the public and political, and has become more inseparable with other identities such as gender, race and sexuality since the 1980s. The concern about working class traditions has survived all decades, with the 1990s commercial comedies picking up working class collectivity and solidarity to a utopian new height. The attack on consumerism remains and is as usual linked with women. The way to escape is individualistic through education or highly utopian through special talents. Yet there has been a tendency to marginalize, or under-estimate, the experience of women and black and Asian workers, ignoring the multicultural nature of British society and the rising importance of female workers. The elevating skilled working class, associated with the rise of Thatcherism, is also neglected.

The shift reflects changes in fundamental attitudes in British post-war society from welfare egalitarianism to the neo-liberal enterprise culture. The cinematic representation has reflected and reinforced dominant ideological position, but at the
same time conveyed more left-wing progressive views of filmmakers.

Among the New Wave films there is also a prominent structure of feeling to articulate the sense of loss of politics, the loss of radical intent on the part of the working class which is in fact a response to the affluence and political consensus of that time, as well as a structure of feeling which privileges and appreciates traditional working class culture, which was threatened by the emerging mass culture in the post-war society. Also apparently, a structure of feeling to reveal a "sense of losses" among the films of the 1980s and 1990s was driven by the enormous social changes under Thatcherism.

Social realism films can be taken as contributing to the contestation about the existence of working class. The structural inequality and exploitation still affect the life-chances and the lifestyles of the working class people, as we can see in the films. Thinking over the long history of British social realism, its greatest achievement should be, in Hill's words, "provid[ing]--despite the persistence of politicians in arguing for the classlessness of British society--a reminder of the continuing economic divisions within Britain as well as giving voice to the desire for a different kind of society in which community and social attachment are accorded greater importance" (2000a, p. 186).

In the 21st century, the working class is definitely faced with more severe challenges. It has declined drastically as a cultural and political force. The "classless" ideology keeps its dominance. With the shrinking in number and the diversification in structure, it is now even more difficult to define the working class, which has been
termed as the "post-working class." The growing complex of jobs and labor contracts combine with gender and ethnic difference to produce a mosaic that is not easily represented in simple images. Taking all this into consideration, it should be of growing difficulty to keep a distinguished cycle of working class films in the future. Creative adjustment from filmmakers is crucial to find new perspectives if he or she wants to make working class films. Mike Leigh is focusing on family and personal adaptation; Ken Loach is also stressing more personal life in families and his films are funnier. The social realist comedies are commercializing working-class experiences. In fact, the potential for working class films to be successful is a common sense among many directors. As Lee Hall, the screenwriter of the successful *Billy Elliot,* once said, "I always knew that if you can write something about working class people with some integrity, and can represent their lives...there's a real chance of it being successful" (Hall, 2000, para. 2). I hold that so long as social realist films continue to care about the laboring public, the "one-third" in New Times, it is functioning its role. In short, working class films will keep its place in British cinema, and continue to be successful when certain film-makers make it right. With the changing political economy, it seems clear that the commercialization of British working class images (favoring comedy) and the focus on the private and the personal will continue into the future.

In short, from masculinity to crisis of masculinity, the public to the personal, alienation from community to collective action, and realistic presentation to more aesthetic one, the British cinema never fails to show a concern for the life of
working-class in the changing society. In the face of more severe challenges in the new century, this dissertation calls for cultural policy support for socially purposive British national cinema to keep social realism as a democratization of representation of national cultural life as well as a sustained concern for working-class dignity.
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My Beautiful Laundrette (Stephen Frears, 1985)

High Hopes (Mike Leigh, 1988)

Brassed Off (Mark Herman, 1996)

The Full Monty (Peter Cattaneo, 1997)

Sweet Sixteen (Ken Loach, 2002)
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