

**REMEDIATING THE EIGHTIES:  
NOSTALGIA AND RETRO IN BRITISH  
SCREEN FICTION  
FROM 2005 TO 2011**

Thesis submitted by

**Caitlin Shaw**

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## ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis studies a cycle of British film and television fictions produced in the years 2005-2011 and set retrospectively in the 1980s. In its identification and in-depth textual and contextual analysis of what it terms the 'Eighties Cycle', it offers a significant contribution to British film and television scholarship. It examines eighties-set productions as members of a sub-genre of British recent-past period dramas begging unique consideration outside of comparisons to British 'heritage' dramas, to contemporary social dramas or to actual history. It shows that incentives for depicting the eighties are wide-ranging; consequently, it situates productions within their cultural and industrial contexts, exploring how these dictate which eighties codes are cited and how they are textually used.

The Introduction delineates the Eighties Cycle, establishes the project's academic and historical basis and outlines its approach. Chapter 1 situates the work within the academic fields that inform it, briefly surveying histories and socio-cultural studies before examining and assessing existing scholarship on Eighties Cycle productions alongside critical literature on 1980s, 90s and contemporary British film and television; nostalgia and retro; modern media, history and memory; British and American period screen fiction; and transmedia storytelling. Chapter 2 considers how a selection of productions employing 'the eighties' as a visual and audio style invoke and assign meaning to commonly recognised aesthetic codes according to their targeted audiences and/or intended messages. Chapter 3 investigates semi-autobiographical dramas that bear the mark of remembering, from the vantage point of the present, a time of fast expansions and shifts in the global media landscape. Chapter 4 explores how historical fictions locate historical knowledge in the decade's refraction through modern media and reconstruct, deconstruct or ironise these mediations to meet particular cultural or industrial demands. Chapter 5 identifies two spin-offs that exploit shifts toward transmedia production and distribution by using eighties iconography as the set pieces for an immersive fantasy world, considering how and why their source texts are adapted and what this implies for past representation. Finally, the Conclusion reviews the project's findings and briefly considers possible factors for the cycle's deceleration and transformation after 2011.

Ultimately, this project sees the Eighties Cycle as a by-product of shifts in Britain toward advanced globalisation and new mediation that have facilitated access to domestic and international mediated recent pasts. These productions operate within a distinct recent-past period screen fiction mode, engaging audiences equipped with comprehensive notions of the eighties as circulated in media. Meaning is produced in how these notions are structured; sometimes they are lauded, sometimes parodied, sometimes criticised or ironised, and sometimes they are simply cited for the sheer pleasure of recall.

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Parts of Chapter 4 have been previously published as ‘Known Pleasures: Joy Division in *24 Hour Party People* and *Control*’, in *Cinema, Television and History: New Approaches*. Eds. Laura Mee and Johnny Walker. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: CSP, 2014. 164-81. It is reproduced in its entirety and in its original format in the Appendix.

**Note on Referencing:** This thesis has been referenced using the Modern Language Association (MLA) format. The publication included in the Appendix has been referenced using an alternate format in accordance with the publisher’s guidelines.

## INTRODUCTION

It's easy to laugh at the 1980s. Many people base their memories on the stuff they see in those *I Love the '80s* TV shows: massive VHS recorders, Atari consoles and rubbish digital watches [...]. Then there was the way that people dressed: your mum with a deranged perm, your dad in a pair of grey leather slippers and your sister with a 'Frankie Says Relax' T-shirt and a stack of love bites round her neck. But my memories have more meaning than that.

- Shane Meadows, 'Under My Skin', *The Guardian*, 21 Apr. 2007

The above comment is taken from an editorial written by British 'auteur' Shane Meadows to accompany his new eighties-set film, *This is England* (2006). He discriminates between his own memories and those based on archaic media technologies and excessive mainstream styles which, according to him, carry less meaning. His 'memories' of the eighties as brought to life in *This is England* evidently resonated with viewers; the film proved both critically and commercially successful, earning the award for Best British Film at the 2008 BAFTAs while also theatrically recouping its budget and selling nearly 800,000 domestic DVD copies (Fradley, Godfrey and Williams 1-2). Its simultaneously raw and stylised, historically critical and aesthetically pleasing approach had clearly tapped into something widely appealing. However, the binary he establishes raises questions. What, then, constitutes 'meaningful' memory? Later in his editorial, Meadows locates it in the "vibrant youth culture that makes today's kids look dull and unimaginative" and the fervour that provoked British people to "fight for the stuff they believed in" (Meadows, 'Under My Skin'). Notwithstanding the fact that his 'memories' of cultural and political subversion are imagined, as are his views on present complacency and passivity, his suggestion that these memories are more meaningful than those of popular commodities is questionable. After all, despite *This is England's* success in highlighting memories of the former variety, the latter also hold significant exchange value in contemporary Britain, as shows like *I Love the '80s* (BBC, 2001) illustrate. From where do various definitions of 'the eighties' come, and is it possible to assign to some greater importance than others?

As Meadows' article is journalistic and to an extent self-promoting, he does not address these questions. Instead, he calls upon an assumption on recent-past nostalgia



that is often held in wider art and culture and sometimes in academia: that trends in popular post-war revivalism are at best trivial and at worst regressive and consumerist, while critical investigations into recent social, political and cultural history are more noteworthy. This perspective stems partly from academic theories proposed in the 1980s and early 90s (Baudrillard; Jameson) that read many of the recent past's postmodern uses as commodified and lacking in "genuine historicity" (Jameson 18). Fredric Jameson famously applied this reading to American films like *American Graffiti* (George Lucas, 1973) and *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974), dubbing them "nostalgia films" (19). However, these value-laden assessments have led many contemporary manifestations of post-war retro and nostalgia to be deemed insignificant and disregarded, leaving little room to explore what underlies their growing prevalence in British cinema and television.

This study works toward filling that gap by examining one cycle of British recent-past screen fictions: namely, the thirty 1980s retrospectives produced between 2005 and 2011 that I will call the 'Eighties Cycle'. It emerged during an eighties fashion and music revival that saw everything from the reintroduction of leggings in mainstream fashion to alternative 'indie' music that recalled 1980s post-punk. Simultaneously, developments in new media brought the introduction of online platforms, such as YouTube in 2005, which greatly facilitated access to archival media. Amidst these phenomena, Nick Love released a relatively niche crime film set in the eighties: *The Business* (2005). It was not the first British screen fiction to be retrospectively set in the 80s; in television the decade had already been depicted in Paul Greengrass' *Open Fire* (ITV, 1994) and, in film, in *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996) and in a few others that followed it, including *Billy Elliot* (Stephen Daldry, 2000) and *24 Hour Party People* (Michael Winterbottom, 2001). However, these earlier eighties retrospectives are generally (and rightly) read in the context of late 1990s 'New Britain' optimism, fuelled by the Blair government's attempts to shed Britain's international reputation as stuffy and conservative by re-branding it as 'Cool Britannia' or 'New Britain' (Barton; Monk, 'Underbelly UK'; Wayne). As such, they primarily champion Britain's transition from the 1980s to the present and do not aesthetically emphasise their period settings. In the wake of eighties revivalism and of rapidly diversifying ways to share and engage with

archival media, however, Love's version of 'the eighties' in *The Business* was parodically excessive, invoking those memories of commodity deemed non-meaningful by Meadows. The film's set designer claimed to be actively anticipating an eighties revival ('Making of Featurette').

The following year, a modest but still notable number of screen fictions were set in the eighties: *The History Boys* (Nicholas Hytner, 2006), *The Line of Beauty* (BBC, 2006), *Starter for 10* (Tom Vaughan, 2006) and *This is England*. This sudden surge of interest in depicting the decade onscreen was thrown into full swing by *This is England*'s massive popularity, and the next five years saw a sustained wave of feature films, TV series and television films set in either the last years of the 1970s or the 1980s. In 2007, *Control* (Anton Corbijn, 2007) and *Son of Rambow* (Garth Jennings, 2007) were released. 2008 saw the premiere of *Ashes to Ashes* (BBC, 2008-10) as well as *Cass* (Jon S. Baird, 2008), *Clubbed* (Neil Thompson, 2008), *Fifty Dead Men Walking* (Kari Skogland, 2008), *Hunger* (Steve McQueen, 2008), *Is Anybody There?* (John Crowley, 2008) and *Tuesday* (Sacha Bennett, 2008). In 2009 the cycle continued with *Awaydays* (Pat Holden, 2009), *A Child's Christmases in Wales* (BBC, 2009), *An Englishman in New York* (Richard Laxton, 2009), *The Firm* (Nick Love, 2009), *Margaret* (BBC, 2009), *Micro Men* (BBC, 2009) and the *Red Riding* trilogy (Julian Jarrold et al., 2009); in 2010, with *Never Let Me Go* (Mark Romanek, 2010), *Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll* (Mat Whitecross, 2010), *Submarine* (Richard Ayoade, 2010), *Sus* (Robert Heath, 2010) and *This is England '86* (Harper and Meadows, 2010); and in 2011, with *The Iron Lady* (Phyllida Lloyd, 2011), *Killing Bono* (Nick Hamm, 2011) and *This is England '88* (Shane Meadows, 2011).

Those set primarily in the late 1970s (*Awaydays*, *Control* and *Sus*) can be considered a part of this cycle because they evoke what is often remembered as 'the Thatcher era', or what might be termed here 'the long 1980s'. In his analysis of the American seventies, Bruce J. Schulman uses the term 'the long 1970s' to denote a period of cultural pessimism and scepticism that began before the 1970s, in 1968 (4); similarly, 'the long 1980s' can be used to describe the period between 1978 and 1990, beginning with the widespread public sector strikes during the so-called Winter of

Discontent of 1978-9, which heralded the end of an era of trade unions and paved the way for the Thatcher government's victory in 1979, and ending with Margaret Thatcher's resignation in 1990. Also includable in this cycle is the BBC's *Margaret Thatcher: The Long Walk to Finchley* (2008); although it is set well before the 1980s, it depicts Thatcher's rise to power and mainly incites memories of the eighties.

Although the aforementioned productions differ aesthetically, structurally and thematically, nearly all share with *The Business* a concern to aesthetically foreground and/or thematically emphasise their eighties settings as a defining element, and can therefore be considered to constitute a distinct period screen fiction cycle. By approaching them in this way, this project is theoretically situated within existing literature on contemporary period and historical screen fictions, which in British cinema and fiction television studies has shown particular concern for so-called 'heritage' dramas. This attention is warranted, as period dramas primarily depicting the upper-middle- and upper-classes in Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian England have, since the 1980s, proved vital for the British cinema and TV industries both domestically and as exportable commodities.<sup>1</sup> However, it has led recent-past screen fictions to sometimes be read in the context of debates surrounding heritage dramas. Since being popularised by key early-90s texts on the 1980s cycle of heritage films (Craig; Higson, 'Re-presenting'; Wollen), it has been commonplace to read them as complicit in the conservative heritage industries' commodification of traditional Englishness.<sup>2</sup> This reading was almost immediately contested, and has since expanded into a complex and wide-ranging debate.<sup>3</sup> However, its remnants are visible in the tendency, among some scholars, to locate the value of British recent-past screen fictions in their ability to subvert heritage's nostalgic pleasures (Higson, *Film England*; Murphy, 'A Path'; Powrie; Sargeant). Conversely, other works, particularly on Eighties Cycle productions, on occasion frame them as mostly interchangeable with contemporary social dramas,

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<sup>1</sup> See Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema* 1-8.

<sup>2</sup> The conservative values underlying cultural manifestations of British 'heritage' have been exhaustively discussed; see, for instance, Hewison, *The Heritage Industry*.

<sup>3</sup> Notable works, in this regard, are Monk, 'The British Heritage-film Debate Revisited' and *Heritage Film Audiences*.

implying that because they depict recent eras, they ought not to be read as period dramas (Brown; Higson, *Film England*; Whittaker).

These binary readings of British recent-past screen fictions are far from unanimous. Academic works have constructively considered them on their own terms. However, these have either analysed the texts on a case-by-case basis – Mike Newell’s *Dance with a Stranger* (1985), for instance, has received much attention (Cook; Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s*; Landy, ‘You Remember’) – or drawn comparisons between a few, as Sarah Street does in *British National Cinema*, identifying ‘the biopic’ as a significant 1980s film genre. Among literature on Eighties Cycle productions, this is also true; as I will elaborate on in Chapter 1, a series of publications effectively analyse one or a handful of texts in the cycle, but their ranges of view are too self-contained to sufficiently consider how the texts they examine relate to broader trends in recent-past film and television dramas. Furthermore, academic literature has more closely focused on and/or more highly valued those productions considered to be historically critical or innovative, possibly as a by-product of their perceived position over-and-against more remotely set productions. This imbalance marks literature on the Eighties Cycle; those productions that have received the widest attention are the critically acclaimed films *Control* and *This is England*, alongside the latter’s TV serial spin-offs and *Ashes to Ashes* which, although not especially lauded itself, was a spin-off to the highly regarded BBC series *Life on Mars* (2006-7).<sup>4</sup>

The breadth and diversity of the 2005-11 Eighties Cycle reveals that British recent-past screen fictions demand inquiry on the broader scale at which their ‘heritage’ counterparts have been studied. However, this should not simply involve identifying how they function as commodities as did Higson and Wollen for 1980s British heritage films and as did Jameson for American ‘nostalgia films’. In *Screening the Past*, Pam Cook addresses this issue, noting that period dramas are often “far more complex and interesting than is allowed” by critiques such as these (220). As such, this study also engages with theoretical frameworks outside of British period and historical drama that

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<sup>4</sup> The only populist genre productions in the Eighties Cycle to so far receive attention are the football hooligan films *Cass*, *The Firm* and *Awaydays* as examined in Rehling, ‘It’s About Belonging’.

help to address this issue, including literature on American postmodern nostalgia film (Collins; Dika; Grainge, 'Nostalgia and Style') and on the uses of retro and nostalgia more generally (Boym; Guffey; Hutcheon). Vera Dika, for instance, reclaims American postmodern nostalgia films by arguing that in citing previous pop cultural genres, they depend for meaning on their media-savvy audiences' assumed responses, and demand one to consider how their references are structured (103). This is how Eighties Cycle productions must be approached, as they address British and sometimes international viewers whose access to past and present global media has been facilitated by new media technologies and who consequently have substantial pop cultural knowledge.

The impact of these changes on viewers' relationship to the past is significant and, as such, this project also incorporates academic literature on the relationship between media and memory in the digital era. Some generalised debates inform discussions herein (Neiger, Meyers and Zandberg; van Dijck), but of particular consequence are studies concerning the impact of increased mediation on screen representations of the past (Collins; Grainge, *Memory*), on memories of events (Hoskins; White, 'Modernist') and on generalised memories of era (Holdsworth; Piper). Indeed, nearly all Eighties Cycle productions are textually marked by the effects of globalised mediation and two – *Ashes to Ashes* and the *This is England* serials – are further impacted by shifts toward transmedia storytelling and distribution which new media technologies have facilitated. As such, theoretical debates on transmedia (Jenkins; Newman and Levine; Wolf) and specialised studies on the ways it has influenced the contemporary British television industry (Elizabeth Evans; Perryman) are also integral to understanding the scope of the Eighties Cycle.

Engaging with the critical debates briefly outlined here, this study poses a series of interrelated research questions. Namely, what imperatives encouraged the production of so many films and television series set retrospectively in the eighties? Were they industrial? Cultural? Political? How is 'the eighties', as a concept, defined in these productions? Relevant here is Daniel Marcus' notion of a 'web of meaning'; in his critical analysis of 1970s American representations of the fifties and sixties, he distinguishes between numerical terms and popular monikers for 20<sup>th</sup> century decades,

suggesting that while the former refer to series of events and important figures, the latter connote “webs of meaning” (3): memories and concepts which may or may not reflect historical realities. Although ‘the 1980s’, which refers to the actual time period, is arguably absolute, ‘the eighties’ can encompass a wide range of conflicting and even inconsistent meanings. From where do these meanings come, and how do they influence onscreen representations of the decade? In turn, do these representations impact on shared memories of the eighties and, if so, how? Do the Eighties Cycle productions reflect a cultural longing to return to the 1980s? Do they criticise history? Or does their use of eighties signifiers indicate changing relationships to the recent past facilitated by new media, globalisation and other postmodern developments?

Although this project is grounded in the outlined critical debates, effective responses to the above questions require consideration of social, political and cultural factors that affected how the 1980s are today perceived, as these undoubtedly impacted on how Eighties Cycle productions retrospectively define ‘the eighties’. Most significant, perhaps, is the effect that Margaret Thatcher’s and her government’s social and economic policies have arguably had on shared memories of the decade. Although difficult (and according to some, impossible) to accurately define,<sup>5</sup> ‘Thatcherism’ is now remembered as an ideology that rejected Britain’s post-war practice of compromise and consensus in favour of free-market economics, consumerism and low government spending and of fostering traditional social values and national pride.<sup>6</sup> The fervency with which the government’s policies were enacted encouraged intense polarisations of opinion, torn between dogmatic supporters and militant protestors, and although many of the changes seen in the eighties were underway globally and likely would have occurred with or without the government’s advocacy, the sudden force with which Britain’s social and cultural foundations were unearthed led simultaneously to a surge in wealth in the south of England and to civil unrest and mass unemployment elsewhere.

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<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Eric Evans’ *Thatcher and Thatcherism*, 1-12.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Hewison discusses this shift in *Culture and Consensus*.

For these reasons, Louisa Hadley and Elizabeth Ho note that the so-called ‘Thatcher era’ is often experienced as a “‘wound’ in the contemporary imagination” (2), a traumatic experience which is seen to have irreversibly changed British cultural life. For the film and television industries of which the cycle in question is a part, consumerist values meant diversified television channels and the wider influence of American culture. In *Britain Since the Seventies*, Jeremy Black points out that shared pop cultural experiences enabled by television through the 1960s and 70s were weakened from the 80s onward, first after the establishment of Channel 4 in 1982, which marked the beginnings of multichannel television, and later with the coming of satellite, cable and digital television as well as the VHS player, all of which were assisted by consumerist imperatives. These also facilitated greater exposure to American TV programmes. Furthermore, the Thatcher government’s mid-1980s repeal of the Quota Act and Eady Levy debilitated the British film industry, a factor that encouraged American films to dominate the market more than ever before in the years that followed (Black 52-3). Consequently, for many film and TV producers in the late 2000s, ‘the eighties’ represented both a general period of unrest and a very specific ‘wound’: namely, the end of an era of British media and the start of what would become the diverse, globalised media landscape of the present. Of course, these are historical simplifications, generalised ‘webs of meaning’: they are *perceived* changes that permeate contemporary British consciousness. However, for film and TV retrospectives, these generalisations drive the perspectives expressed within.

This project synthesises the above academic debates and social histories to ground an interpretative, textual and contextual study of Eighties Cycle productions. It seeks to identify trends within the Eighties Cycle and to approach and analyse them thematically, rather than constructing a chronological production or genre history. Such an investigation can only be efficiently achieved by considering many Eighties Cycle texts and, as such, most are discussed, although to varying degrees of depth. For the sake of length, however, some have been omitted from this analysis on the basis of their relative obscurity (*Sus*; *A Child’s Christmases in Wales*; *Micro Men*), their peripheral significance to the Eighties Cycle due to closer links to other trends and genres (*An Englishman in New York*; *The History Boys*; *Never Let Me Go*), or their reasonable

representational comparability to other productions considered herein (*Fifty Dead Men Walking*; *The Firm*; *Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll*; *Killing Bono*). The discussed productions' implicit meanings are textually inferred with reference to the outlined theoretical and historical frameworks, alongside industrial contexts and testimonials from directors, writers and producers published in various media sources. Analysed where needed are marketing materials that reveal how the productions engage with and contribute to an extratextual 'Eighties Cycle' discourse and wider trends in pop cultural retro and eighties revivalism. To speculate on how Eighties Cycle productions were understood, consumed and interacted with between 2005 and 2011, this project also sometimes consults critical and audience responses as expressed in print and online newspapers and magazines, as well as on message boards and blogs.

Employing the described methodological structure, the study outlines four ways in which 'the eighties', as a concept, is invoked and reconstructed: as a style, as an abstractly drawn era based in childhood, adolescent or young adult memory, as a historical period and as a transmedial world. Although traces of each of these concepts are present in most productions, most engage viewers' knowledge of one in particular. Those stressing style capitalise on, ironise or otherwise call on the 'eighties mode' as it is constructed in pop culture, while those based in autobiographical memory tend to recall a vague and ahistorical but still implicitly 'true' past. Historical fictions engage with viewers' mediated knowledge of events and figures while often simultaneously exploiting eighties revivalism and 20/30-year anniversaries of 1980s events, and those that develop transmedia worlds invoke eighties style but remap the decade as an alternate, immersive universe. The productions are accordingly divided to consider how these concepts are called on and utilised to communicate various perspectives. In doing so, this project places particular emphasis on the productions' wide references to media, film and TV genres and archaic technologies. This particular quality marks nearly all of them, revealing that from 2005 to 2011, 'the eighties' was primarily experienced and understood via these platforms.

All chapters apart from the first are structured according to the four ways, outlined above, that 'the eighties' is conceptually defined. Chapter 1 will contextualise



the project by reviewing the literature that informs it and identifying holes in academic knowledge that the subsequent chapters will fill. I will survey relevant historical studies of 1980s Britain and of post-1980s British and global society and culture, and examine and assess existing critical literature on recent British cinema and television, on nostalgia and retro in contemporary culture, on new media and memory, on period screen fictions (both British and American) and on theories of transmedia storytelling. I will also evaluate previous critical studies on Eighties Cycle productions, identifying the integral insights they provide but also the questions they leave unanswered. In Chapter 2, I will examine a selection of Eighties Cycle screen fictions – *Ashes to Ashes*, *The Business*, *Tuesday*, *Awaydays*, *The Line of Beauty* and *Submarine* – that make use of ‘the eighties’ as a visual and audio style, exploring how they invoke commonly recognised aesthetic codes to engage their media-conscious 21<sup>st</sup>-century viewers. The varying meanings ascribed to the eighties mode will be contemplated to determine if they reveal a longing for retrieval or reflect other contemporary uses of past styles facilitated by changes in media accessibility. I will also consider various uses that the eighties aesthetic serves for film- and TV-makers, considering how the productions employ the mode to differentiate or destabilise genre productions and how these decisions are dictated by targeted audiences and/or intended messages.

In Chapter 3, I will investigate semi-autobiographical, coming-of-age retrospectives that elicit viewers’ notions of the decade as a collectively remembered era: *Starter for 10*, *Clubbed*, *Is Anybody There?*, the *Red Riding* trilogy and *Son of Rambow*. These productions introduce questions on the impact of global mediation on private and shared memories, as each bears the mark of recalling, from the vantage point of contemporary Britain, a time that saw fast expansions and shifts in the global media landscape. The chapter will consider whether their depictions of a recalled era reflect increased cohesion between globalised memories of film, television and other media and localised memories of lived experience and, if so, how this impacts on their reiterations of era. I will also interpret the viewpoints articulated both textually and extratextually by their directors, writers and producers on the ever deeper links forged between media and memory, asking if they reveal apprehension, acceptance or even espousal. In Chapter 4, I will turn to historical dramas based on actual occurrences or

people from the late 1970s and 1980s. These include *This is England*, *Control*, *Cass*, *Hunger* and three Margaret Thatcher biopics: *The Long Walk to Finchley*, *Margaret* and *The Iron Lady*. Representationally, each actively cites past depictions of their subjects in TV and radio news, previous TV shows, photographs, archival videos, publicity materials and so on. As such, I will ask how easier access to these archival media has affected historical knowledge and notions of historical authenticity and how these, in turn, are reflected in the retrospectives. I will also explore how eighties revivalism, the Eighties Cycle itself and the practice of marking 20<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of 1980s events inform these representations of history. Equally, the chapter will consider how differing budgets and/or intended audiences dictate which mediations of history are invoked and, with regard to representations of Margaret Thatcher, how mediated knowledge and polarised perspectives are distilled to meet these requirements.

In Chapter 5, I will examine texts that depart from extant public definitions of ‘the eighties’, instead using eighties iconography to build separate fantasy worlds: the *Life on Mars* sequel *Ashes to Ashes*, which will be re-evaluated here from a different angle, and the follow-up serials to *This is England*, *This is England ’86* and *This is England ’88*. Reading *Ashes* and the serials with reference to academic debates on transmedia, the chapter will trace their production imperatives and ask how moves toward transmedia storytelling spurred by developments in new media inspired their producers to adapt their source material. I will consider how their depictions of the eighties are affected by these modifications and, indeed, to what extent the actual past (as a style, as memory or as a set of events) continues to feature as a primary referent. I will also utilise these series to contemplate on possible ideological repercussions of adjusting a retrospective narrative’s internal system of representation in accordance with fans’ assumed desires. Finally, after reviewing findings and surveying the cycle’s deceleration since 2011, my project will conclude with a brief analysis of *Pride* (Matthew Warchus, 2014). I will ask whether this later eighties retrospective signals the cycle’s resurgence or, if not, what new cultural or industrial demands it suggests.

## Chapter 1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Period screen fiction has received substantial academic attention in British film and TV studies. However, as I noted in the introduction, this literature has often focused on representations of the Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian eras commonly labelled ‘heritage’ dramas. Meanwhile, critical discussions on those that depict post-World War Two decades have been sporadic and case-specific. Here, I will justify this study’s comprehensive focus on the series of interrelated recent-past screen fictions that comprise the Eighties Cycle. This chapter outlines histories and social surveys that provide cultural context, as well as broader critical debates in British film and television, new media and memory, contemporary nostalgia and retro and transmedia storytelling from which it contextually and theoretically draws. It also identifies and critically examines debates around British and American period screen genres and existing academic literature on this thesis’ primary texts. In doing so, this chapter acknowledges the valuable work on Eighties Cycle productions and on other contemporary recent-past screen fictions on which the remaining chapters build while locating these studies’ shortcomings and gaps in existing literature.

### Mapping the Social Context

It is first necessary to outline texts that focus on cultural, social and political changes in Britain from the 1970s to the present day. In many cases these are cultural histories rather than critical texts and have been used for contextual information. As such, it is unnecessary to discuss them in detail, but their relevancy should be noted. They include broad works on cultural and political trends in the 1970s, such as Andy Beckett’s *When the Lights Went Out* and Janet and John Shepherd’s *1970s Britain*, and the 1980s, including Andy McSmith’s *No Such Thing as Society* and Richard Vinen’s *Thatcher’s Britain*.<sup>7</sup> They also consist of historical and sociological texts that pertain to particular

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<sup>7</sup> Cultural histories of 1970s and 1980s Britain are exhaustive. They also include, among several others, Dominic Sandbrook’s *Seasons in the Sun*, Daniel Collings’ and Anthony Seldon’s *Britain under Thatcher* and Eric Evans’ *Thatcher and Thatcherism (The Making of the Contemporary World)*. Most of these histories are fairly similar in focus and peripheral to my primary research, so only a select few have been included.

films and series, from which relevant information is drawn as needed in the chapters that follow. These include sociological literature on subcultural movements – Stuart Hall’s and Tony Jefferson’s edited collection *Resistance through Rituals*, Dick Hebdige’s *Subculture* and *Hiding in the Light*, and David Muggleton’s more recent *Inside Subculture* – as well as Ian Glasper’s and Simon Reynolds’ books on punk and postpunk, Robert Harris’ and Robert Dillon’s investigations of media and government relations during the Falklands crisis, and Jonathan Tonge’s and Paul Dixon’s and Eamonn O’Kane’s books on conflict in Northern Ireland.<sup>8</sup>

One social shift with widespread implications – deindustrialisation and the subsequent rise of consumerism – triggered several critical perspectives on recent British history which require closer attention. These have and continue to inform debates on nostalgia and contemporary British cinema and to impact on retrospective representations of the eighties. At the centre of these is Thatcherism which, as Robert Hewison succinctly explains, created “a new myth of economic individualism to replace the old ideas of community and collectivism” (*Culture and Consensus* 212). Many have been careful to note that the shift from a consensus-driven ethic toward one driven by consumerism began well before Thatcher was voted into office as the result of a growing industrial crisis, of unemployment and of economic downturn and of the rise of reactionary right-wing sentiments in the face of an increasingly diverse British population.<sup>9</sup> However, as Louisa Hadley and Elizabeth Ho note in their introduction to an edited collection on the continued cultural impact of Thatcherism, “Thatcher and the phenomenon of Thatcherism [...] function as a symbolic ‘wound’ in the contemporary imagination, a palpable point where things can be said to have irrecoverably changed” (2). Thatcherism was commonly understood almost immediately and is still often remembered as a moment of rupture that permanently overturned British society and culture.

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<sup>8</sup> This literature examines historical events relevant to film and TV texts discussed directly in the chapters, but cultural histories of the miners’ strike of 1984-5 were also used to contextualise the brief discussion of *Pride* (Matthew Warchus, 2014) in the conclusion. See, for instance, D.V. Khabaz’s *Manufactured Schema*.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Black 142.

Irrevocable change was already a predominant theme in pessimistic state-of-the-nation tracts published in the 1980s like Beatrix Campbell's, Ian Jack's and Paul Theroux's. These lament the effects of deindustrialisation in the north (Theroux 198), depict the transformation of a selfless, communal culture into a self-serving and introverted one (Jack 134) and criticise changing perspectives on poverty (Campbell 19). The extreme pessimism of these early critiques must be taken in context; Laurel Forster and Sue Harper note in the introduction to their edited collection *British Culture and Society in the 1970s* that in the 70s "Marxism told silently on the minds of a whole generation" (9), and there is an implicit lament in these works for the loss of a Marxist perspective. However, they reveal the first signs of the so-called 'wound' of Thatcherism. After the decade, the Thatcher government's impact continued to be acknowledged; in 2001, Richard Heffernan wrote that although "Thatcher herself has all but left the political scene, [...] the neo-liberal agenda bequeathed by her governments remains a live and viable political force" (19). Thatcherism is seen to have caused New Labour to shift its party policies toward free-market ethics; Hadley and Ho write that "New Labour's strategy was to consolidate the threat that Thatcher made to 'kill socialism in Britain' [...] by expunging socialism from its political agenda" (9).

New Labour's neoliberal slant is thought to indicate a wider acceptance of consumerist values in Britain, leading to changes in social and cultural practices. Because this shift is implied in and relevant to many eighties retrospectives, inquiries like Hadley's and Ho's into the *transition* from the 1980s to the present are particularly pertinent to this study. Also notable among these is Jeremy Black's *Britain since the Seventies*, which charts habit changes that range from increased media consumption to a resurgence in gardening. He argues that these shifts are attributable to the growing belief that "I spend therefore I am"; he writes that from the 1970s onward, "The consumer, and the industries geared to consumerism, drove the pace of social change" (11).<sup>10</sup> Of course, it is simplistic to attribute this value shift directly to Thatcherism, but in examining retrospective depictions of the 1980s, it is as important to consider what is

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<sup>10</sup> Also relevant is Brian Robson's 'Mancunian Ways: The Politics of Regeneration', which focuses on the post-Thatcherite regeneration of Manchester.

commonly *perceived* to be truth as it is to understand what truly occurred. In this regard, Hadley and Ho write that “‘Thatcher’ functions both *as* historical discourse and *outside* of historical discourse, where historical accuracy is ‘entangled’ [...] with British cultural memory of the 1980s” (1). In other words, ‘Thatcher’ can refer to the person and to her party’s political agenda, but it also often refers a cultural construct that has as much to do with memory as history and which continues to inform perspectives on the eighties today.

## **Trends in Recent British Cinema and Television**

### Developments and Discussions in the 1980s

This section outlines critical debates on significant trends in British film and television, but mostly foregoes studies on the British period drama, returning to them after outlining theories on nostalgia and retro later in this chapter. More of the academic work discussed here concerns cinema than television – as this study only considers period screen *fictions*, and more of these are films than are TV series, the cycle’s cinematic origins are of particular relevance – but British television history and theory are discussed where applicable. I will begin by discussing texts concerning Thatcherism’s effect on the media industries and on debates surrounding 1980s British cinema and TV. The impact of Thatcherism on British cinema and on the British film industry – and later, its effect on critical debates surrounding British cinema – has been exhaustively discussed. A defining publication in this regard was the 1993 edited collection *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism*. In its first chapter, Leonard Quart outlines the Thatcher government’s decision to treat the film business primarily as a business, among other things abolishing the Eady Levy which had allotted a percentage of box office receipts to British films and privatising the National Film Finance Corporation (21). Quart argues that this approach to the film business, coupled with Margaret Thatcher’s general disregard for artists and intellectuals, inspired filmmakers such as Derek Jarman, Mike Leigh and Stephen Frears to “burn brightly”

(29), producing a cycle of anti-Thatcherite films. This narrative is repeated elsewhere, and is often used to justify analyses of 1980s British cinema alongside Thatcherism.<sup>11</sup>

The Thatcher government's impact on the British TV industry and resulting televisual landscape has also received critical attention. Patricia Holland and Georgia Eglezou note that British broadcasting "had been created within a rhetoric of public service" (32) and when Thatcher took office in 1979 consisted only of the two publicly funded BBC stations and their lone independent competitor, the network of regional franchises known as Independent Television (now ITV). This was considered contrary to the Thatcher government's free-competition-focused policies, and it accordingly aided the development of a new independent channel, Channel 4, which began broadcasting in 1982. It also encouraged other initiatives that would aid competition, leading to the introduction of cable and later to the launch of Sky Television satellite service in 1989. These changes, Holland and Eglezou argue, made it "more important for all channels to compete for audience numbers. Inevitably this led to a more populist approach" (44) which was

[...] reflected in the culture of television itself, as much as in the content of programs. There was an expectation that the schedules would, above all, bring entertainment, as the drive toward lifestyle, shopping and a high-spending leisure culture took hold. Current affairs was in decline. Challenging or difficult programs were made less frequently. (49)

Television industry changes thus to some extent reflected those in the film industry, as free-market values were increasingly adopted.

Because the antagonistic relationship between the Thatcher government and the media industries has been so well documented and because Thatcherism clashes with artistic values, it is safe to guess that many filmmakers and TV producers working today share a disregard for Thatcher, and it is important to bear this in mind when examining 2000s depictions of the period. However, contemporary producers' relationship to these changes is far from simple. After all, even if establishing Channel 4 was "in tune with Thatcher's desire to see greater competition" (Tait 2), it also, to her dismay, was

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<sup>11</sup> See also John Hill's *British Cinema in the 1980s*.

incorporated into the existing public-service structure and, as Holland and Eglezou note, initially became “the home for left-wing campaigners, feminists, black and Asian filmmakers, extreme political views, avant-garde filmmaking styles, auteur films and amateur filmmakers” (33-4). Paul Giles explains that despite the government’s initiatives, true changes to the televisual landscape were slow and in the 1980s, television still generated “a discourse predicated upon the compulsive pleasures of familiarity and communal recognition” (60). As such, and thanks to the development of Channel 4, many of the decade’s most memorable films, like *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Stephen Frears, 1985), were actually produced for television. Channel 4 dramas discussed herein – namely, the *Red Riding* trilogy and the *This is England* serials – have direct origins in the relationship forged between the channel and auteur filmmakers in the 1980s.

Furthermore, Thomas Elsaesser suggests an alternative reading of the 1980s British film ‘renaissance’ and its relationship to Thatcherism. Elsaesser asks if the “self-questioning of national identity” in the face of Thatcherism “can be distinguished from another response, no less prominent in the 1980s: self-promotion, also pursued in the name of national identity” (46). Pointing to such marketing tactics as film festivals, the BFI’s celebration of its fiftieth year and clever programming choices (47), he notes that although the Thatcher government did alienate the artistic community, it also encouraged the idea that success lay in the ability to market a product rather than to prove its worth.<sup>12</sup> As such, despite a general disregard for Thatcherism in the arts, the decade also proved that television could be made effectively in an atmosphere of free-competition and that cinema could be used as a form of tourism and self-promotion. These realisations, as will become clear in subsequent chapters, also affected perspectives in the media industries.

Another 1980s debate relevant to this study was that surrounding ‘heritage’ drama. Although I will return to it in greater detail below, I will briefly discuss its origins here as it had an effect on subsequent British cinema scholarship. Alongside

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<sup>12</sup> This perspective is briefly echoed by Leonard Quart, who also points to “a general mood that encouraged economic risk-taking” (22).



films associated with the so-called ‘renaissance’ in British art-cinema there emerged a cycle of period films including, among others, the Merchant-Ivory E.M. Forster adaptations *A Room with a View* (James Ivory, 1985) and *Maurice* (James Ivory, 1987), and Charles Sturridge’s adaptation of *A Handful of Dust* (1988). These films were later accused of being complicit in promoting heritage culture by aesthetically endorsing Thatcherite ideology even as their narratives opposed it. The debate began in the late 1980s and was popularised in the early 1990s by essays such as Andrew Higson’s ‘Representing the National Past’, where he writes that the “past is displayed as visually spectacular pastiche, inviting a nostalgic gaze that resists the ironies and social critiques so often suggested narratively by these films” (91).<sup>13</sup> This reading was also eventually applied to television – Jerome de Groot notes that the classic serial is “generally included in this criticism, part of a selling of heritage Britishness to the world” (184) – and it sparked a contentious academic debate that will be outlined in a later section.

In aligning these films with Thatcherite ideology, Higson also situated them in opposition to the films associated with the art-cinema ‘renaissance’, which were characteristically set in contemporary Britain. This became a commonly used dichotomy; for instance, John Hill divides *British Cinema in the 1980s* into three parts: ‘Contexts’, ‘Representations of the Past’ and ‘Contemporary Representations’. Dividing representations of the past and those of contemporary Britain implies that they are inherently irreconcilable and that representations of the past are always less progressive and critical than those set in the present. This reading of 1980s period dramas was almost immediately contested, as I will elaborate upon below, but as Claire Monk has noted in her reception study of British period films, *Heritage Film Audiences*, the perception of period dramas as necessarily conservative has permeated cultural consciousness to such an extent that her younger and more progressive respondents displayed an “evident self-consciousness, and even dissociative embarrassment [...] about enjoying period films” (175). The British period film’s increasingly negative reputation led to transformations in the genre in the 1990s, to which I will now turn.

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<sup>13</sup> See also Craig and Wollen.

### Debates on 1990s and Contemporary British Cinema

Thomas Elsaesser's suggestion in 1993 that the Thatcherite ethos of self-promotion contributed to the development of a cinema 'renaissance' in the 1980s is given credence by subsequent trends in the 1990s. A common theme in academic literature on cinema from this period, most notably in the 2000 edited collection *British Cinema of the 90s*, is the commodification of British genres, quite often in concern of self-promotion. From a production standpoint, the film industry flourished in the 1990s when compared to the previous two decades; Peter Todd points out that UK film production doubled between 1992 and 1996. However, Todd and others have suggested that much of this success was due to increased Hollywood involvement.<sup>14</sup> Todd notes that after Rank Film Distributors closed down in the middle of the decade, the remaining major distributors were all American (18). Furthermore, Robert Murphy points out in 'A Path through the Moral Maze' that while cinema attendance continued to increase, "what most people were going to see were Hollywood movies" (1). Most significantly, John Hill writes in 'Contemporary British Cinema: Industry, Policy, Identity' that most successful British films of the 90s, such as *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, 1997) and *Notting Hill* (Roger Michell, 1999), were funded and distributed by Hollywood majors (30).

The British film industry's reliance on Hollywood money and need to define itself over and against Hollywood is nothing new. However, it appears that in the 1990s, concerns with establishing a national British cinema for domestic audiences were increasingly replaced by concerns with developing ties to Hollywood majors and selling British identities to international audiences. This is often attributed to the late-90s influence of New Labour. The Blair Labour government may have supported the development of the British cinema industry, but this was done in order to, as Claire Monk writes, "promote a global perception of Britain as a competitive and innovative enterprise economy, thus enhancing its industrial prospects in a global capitalist free market" ('Underbelly UK' 284). Thus, according to several contemporary British cinema theorists, the industry continued to be treated as a business; the primary

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<sup>14</sup> See Todd 17-19 and Hill, 'Contemporary British Cinema' 30. See also Robert Murphy, 'A Path through the Moral Maze' 1.

difference was in the Blair government's recognition that culture industries had potential as promotional devices. The 'Britain' that the Blair government sought to promote was epitomised in the title 'New Britain', which was popularised in the media and exploited by New Labour. Claire Monk explains that, seeking to shed Britain's international image as stuffy and conservative, the British think-tank Demos argued for a global "re-branding" of Britain as a forward-thinking free-market economy. This led to the development of labels like 'New Britain' and 'Cool Britannia' which, as Monk writes, were defined "in terms of youth, modernity, creativity, energy, optimism, and entrepreneurialism" ('Projecting a 'New Britain'' 34). The 'New Britain' model is seen in academic literature to have impacted on several pop cultural forms, including various film genres.<sup>15</sup>

One genre particularly relevant to this study is so-called 'Brit-grit', which marked a late-90s return to the northern industrial town settings of 1960s British New Wave films. However, as Samantha Lay notes in her overview of the genre, the 60s 'kitchen sink' dramas have been criticised for their focus on working-class male protagonists living in industrial societies and their adverse depiction of women as "the social agents of consumerism" (*British Social Realism* 64). In contrast, late-90s 'Brit-grit' films, which include mainstream outputs like *The Full Monty* and *Brassed Off* (Mark Herman, 1996) and youth 'underclass' films like *Trainspotting*, are noted to instead focus on *unemployed* male protagonists living in economically deprived post-industrial societies. Theorists such as Julia Hallam, John Hill and Claire Monk have argued that these films express masculine anxieties surrounding the loss of the traditional male community. John Hill, for instance, argues in 'Failure and Utopianism' that the utopian endings in *The Full Monty*, *Brassed Off* and *Up 'n' Under* (John Godber, 1998), in which the films' disenfranchised male protagonists come together to overcome challenges in the face of economic adversity, "celebrate the recovery, in a post-industrial context, of the collective spirit that such communities have traditionally stood for" (183). Similar observations are made by Hallam and Monk, who both

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<sup>15</sup> For instance, Steve Chibnall has noted the impact of 'Cool Britannia' on 'lad' films in 'Britain's Funk Soul Brothers', while Robert Murphy has highlighted its impact on the romantic comedy in 'Citylife'.

identify an undercurrent of nostalgia in Brit-grit films for lost male communities.<sup>16</sup> Monk points to the influence of the anti-feminism backlash and of the misogynistic ‘new lad’ media construct, noting that women are usually either absent from these films or kept peripheral, while “the female pursuit of work and qualifications [is] itself marginal to the young male’s sphere of interest” (‘Men in the 90s’ 160). Films set in contemporary Britain, which in British cinema of the 1980s had been identified as progressive, began to retreat to a nostalgic conservatism.

Nostalgia for traditional masculinity was not unique to Brit-grit; theorists have noted that as well as 60s New Wave, some Brit-grit films also recall 1960s and 70s British crime films. In ‘Parole Overdue’, Steve Chibnall and Robert Murphy point out that what they call ‘underworld’ films, which typically take place in underworld settings and feature professional criminals as protagonists, have been a staple of British cinema for decades (3). They argue that in the 1960s and 70s, the virility and chauvinism notable in popular ‘gangland’ films like *Get Carter* (Mike Hodges, 1971) provided “coordinates to map the cultural upheavals created by women’s aspirations and by economic change” (2). Claire Monk suggests in ‘From Underworld to Underclass’ that the social changes heralded by Thatcherism, changing gender roles and growing disillusionment with and disregard for the law and moral boundaries led ‘underworld’ films to transform in the 1990s into ‘underclass’ films. She argues that they were inspired by considerable nostalgia expressed in 90s ‘lad’ media for the “idealised, parochial 1960s gangland” depicted in ‘classic’ British crime films, and although some 1990s ‘underclass’ films attempted to break away from sexist conventions, they achieved this to varying degrees of success.

Monk and others also argue that Brit-grit films made a commodity of 1990s Britain. Julia Hallam praises their celebration of locality and mission to depict British locations outside London, but argues that they commodify the “cultural identities of economically marginalised communities, re-packaging their experiences for sale in the global marketplace” (270). She sees this as a symptom of the Blairite tendency to

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<sup>16</sup> See Hallam 266-7 and Monk, ‘Underbelly UK’ 280.

emphasise the commercial over the cultural in film production (271). Claire Monk echoes this, arguing that Brit-grit films transform the underclass into an “appealing, profitable and exportable commodity” (‘Underbelly UK’ 276). She suggests that their narratives of self-improvement reject the old socialist order in favour of an entrepreneurial spirit, aligning them with the values and concerns of ‘New Britain’; for instance, she explains that despite the implicit irony in *Trainspotting*’s conclusion, it still “addresses a generation of ‘Thatcher’s children’ for whom the conflation of subcultural dissent and entrepreneurial capitalism holds no contradictions” (285). However successful Brit-grit films were in disseminating the ‘Cool Britannia’ brand, their immense success certainly established them internationally as quintessentially British and, as will be explored in later chapters, many contemporary eighties retrospectives recall them.

The ‘New Britain’ ethos also led to changes in period dramas. Monk argues that ‘post-heritage’ period dramas in the 1990s deliberately employed self-consciously stylistic aesthetics and displayed overt sexuality in order to differentiate themselves from the earlier ‘heritage films’ associated with Thatcherite conservatism. She notes that by the late 1990s, the marketing for both underclass and period films similarly alluded to ‘Cool Britannia’ and addressed the same audience, writing that “in such a climate, representations of history and contemporary poverty alike become, first and foremost, commodities, capable of serving peculiarly similar economic and ideological objectives” (284). Thus, according to Monk, two previously irreconcilable genres converged in the 90s as commodities celebrating ‘Cool Britannia’. As will be argued subsequently, several Eighties Cycle productions represent a further development wherein the commodities of history and contemporary poverty are fused to form one single, easily marketable commodity.

I will examine specific literature pertaining directly to Eighties Cycle productions at the end of this chapter. However, here it is worth noting that globalisation and American domination of the British film market continue to dominate generalised debates on contemporary British cinema, most notably in James Leggott’s 2008 overview, *Contemporary British Cinema*, and Andrew Higson’s more in-depth

2011 study of English cinema, *Film England*.<sup>17</sup> Higson writes that most British “productions today are in some sense transnational” (14); on the one hand the 2000s saw a continuation of the 90s trend for increased film production, doubling (as it had between 1992 and 1996) the number of films produced in the 2000s from the number produced in the 1990s (*Film England* 20-1). However, on the other, also much as John Hill noted in 2001 of 1990s British films, Higson points out that the twenty top-performing UK productions between 2000 and 2008 had some form of American studio involvement (*Film England* 21). Thus, Leggott writes that Britain’s economic relationship to Hollywood is now so “ingrained that it is often felt to pose a threat to the individuality of British film culture and its capacity to reflect national concerns” (28).<sup>18</sup> Some Eighties Cycle productions had American backing and consequently represent subjects that are of global rather than national interest; this will be discussed in further depth with reference to *The Iron Lady* (Phyllida Lloyd, 2011) in Chapter 4. Yet, as will become clear, even those aimed primarily at domestic audiences often borrow from genres established as profitable in the 1990s.

### **Global New Media, History and Memory**

Alongside debates on trends in British screen fiction, this study is also informed by and contributes to a significant body of literature on the circulation of the past in the media. This literature can be broadly divided into two differing but interrelated research areas: debates on the relationship between recycled media and history/ memory and those concerned with the uses of nostalgia and retro in culture and media, the latter of which will be discussed in the next two sections. The former, however, requires attention here, as the Eighties Cycle emerged at a time of significant change in how past media was

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<sup>17</sup> Also notable but less relevant to this study are Paul Dave’s *Visions of England* and John Fitzgerald’s *Studying British Cinema*. Dave’s book is thorough and discusses relevant texts like *The Full Monty* and *Trainspotting*, but it is concerned primarily with class representation, making it peripheral to my research. Fitzgerald’s volume is useful for informational purposes but as it is designed for students, it is less valuable theoretically.

<sup>18</sup> Nick James echoes this point in ‘British Cinema’s US Surrender’, writing that “budgets are creeping up in answer to the complaint that British production values are too inferior for the multiplex age, but with bigger budgets tends to come a co-production blandness” (24).

recycled. With the growing digitisation of previously analog technologies and, most significantly, the increasingly widespread availability of the internet through the late 1990s and 2000s, media from the past could now be recycled and re-accessed more quickly and efficiently. Memories of the 1980s in the 2000s were significant in this regard. Ivan T. Berend notes in *Europe Since 1980* that although “it was the outcome of a continuous process, the technological revolution began a new chapter after 1980, especially because of its decisive impact on everyday life” (159). From the 2000s, then, the eighties were not just remembered as the years of Thatcherism but also of the digital revolution.

The impact of these changes on relationships to past media in Britain and other Western nations was already a subject of debate well before digitisation and access to the internet had become the overwhelming norm. In 1993, Jim Collins argued that in contemporary “techno-sophisticated cultures” (255), communication depends on a shared knowledge of what he calls “the array”: “the perpetual circulation and recirculation of signs that forms the fabric of postmodern cultural life” (246). He suggests that in these societies, this ‘array’ of mediated signs – which includes shared memories of specific televised events or of old films or TV shows but also the shared recognition of broader signs like media genre codes – is so engrained in people’s day-to-day experiences that it is considered as real as the material world (255). This became truer through the 2000s with the emergence of internet platforms like, for instance, YouTube in 2005 and, in the introduction to their 2011 edited volume *On Media Memory*, Motti Neiger, Oren Meyers and Eyal Zandberg argue that “phenomena such as the increasing use of YouTube [...] [and] the unprecedented availability of online databases offering media-based documentation of the past” (2) demand inquiry into how they affect contemporary engagements with and recollections of the past. The debate on media, history and memory has recently broadened and several generalised works like Neiger’s, Meyer’s and Zandberg’s have been published. These include José van Dijck’s *Mediated Memories*, which incorporates scientific and cultural theory to examine memory processes, and Joanne Garde-Hansen’s educational volume *Media and Memory*. These are useful for context but would be superfluous to discuss in detail here. Those worth considering more closely are studies on the specific impact of accessibility

and recyclability on film and TV and, in turn, contemporary film and TV's impact on how people remember and engage with history.

Jerome de Groot takes up this question in *Consuming History*, where he points out that in the UK, new technologies have enabled individuals to “circumvent the historical professional and appear to engage with the ‘past’ in a more direct fashion”, leading to a “crisis of legitimacy” and a new “popular epistemology” (3). However, simultaneously, “History” in its more traditional sense “was increasingly prevalent as a cultural, social and economic trope and genre” (3). He uses *The Other Boleyn Girl* (Justin Chadwick, 2008) to show how this affects readings of contemporary historical fictions, explaining that the film draws from and engages with so many overlapping genres and sources that “its meanings can only be fully understood through a multi-platform consideration of the text’s placement within various discourses” (13). He calls this contemporary style of historical representation ‘Historioglossia’: “a multiplicity of hybrid discourses accruing around a single instance” (13).

Paul Grainge further argues that the current globalised media landscape is such that “the past may no longer be felt or understood in any culturally specific or referential sense” (*Memory and Popular Film* 7). He suggests that while period fictions produced in the globalised present may depict a particular region’s past, the mediated narratives from which they draw may come from several locales; for instance, a British film set in the Second World War might draw from previous Hollywood representations. Relevant here is Allison Landsberg’s notion of ‘prosthetic memory’; she argues that new technologies and commodification, which have enabled viewers to learn about events through their onscreen representation, have encouraged the development of mediated memories outside the realm of direct experience. These memories are prosthetic because, while not tied to individuals in a straightforward and traditional sense, they reshape their identities and help them to be more empathetic members of society, as they facilitate awareness of human experience beyond their immediate geographical communities (146).

In addition, Jim Collins highlights the need to consider the implied *perspective* on the contemporary media ‘array’ in screen fictions. He identifies two divergent trends



in 1990s genre cinema: ‘new sincerity’ and ‘eclectic irony’. The first rejects the ‘array’ altogether in search of a lost authenticity that is thought to have existed before the advent of media corruption (259), while the second embraces the ‘array’ by acknowledging audiences’ increasing cinema literacy and the entertainment value of ironically manipulating the media knowledge they possess (249). Grainge, Mark Jancovich and Sharon Monteith argue that Collins’ categories can be applied to period fictions, noting the divergence between sincere representations of the past like *The English Patient* (Anthony Minghella, 1996) and eclectically ironic depictions like *Boogie Nights* (P.T. Anderson, 1997) (533). The multiplicity of sources on ‘the past’ from which Eighties Cycle productions draw, as well as the globality of those pasts and their potentially differing outlooks will all be considered in the chapters that follow.

The above theories are applicable to screen fictions for both film and television, but there is also relevant literature centring on other manifestations of the past in media, primarily in television. Some of this – most notably by Hayden White and Andrew Hoskins – focuses on the mediation of world events. In ‘The Modernist Event’, White argues that the electronics revolution has rendered it more difficult for a single, official narrative of an event to take hold because multiple accounts now emerge as it unfolds (23). This has implications for representations of the 1980s which, due to the electronics revolution, were heavily mediated. A great deal of media was produced and disseminated in the UK in the 1980s and, in light of developments in new media, much of it is accessible to contemporary Britons. Whereas White discusses the *immediate* impact of new media on historical narrativity, Hoskins considers how the *repetition* of historical events on television affects memory. He argues that recycled archival news footage of pivotal events like the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal “take on a new ‘fullness’, not the synchronic one of the original moment, but rather capturing diachronically, the whole history of the period of the time and of time since” (343). The fact that these images come to stand in for our personal memories of events, he continues, “has certain consequences for what it is *possible* to remember” (344). This point will be of particular relevance when considering representations of Margaret Thatcher in Chapter 4, but it also can be applied to reruns, ‘clip’ shows and other archive television, which also influence what is remembered. In addition, Amy Holdsworth points out that “through its

repetition and continual re-narrativization of grand historical narratives of, for example, world wars and world cups, television itself is marked by, and generates our obsession with, commemoration and anniversaries” (‘Television Resurrections’ 138). TV repetition can, then, influence not just *what* we remember but also whether or not we *care* to remember in the first place.

Holdsworth and Helen Piper also examine the effect of the television flow on memory. Holdsworth suggests that although research often focuses on the effect of mediating particular events, television can also impact on memory “as an experience formed over time within the patterns of the everyday. Here, television is remembered and felt as a significant experience that can illuminate histories and memories of the self and family” (*Television, Memory and Nostalgia* 15). Holdsworth notes that the increased presence of past media in UK TV schedules can be accounted for by digitisation, which opened significant television ‘space’ to fill (*Television, Memory and Nostalgia* 99), but both she and Piper seek to read reruns and ‘documentaries’ like *I Love the ‘80s* (BBC, 2001) as more than merely, as Piper writes, “a convenient means of tapping into audience desire for renewed consumption, at the same time as providing a low-cost way of filling the expanding airwaves” (412). Piper argues, instead, that reruns “allow space for general memories of a more settled broadcasting communality and its profound everyday signification, at the very point that the future of television, at least as we have always known it, looks increasingly uncertain” (427).<sup>19</sup> This helps to explain the existence of, and to read, television series like *Life on Mars* and its sequel *Ashes to Ashes*, which reference past TV.

### **Theories of Nostalgia, Retro and Heritage in Contemporary Culture**

I will now turn to debates on nostalgia, both British and American, beginning by discussing general theoretical frameworks for contemporary nostalgia and moving on to their application to film and television. Many theorists have identified the recent

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<sup>19</sup> Holdsworth echoes this, suggesting that the constant repetition of past television may actually indicate a fear that “television, the professed medium *par excellence* for the production of vanishing acts, will itself disappear” (‘Television Resurrections’ 139).

emphasis on nostalgia in the media, in music and in fashion in such forms as reruns, remakes and revivals, as well as in the broader society as a whole, evidenced, for instance, by a renewed interest in museums and galleries.<sup>20</sup> Paul Grainge usefully divides theories of nostalgia into those that consider it a ‘mood’ and those that read it as a ‘mode’. He writes that ‘mood’ theorists understand it “as a socio-cultural response to forms of discontinuity, claiming a vision of stability and authenticity in some conceptual ‘golden age’”, while ‘mode’ theorists are concerned with nostalgia’s “stylistic form and significance in a world of media image, temporal breakdown, and cultural amnesia” (‘Nostalgia and Style in Retro America’ 28). I would argue that, rather than disparate *readings* on the same phenomenon, these are actually two distinct but often overlapping *forms* of nostalgia. I will suggest in Chapter 2 that both are identifiable to varying degrees in the Eighties Cycle. However, Grainge is careful to note that many theories of nostalgia consider both, and his distinction helps to frame various approaches.

Theories of nostalgia as a ‘mode’ tend to emphasise the rise of consumer culture, noting that nostalgia manifests itself primarily in the form of commodities, whether material commodities like replicas of obsolete products or cultural commodities like television adaptations of literary classics. Susan Stewart laments in *On Longing* that in “the final phases of late capitalism, history itself appears as a commodity” (xiii). Raphael Samuel, whose work crosses the line between ‘mood’ and ‘mode’ theories, is less pessimistic about nostalgia as a ‘mode’ but argues that ‘retrochic’ – his term for the recycling of past styles in contemporary cultures and subcultures – usually “start[s] life in quite impromptu ways, often in the pursuit of an individual whim, [...] [but] moves by degrees from the world of the flea markets to that of franchises and contracts” (102). As a ‘mood’, contemporary nostalgia is often linked to globalisation and the increasing pace of social change. Many point to the growth of global consumer economies and the resultant loss of a sense of local community as contributing factors; in *The Future of*

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<sup>20</sup> Andreas Huyssen, for instance, discusses the renewed popularity of the museum in this context in *Twilight Memories*, and Linda Hutcheon calls nostalgia one of the “key components of contemporary culture today” (192).

*Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym calls this a “yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world” (xiv).<sup>21</sup>

Of course, nostalgia has been a key element of contemporary British culture since before the 2000s. ‘Mood’ nostalgia theorists like Robert Hewison and, to some extent, Raphael Samuel chart British heritage culture’s emergence in the 1970s,<sup>22</sup> also attributing it to immense social change. Hewison contends that “growing popularity of romanticised versions of pastoralism and ‘heritage’ as an embodiment of Englishness in the seventies” coincided with increasingly sour attitudes toward contemporary developments such as increased black immigration (*Culture and Consensus* 165). Linda Hutcheon identifies an inherent contradiction in responding to fast-paced social change by immersing oneself in nostalgic commodities, arguing that although yearning “for a Mont Blanc fountain pen” soothes “techno-peasant anxieties”, it is “electronic and mechanical reproduction” that allows consumers “quick access to an infinitely recyclable past” (196). Other theorists see this ease of access as not only facilitating but also *causing* nostalgia. For instance, in Simon Reynolds’ largely pessimistic *Retromania*, on generic recycling in 2000s music, he suggests that the wide availability of older music genres on platforms like iTunes and YouTube has “insidiously” hampered the present’s ability to develop its own unique identity (57).

Reynolds’ diagnosis of the contemporary music industry as ‘retromanic’ reflects a somewhat dated perspective on nostalgia put forth by earlier ‘mode’ nostalgia theorists like Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard in the 1980s and early 90s. They argued that the breakdown, in postmodern society, of modernist absolutes like truth and the existence of an individual subject meant that one could no longer strive for newness and was forced to turn, as Jameson writes, “to the past: the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture” (17-8). New past recollections were said to exist within a commodified ‘simulacrum’ where the referent was not history itself but previous simulations of

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<sup>21</sup> Other discussions of this can be found in Andreas Huyssen’s *Twilight Memories* and Joe Moran’s ‘Childhood and nostalgia in contemporary culture’.

<sup>22</sup> See Hewison, *The Heritage Industry* and Samuel, *Island Stories*.

history (*Postmodernism* 18), thus erasing historical truth; Linda Hutcheon highlights Jameson's yearning for 'genuine historicity' (203). Elizabeth Guffey notes the "sense of amoral emptiness, malaise, decline and dislocation – a kind of self-indulgent nostalgia" (16) pervading these perspectives.

Indeed, Reynolds' view that popular music is no longer 'what it used to be' is itself nostalgic. It also implies that previous music genres were entirely original and did not also borrow from earlier styles which, of course, is not true. What Reynolds has actually tapped into is a shift wherein cultural products no longer *project themselves* as original, instead openly recycling past styles to evoke nostalgia. This is true of many postmodern cultural products, including, I will argue, many contemporary eighties retrospectives. However, figuring it as regressive and antithetical to originality negates the possibility of critique from within postmodern nostalgic forms. As such, I tend to agree with more recent literature that recovers nostalgia, pointing both to its regressive and its progressive forms. This is framed in varying ways, some more useful than others. Stuart Tannock argues that nostalgia's negative associations arise in particular from its association with reactionary and conservative politics (455), suggesting that nostalgia can be used for either 'retreat' or 'retrieval', either to flee from the present or to "comb the past for every sense of possibility and destiny it might contain" (458). While I agree that nostalgia's negative associations are historical in origin, Tannock's argument is predicated upon the modernist assumption that 'looking to the future' is always better than 'looking to the past'.

In contrast, recoveries of nostalgia that emphasise its *ironic* potential allow it to function as more than a tool for building a better future. Svetlana Boym outlines two forms of nostalgia, 'restorative' and 'reflective', arguing that the former tries to restore the past, metaphorically erasing historical time and experiencing the past as it supposedly 'really was' in the present. This is nostalgia as it is appropriated by essentialist groups: "Displacement is compensated by a return home, preferably a collective one" (44). 'Restorative nostalgia' takes itself seriously, whereas 'reflective nostalgia' approaches the past ironically, revelling in its imperfections and reflecting on the passage of time up to the present (50). Similarly, Linda Hutcheon argues that

although most commercial nostalgia is not ironic, some – what she terms postmodern nostalgia – *is*, “undermin[ing] modernist assertions of originality, authenticity, and the burden of the past” (206). Instead of being the antithesis to originality, nostalgia can therefore question the modernist belief in true originality. In *Retro: The Culture of Revival*, Elizabeth Guffey also suggests that ironic nostalgia can put modernist “visions in perspective, to see the unshakeable faith in Modernity as limited in scope” (25). Guffey calls ironic nostalgia ‘retro’, qualifying it as *contemporary* ‘retro’ rather than previous conceptions of ‘retro’.<sup>23</sup> This usefully distinguishes ironic nostalgias from less self-conscious ones, and will be how I employ the term ‘retro’ in subsequent chapters.

### **Nostalgia and Retro in Film and Television**

Theories of nostalgia have been vastly applied to the analysis of film and television and it is unnecessary to discuss them all here. As such, I am mostly limiting my scope to literature that focuses on representations of the *recent* past. However, because the period film genre has played such a significant role in British cinema, some literature on recent British screen fictions set in remoter periods must be discussed to situate those set in the recent past within this debate and to understand how they have often been read. I will also examine certain theories on American period genres, as depictions of the post-war period have figured more prominently in these discussions and, as I will elaborate on below, many Eighties Cycle productions share more in common with their American counterparts than with earlier British films and shows set in recent decades.

#### Debates on British Period Genres from the 1980s, 90s and Early 2000s

As I have already discussed, popular British period dramas produced in the 1980s like *A Room with a View* sparked a debate in the 1990s concerning their relationship to the growing heritage industry and the ideologies of Thatcherism. Drawing partly from Fredric Jameson’s work on postmodern historical representation, theorists like Andrew Higson and Tana Wollen popularised a reading of these films as heritage products that

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<sup>23</sup> Guffey’s concept of ‘retro’ is partly derived from the concept of ‘retrochic’ proposed by Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* 83-114.

invited audiences to nostalgically indulge in the spectacle of Old England. However, this theory assumes that aesthetically pleasurable screen fictions trading within a nostalgic commodity culture cannot also be critical, which is problematic for several reasons. First, it sees audiences as passive consumers who are unable to read texts critically. However, Pam Cook rightly notes that “consumption is never simply passive, since it involves skills, knowledge, negotiation and discrimination” (222). In her critique of the charges laid against the heritage film, Claire Monk notes the absurdity of suggesting that “the viewer’s conservative, consumerist ‘nostalgic gaze’ – supposedly fascinated by ‘country houses’ [...] rather than human bodies, behaviour or desires” would override all matters apart from aesthetics (‘The British heritage-film’ 191).

Monk identifies another reason why the heritage critique is problematic: it assumes that all period dramas are produced under a similar agenda and do not vary in perspective or degree of critical inquiry. She correctly attributes this assumption to the historical nature of the debate, arguing that it stemmed from a combination of the intellectual left’s antagonistic relationship to the Thatcher government, the Thatcher government’s endorsement of heritage culture, and the emergence of right-wing criticisms of low-budget films set in contemporary Britain as apparently dissolute (177, 189-90). Still, Monk notes that the heritage-film critique has had a lasting impact on the academic perception of British period drama. She writes that despite “substantial changes” to the aesthetic of period films in the 1990s, made in an effort to shed the period drama’s reputation as stuffy and conservative, “the term ‘heritage film’ continues to be applied and disseminated ever more widely. Heritage-film criticism has become as effective a commodity in the academy as heritage films have been in the cinema” (182).

It is important to note the persistence of this perspective because it has, I argue, compelled several theorists to regard British films representing the recent past *in opposition* to more traditional British period dramas set in pre-modern or modern eras, usually Victorian or Edwardian. Just as Claire Monk argues that heritage films are “declared politically objectionable as much *because* they showed the ‘middle and upper classes [...]’ as because of *how* they showed them” (‘The British heritage-film’ 190), there is an implied assumption in some literature that period dramas set in recent, post-

empirical decades are automatically more progressive than and always necessarily subvert the conventions of traditional British period dramas. For instance, Robert Murphy argues that in Gillies MacKinnon's films *The Playboys* (1992), *Small Faces* (1995) and *Hideous Kinky* (1999), set in the 50s, 60s and 70s respectively, "it is his evocation of the recent past [...] that marks him out as an original and interesting director. Deliberately avoiding the sort of surface detail dwelt upon by heritage films, he recreates the period through the dilemmas and decisions faced by his characters" ('A Path' 12-3). This implies both that all 'heritage films' dwell on surface detail and that representing more recent periods will automatically subvert this.

As Murphy's essay was published in 2000, it does not consider any Eighties Cycle productions. However, Andrew Higson makes a similar assumption over a decade later in *Film England*. Despite acknowledging the complexity of the heritage debate in *English Heritage, English Cinema*,<sup>24</sup> Higson still appears plagued by his distinction in 'Re-presenting the National Past' between conservative period dramas and those set in contemporary Britain, which he argues are more progressive in their depictions of alternate class, ethnic and sexual identities. In *Film England*, this outlook influences his reading of period films set in the recent past, which he argues present a "new, more democratic vision of England" because "most of them focus on ordinary Englishness rather than the culture and identity of the privileged" and "are highly localised in terms of setting and subject matter" (*Film England* 243). Higson references several films including *East is East* (Damien O'Donnell, 1999), *Vera Drake* (Mike Leigh, 2004) and *Control*, ignoring the extraordinarily differing agendas of and perspectives in these films. Even more questionably, he argues that British films set in the recent past are often similar to contemporary social dramas, citing *Billy Elliot* and *This is England* as examples (*Film England* 33). This reveals an unwillingness to consider British films set in recent periods as part of a *third*, alternate genre. While *Billy Elliot* and *This is England* are not like period dramas set in the pre-modern and modern eras, nor are they meant to be read as contemporary. They are quite *self-consciously* set in the past, but it

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<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, pgs. 1-2.



is not to uphold notions of traditional Englishness, which is what appears to confuse Higson.

Higson's analysis is unusually reductive, but it reflects an occasional tendency in literature to place limited importance on British films set in the recent past. In *British National Cinema*, Sarah Street points to the biopic as a "dominant genre" in 1980s British cinema, citing such films as *Dance with a Stranger* and *Sid and Nancy* (Alex Cox, 1986). However, terming them 'biopics' implies that their goal is primarily to scrutinise figures in recent history rather than to evoke a sense of nostalgic pastness. Furthermore, they are again read in opposition to what she calls "classic heritage films" (105), and still in some sense 'contemporary'. She writes that "the nostalgic elements were [...] invested with an uneasy contemporary gloss which co-existed with the familiar visual pleasures offered by period spectacle" (105), suggesting that themes expressed in them like concerns surrounding "homosexual relations and non-conformist women" (105) more readily offered them up for comparison with the present. While I do not contest her assertion that 1980s biopics "indicate contemporary fears" (105), framing them primarily as contemporary dramas with an added dash of period detail closes off discussions on how they might indicate a growing interest, from the 1980s onward, in post-war nostalgia for its own sake.

Within literature that *focuses* on British screen fictions set in recent decades, the distinction between conservative 'heritage' dramas and critical recent-past dramas is sometimes upheld by disregarding those in the latter category that are not historically critical. Phil Powrie does this in 'On the Threshold Between Past and Present', where he acknowledges certain recent-past screen fictions that tend toward "cosy nostalgia" (316) but implies that they are not as worthy of attention as more fragmented and critical productions like *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (Terence Davies, 1988) that he terms 'alternative heritage' films. In doing so, Powrie denies the significance of 'nostalgia' and 'retro' as contemporary discourses, implying that period spectacle is always a sign of retreat from the present rather than a mode that can be used either regressively or subversively. Amy Sargeant makes a similar argument in 'The content and the form', where she examines three British films, *Scandal* (Michael Caton-Jones, 1989), *Velvet*

*Goldmine* (Todd Haynes, 1998) and *The Cement Garden* (Andrew Birkin, 1992), which she terms 'retro' films. Her title is taken from Hayden White's book, *The Content of the Form*, and she borrows from his suggestion that all histories are products "of processes of condensation, displacement, symbolization, and qualification" ('Historiography and Historiophoty' 1194) when she writes that "films and television should be considered as media which produce history rather than just record or represent it" (200).

Sargeant suggests that *Scandal* is a conventional historical drama that presents events in a linear manner, while *Velvet Goldmine* invokes a particular time but plays with its referents inconsistently and inauthentically, and *The Cement Garden* evades evoking an era altogether, standing "out of time and archetypally for all time" (214). As a result, she contends that while *Scandal* can be used as "valid history" (214) and *The Cement Garden* successfully conveys "a sense of generalised pastness beyond any particular moment in time" (214), *Velvet Goldmine* fails to engage successfully with history, as "it is unclear to what sort of history it aspires" (214). Yet, this is because *Velvet Goldmine* instead engages with *popular culture* and its appropriations of the past. Sargeant insists on reading the film "from a historical perspective", leading her to be "less concerned by the incoherence between various stylistic aspects of the film and the licence taken in its reconstruction of its assumed period location than by its incapacity to resolve its narrative" (210). However, when approached from this perspective *Velvet Goldmine* inevitably falls short because its significance lies in its stylistic aspects and the licences taken in its period reconstruction.

I do not intend to argue for the significance of *Velvet Goldmine* here, but merely to point to a significant gap in literature on British recent-past screen fictions. Generally, they do not allow for criticality from within *postmodernist* representations of the past which trade in artifice, generally preferring *modernist* films which break down and expose artifice. Although I will return to this distinction momentarily, it is first pertinent to note that this issue has been identified (albeit put differently) by Pam Cook in *Screening the Past*, where she writes,

Those approaches that concentrate on what historical fictions have to say about the present tend to retrieve the contemporary social message from behind the trappings of historical reconstruction, which are rarely discussed in their own

right. If they are discussed, they are often perceived in negative terms as carriers of ideological messages contaminated by consumerism. The images themselves are seen as commodities – selling ‘us’ (the British) to ‘them’ (primarily the American market). Without denying the validity of such approaches, I would claim that historical films are far more complex and interesting than is allowed by those critiques which focus on their appeal as commodities for consumption. (219-20)

Cook rightly suggests that valued “historical fictions” tend to be rewarded for their historical messages rather than for their depictions of pastness; stylised pastness is usually framed pejoratively as a consumer product. While the pastness in many period films is linked to contemporary consumptive practices, some engage with these practices at an ironic and critical distance. Sargeant calls the films she examines ‘retro’ films, but by Elizabeth Guffey’s definition of ‘retro’, the film she considers to be the least successful is also the most ‘retro’, the film which most playfully appropriates past commodities. This is clearly due to differing definitions of the term; Sargeant appears to use ‘retro’ merely as shorthand for ‘retrospective’, but doing so suggests that all films which retrospectively represent the past can be read from a single, fixed, historical perspective.

In Pam Cook’s chapter on the 1950s-set *Dance with a Stranger* in *Screening the Past*, she offers a refreshingly dynamic perspective. She argues that while British dramas set in the recent past are “not normally perceived as historical films or costume dramas” (218), they still use conventions of period spectacle. Rather than approaching these period conventions as mere commodities, however, she argues that they “offer visual pleasure” while simultaneously triggering “collective memories of the past” and providing “narrative and other kinds of information” or commenting “ironically on the proceedings” (225). *Dance with a Stranger* is based on actual historical events, but Cook chooses not focus on its negotiation of history. She deems this inappropriate because, as she writes, the film does not “[embark] on a search for truth, analysis or explanation”, but rather “invites the audience to enter a fantasy world” (223). As such, she effectively examines the film’s world not as a reconstruction of a ‘real’ past world but as a mediated fantasy world. Like Cook, Marcia Landy acknowledges the significance of *Dance with a Stranger*’s postmodern intertextuality, noting that it “draws on other genres but reconfigures and recycles its borrowings” (160). Unlike

Cook, Landy does read the film's referential style historically; she suggests that by restructuring the media it cites, it draws connections between the 1950s and the 1980s and "offers a multivalent reading" that is "contrary to official history" (160). Yet, although Cook and Landy read the film differently, their arguments are equally persuasive because both acknowledge the value of postmodernist styles of past representation.

Cook's and Landy's analyses of *Dance with a Stranger* offer invaluable departure points for considering Eighties Cycle productions. *Dance with a Stranger* has, in fact, received wider academic attention, notably in John Hill's *British Cinema in the 1980's*. It is possible that the relative sparseness of readings taking Cook's and Landy's perspectives is due to the fact that British recent-past screen fictions operating within *Dance with a Stranger*'s particular postmodernist nostalgia mode were less commonly produced before the 2000s. Indeed, Cook notes that British films like this one are "not usually as flamboyantly spectacular" (218) as those set in the more distant past; this may have been mostly true as late as 2005 when her book was published. Yet, whatever the reason, these case-specific analyses do not provide enough to found a broader analysis of the Eighties Cycle as a whole, and this requires me to look beyond Cook's and Landy's works to literature on American nostalgia genres, where the use of period spectacle in films set in the post-war past has been discussed in far greater detail.

### Debates on American Period Genres

The closer attention paid to American films set in the recent past – often called 'nostalgia films' – is undoubtedly because they have played a more significant role in American cinema than in British cinema for several decades. Whereas popular British period dramas have commonly returned to eras before the First World War, and often to the height of the British empire, it has been noted that American nostalgia films often return to the 1950s, a decade commonly perceived as the 'height' of the 'American empire', so to speak. Literature on the American nostalgia film shares much in common with that on British period dramas, but as I have noted above, connections are rarely made between British recent-past screen fictions and the nostalgic commodity culture in which they trade; this is generally reserved for discussions of heritage films. 'Heritage'

films have been understood, however rightly or wrongly, in the context of the conservative and traditional ideologies of heritage culture, while American nostalgia films have been associated with more popular consumer trends in fashion, music and media that appeal to a younger demographic, a feature that several Eighties Cycle productions share. Furthermore, like Eighties Cycle productions, American nostalgia films represent *already mediated* periods in recent memory that carry a wealth of preconceived stylistic and ideological associations, whether from first-hand memory or from engagements with the period's media in reruns, revivals and the like.

The exemplary discussion on the American 'nostalgia film' that marks the starting point of this debate, and which is widely contested in later literature, is Fredric Jameson's in *Postmodernism*. As I have mentioned above, Jameson charts the disappearance, in postmodern culture, of absolutes and of "the individual subject" (16). The acknowledgement that true originality is impossible and the "increasing unavailability of the personal style" (16) has forced artists to turn back, repeating the styles of the past in a process known as pastiche. He argues that what he calls 'nostalgia films' use pastiche to "appropriate a missing past" (19) by reconstructing styles associated with it. Postmodern nostalgic discourse, he suggests, is unable to represent historical actuality and thus represents an always already futile attempt to relive, in the face of lost individuality, the past in the present through a consumerist indulgence in its media, fashion and music. Jameson names *American Graffiti* the "inaugural film in this new aesthetic discourse" (19).

While postmodern nostalgia films do openly acknowledge past referents, Jameson's reading negates the possibility that these texts might be critical as they are. Linda Hutcheon suggests that it is unfair to call them uncritical merely *because* they are set in the past, noting that Jameson's preference for science fiction over nostalgia "simply points to his orientation toward the very common *futuristic* dimension of an equally nostalgic utopian drive. If the present is considered irredeemable, you can look either back or forward" (204). A desire to retreat from the present can manifest itself in multiple ways and is not necessarily a *condition* of the nostalgia film. Vera Dika also takes issue with Jameson's reading. She suggests that because postmodern discourse

functions differently from modernist discourse, it demands “a shift away from modernist concerns with perspectival space, point of view, or with the film apparatus itself”, toward “the distinctive structuring of meaning in the photographic/film image, one privileging its temporality and textuality” (3). Dika argues that the location of criticism in postmodern nostalgia films often lies outside the film text itself, in its contextual references and the assumed audience response to them (103). While in modernist period dramas, criticism involved *exposing* historical realities by breaking down artifice, she suggests that in their postmodern counterparts it often involves the ironic *blockage* of truth through artifice. She argues that by reading *American Graffiti* in the context of the year it is set – one year before the Kennedy assassination – and of its closing credits, which point forward to the Vietnam War, the “enforced gaiety of the film” (94) takes on the structure of irony, highlighting America’s tendency to retreat to a time before the trauma of the Kennedy assassination and the Vietnam War. There is little of *American Graffiti*’s “enforced gaiety” in British eighties retrospectives, but the crucial point is that stylisation can function as more than visual commodity. Indeed, Paul Grainge notes that “retro need not entail memory crisis, but can suggest an increasing semiotic awareness of the textuality of the past” (‘Nostalgia and Style’ 32).

One aspect of American nostalgia cinema that has received close attention is the soundtrack, which is generally absent from discussions on British period dramas. This may be due to the emphasis on dramas set in remoter periods, which rely less on music for nostalgic cues, but music plays as crucial a role in Eighties Cycle productions. As a stylistic device, its efficacy in conjuring nostalgic sentiments is often noted.<sup>25</sup> Christine Sprengler highlights the privileged position of the song as a “mnemonic prompt” in American nostalgia films due to its “capacity to stir deeply felt memories of the Proustian variety” (76). In addition, although traditional music scores also cue emotional responses, popular music soundtracks have been argued to differ in their self-conscious intertextuality. David Shumway writes that they are “put together on the assumption that the audience will recognize the artist, the song, or, at a minimum, a familiar style”, and that “producers now routinely hire musical consultants to assemble

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<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, Boym 4.

a collection of songs that not only will make the movie more appealing but will also lead to sales in music stores” (36-7).<sup>26</sup> Yet, although the nostalgia soundtrack encourages nostalgic consumption, several argue that it too can be used critically. Tim J. Anderson, for instance, argues that *The Virgin Suicides* (Sofia Coppola, 1999), *Velvet Goldmine*, *Ghost World* (Terry Zwigoff, 2001) and *High Fidelity* (Stephen Frears, 2000) all ironically invoke old music genres to highlight nostalgia’s allure but ultimate futility (63).<sup>27</sup> Shumway argues that in *Dirty Dancing* (Emile Ardolino, 1987), the mixture of obscure contemporaneous songs with contemporary and noticeably anachronistic tracks “might be read as disrupting the nostalgia effect” (45). Thus, attention should always be paid to *which* music is invoked and to what end.

### The Limits of American Nostalgia Criticism

In her essay on the TV show *American Dreams* (NBC, 2002-5), Faye Woods also discusses the critical use of retro music. However, her argument indicates a place where literature on American nostalgia genres falls short of being able to speak for their British equivalents. She argues that the show, set in the 1960s, juxtaposes ‘happy’ music with montages of turbulence and violence, creating “tensions against an inscription of nostalgia to this ‘classic song montage’” (35). This, she argues, highlights how the era’s ‘realities’ were darker than its music suggests, thus subverting nostalgia. This is not necessarily invalid, but it assumes that merely exposing a decade’s problems prevents nostalgic impulses and, in turn, that nostalgia must always be for an idyllic era. Woods does not consider the possibility that *American Dreams* might actually be nostalgising a time of turbulence when resistance seemed possible.

The notion that nostalgia must be for a stable period marks much of the literature on American nostalgia genres, likely influenced by the predominance of the fifties. Dika

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<sup>26</sup> Philip Drake also argues this in ‘Mortgaged to Music’, adding that popular music in nostalgia films creates “a shared discourse with the audience” (189).

<sup>27</sup> Incidentally, the discussion of *Velvet Goldmine* alongside American films without any national distinction is interesting; it gives credence to the notion that many contemporary British ‘retro’ films are influenced by American genres and are understood to operate similarly to American retro films rather than constituting a distinctly national genre, as in British heritage cinema.

writes that “there seems to be a compulsion in popular culture to return to the visual material from a pre-1960s era, to a time just before the historical trauma” (207). However, the notion that a represented period is itself somehow inherently nostalgic breaks down when considering the British Eighties Cycle. The late 1970s is often associated with the ‘winter of discontent’ and the 1980s, despite being partly associated with glamour and wealth, is often remembered as a time of political polarisation, economic decline and increased poverty and unemployment. Thus, even the more nostalgic representations of the era approach it with ambivalence, and certainly never as idyllic. While, in American nostalgia genres, there is a “compulsion” to return to a point *before* “the historical trauma”, in their recent British counterparts this manifests as a compulsion to return *to* the historical trauma, if one accepts Hadley’s and Ho’s assertion that Thatcherism represents a trauma in British collective consciousness.

Because nostalgia in American period genres is often thought to long for an idyllic period, it is usually suggested that regressive or at the very least uncritical productions depict the past as quaint and trivial. Dika argues this in reference to *Grease* (Randal Kleiser, 1978); she writes, “The attitude built into *Grease* is that the past is somehow silly. [...] In *Grease* the disruptions of the past are restabilized by presenting them a-historically and by rendering them harmless” (125). In commercial nostalgia films like *Grease*, which seek to capitalise on the popularity of ‘fabricated’ notions of a decade, she argues that the “fabricated memory is now reconstructed, along with the insistence that it necessarily elicits a happy time, and then sold to younger audiences as a past that once existed and that is now relevant to them” (126). While British recent-past genres often sell a mediated version of the past to younger audiences, they do not elicit a ‘happy time’ in the same way as *Grease*. *Starter for 10*, for instance, does restabilise the past’s disruptions and render them harmless, but it also exhibits a grittiness not present in films like *Grease*.

Two essays on more recent American nostalgia films set in the eighties also distinguish between uncritical representations of the past as ‘silly’ and critical representations of it as problematic. In ‘Together in Electric Dreams’, Lesley Speed compares eighties-set films like *The Wedding Singer* (Frank Coraci, 1998) and *Grosse*



*Pointe Blank* (George Armitage, 1997) to *Grease*, calling them ‘revivalist’ and arguing that they derive humour from “aspects of personal adornment that are associated with the past” (25). Similarly, James Walters argues in ‘When People Run in Circles’ that *The Wedding Singer* celebrates “1980s popular culture, which is fondly remembered and sentimentally revived” (196). Walters contrasts *The Wedding Singer* with *Donnie Darko* (Richard Kelly, 2001), arguing that the latter employs what Dika might call a postmodern critical aesthetic. He writes that director Richard Kelly “specifically and self-consciously” cites the 1980s films of his youth, but problematises “processes of remembrance and nostalgia, restricting the extent to which emotional reminiscence might begin to foster” (198). Again, it is useful that Walters reads ironic citation as a critical device but, for reasons on which I will elaborate in Chapter 2, there are no blatantly celebratory ‘*Wedding Singers*’ against which to compare Eighties Cycle productions. This renders the process of distinguishing nostalgia from ‘retro’, in Guffey’s use of the term, less straightforward.

Still, literature on postmodernity in American nostalgia genres appears to have instigated some to consider their British equivalents less pessimistically. Apart from in Pam Cook’s chapter on *Dance with a Stranger*, this is also notable in Karen Lury’s ‘Here and Then’. Lury acknowledges that nostalgia in 90s youth films like *Trainspotting* has much to do with the fact that, due to VCRs and rental outlets, youth “select and enjoy films from both the past and the present, suggesting that this generation’s experience and connection with films is not restricted to those films currently in distribution” (103). However, she also argues that by establishing itself as a brand, the film could “parody (by being the lowest kind of brand) the whole concept of branding” (106). She continues by writing that *Trainspotting* was “made to appeal to the youth of a global, hybrid culture, where the ambivalent play, negotiation and celebration of the commodity was unavoidable in the making and understanding of identity” (107). Lury’s notion that acknowledging the inescapability of commodification in the 90s enabled *Trainspotting* to reference elements of commodity culture playfully and

ironically is less pessimistic and more dynamic than other approaches to British recent-past period fictions described above.<sup>28</sup>

### **Transmedia Theory**

Before turning to critical literature on pre-Eighties Cycle and Eighties Cycle productions, certain theories on transmedia require brief attention. These will be relevant to Chapter 5, where I argue that the BBC's *Ashes to Ashes* and Channel 4's *This is England* serials, both spin-offs, share characteristics in common with other contemporary transmedia texts. In his pivotal book on the subject, *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins identifies a shift in media production that began at the turn of the millennium wherein, as a consequence of new media developments, consumers are now "encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content" (3). Citing such franchises as *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars*, he notes that stories are now often designed to unfold across a variety of media platforms including film, television, the internet and video games, labelling this new practice 'transmedia storytelling' (97-8). As a result, he suggests that producers increasingly favour the development of imaginary worlds over characters or narratives, as they can be extended and enriched almost indefinitely with each new franchise instalment (116). Mark J. P. Wolf echoes this observation, adding that transmediality is suited to world-building because it "implies a kind of independence for its object" (247): if an imaginary world can be accessed and experienced across multiple media, it feels less dependent on a medium for its existence and, consequently, more realistic. Wolf argues that individual instalments in transmedia stories often differ from stand-alone fictions in their tendency toward digression, exposition and an unusual emphasis on minutia that might, in traditional stories, be thought to slow down the narrative (29). Both *Ashes* and the serials display these characteristics, invoking eighties style more as a backdrop for their unique imaginary worlds than to recall the audience's actual past.

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<sup>28</sup> This is also notable in Trainer's 'No Future for You', where he celebrates *Sid and Nancy* for "championing style over content, [...] emotion over truth" (154).

Jenkins and Wolf primarily cite examples from science fiction and fantasy. World-building has long been a main component of these genres, lending them easily to transmedia storytelling; as such, they tend to account for the most widely recognised examples. However, I argue in Chapter 5 that *Ashes to Ashes* and the *This is England* serials show how this practice has impacted on period fiction as well, albeit on a smaller scale. This is likely partly due to the move toward transmedia distribution in the British TV industry; Elizabeth Evans points out that in 2006, both the BBC and Channel 4 publicly announced their adoption of this approach, leading to two major shifts in the industry: first, television was now packaged to privilege a single unit over the entire flow and second, the boundaries were increasingly blurred between those who officially and traditionally controlled TV content and unofficial and non-traditional sources (56-7). Neil Perryman also notes that the success of the BBC's *Doctor Who* revival in 2005, which followed a multi-platform model that included webisodes and spin-offs, encouraged the BBC to apply this model to other productions (37). The effect of this on other genres demands further consideration, and in Chapter 5 I discuss its implications for period fiction. For this, I also draw from Michael Z. Newman's and Elana Levine's discussion on convergence-era 'quality' television serials. They identify tension in these shows between their origins in TV melodrama and their producers' wish to distance them "from 'soapy,' feminized subjects" (82). I will suggest below that this tension became increasingly identifiable in *Ashes* and the serials as their producers sought to appease what they considered to be female fans' desires. I will elaborate on this point in Chapter 5; as the literature on transmedia described here pertains specifically to my arguments in that chapter, it is better discussed in depth with reference to them.

## **Contemporary British Screen Fictions Set in the Late Seventies and Eighties**

### Pre-Eighties Cycle Productions

Karen Lury's essay on *Trainspotting* discussed above is a useful bridge to examining literature on contemporary eighties retrospectives. While I agree with Lury that *Trainspotting* engages playfully with commodity culture, it does so in a way that is reminiscent of other late 90s British films, parodying enthusiasm for 'New Britain'.

Furthermore, while it is set in the 1980s, it does not foreground the period. Indeed, Lury writes that “the music in *Trainspotting* – which includes contemporary music as well as music from the 1970s and 1980s – is integrated sensitively and is used almost entirely in a non-diegetic way, enabling it to comment on, but not periodise the events taking place” (105). This patchwork aesthetic made sense in 1996 before the explosion of eighties nostalgia; the 1980s was still too recent to be commodified like earlier periods. Despite the importance of Lury’s argument in approaching British recent-past period fictions, *Trainspotting*’s anachronistic aesthetic differs from that in representations of the late 1970s and 80s a decade later, which place higher value on the period itself as a key feature.

Late-2000s eighties retrospectives are also different from *Billy Elliot*, released in 2000 and set during the miners’ strike of 1984-5. While its period aesthetic is less anachronistic than *Trainspotting*’s, its agenda has been argued to align with ‘New Britain’ ideologies, with which I agree. David Alderson argues that the film’s underlying ideology reflects the neoliberal approach of combatting ‘social exclusion’ “not by reducing social inequalities [...] but by sponsoring individuals to rise out of the social class into which they are born in consequence of its definition of equality now in terms of opportunity” (1-2).<sup>29</sup> Mike Wayne also argues this, adding that the film’s retro aesthetic is meant to evoke an “amelioration of circumstances and/or [...] transformation of the self” (287) as the apparent result of commodity culture’s triumph over traditional class culture. As such, *Billy Elliot* is seen as complicit with New Britain’s optimistic entrepreneurial and individualistic spirit and, significantly, may be set in the past but idealises the future.

Two films that are more difficult to place are *Velvet Goldmine* and *24 Hour Party People*. Some literature on *Velvet Goldmine* points to the beginnings of a globalised British nostalgia cinema more influenced by trends in global consumer culture. Hence Stephen doCarmo argues in ‘Beyond Good and Evil’ that the film explores “oppressive *and* liberatory” (397) perspectives on mass culture. This is not

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<sup>29</sup> This reading of *Billy Elliot* has been echoed in several essays, such as in John Hill’s ‘A Working-Class Hero is Something to Be’ and in Mercedes Camino’s ‘Good Luck With the Strike’.

vastly different from what Lury claims *Trainspotting* does, but unlike *Trainspotting*, theorists like Tim J. Anderson also highlight nostalgic impulses in *Velvet Goldmine* that align it with productions released after 2005. However, as it was released in 1998, it is not especially inspired by late seventies or eighties nostalgia which, as noted in the introduction, took hold several years later; instead, it engages primarily with seventies music nostalgia. *24 Hour Party People*, about Factory Records founder Tony Wilson (Steve Coogan), is equally difficult to place. Literature tends to relate it to 90s ‘Cool Britannia’ and ‘new lad’ trends; John Orr suggests that it displays the “gross laddishness and mischief-making of British rock and roll” (16), while Simon Reynolds calls it a “post-*Trainspotting*” film that is “relentlessly lively” (260). However, Joe Barton rightly identifies tension in the film between its optimism for the Manchester music scene’s creative energy and its self-conscious, irreverent and ironic style (Barton). This is possibly due to the fact that the film was released slightly later, in 2002, thus reflecting increasingly ambivalent views on ‘New Britain’ and on the future in general. Still, like *Velvet Goldmine* it predated eighties revivalism and its cut-and-paste aesthetic is designed to appeal to niche audiences of Factory fans and arty filmgoers rather than to broader tastes for seventies and eighties nostalgia.

### Eighties Cycle Productions

Among films and series which I have identified as part of the Eighties Cycle, academic attention is limited; most have received no serious attention. However, a handful have, most notably *Control*, *This is England* and its subsequent serials and *Ashes to Ashes*, as well as isolated studies on the football hooligan films *Awaydays*, *The Firm* and *Cass* and on the BBC mini-series *The Line of Beauty*. These are often considered critically alongside contemporary social dramas, other non-period-specific genres or, in the case of *This is England*, as a work in an auteur’s wider oeuvre. This is true for *Control*, about Joy Division frontman Ian Curtis. Tom Whittaker argues that both it and *Radio On* (Chris Petit, 1979), which was released contemporaneously with Joy Division, use sound to catch “a moment between the post-industrial and the global, the old and the new, [...] conjur[ing] up an atmosphere of social and economic stasis” (424). Here, *Control* is discussed alongside a film made in the late 70s and set in the

present, as if the distinction is not worth acknowledging. Noel McLaughlin does acknowledge *Control*'s retrospectivity, as I will elaborate on below, but like Whittaker, he compares it to a film that is neither set in the past nor fictional: the 1988 documentary *U2: Rattle and Hum* (Phil Joanou, 1988). This is not to consider how a retrospective film compares to a contemporaneous one, but merely to compare filmic depictions of U2 and Joy Division. So too is John Orr more or less unconcerned with *Control*'s status as period fiction. He relates it to various European art cinema trends, arguing, for instance, that the film's minimal use of dialogue compares it to the work of Robert Bresson (18). While he does note director Anton Corbijn's status as one of Joy Division's original photographers, writing that the echoes of his photography lend the film an "air of *déjà vu*" (15), he claims that its gloomy aesthetic is not nostalgic (16), assuming, as discussed above, that nostalgia only applies to cheerful depictions of the past.

Along similar lines, Nicola Rehling examines the football hooligan films *Awaydays*, *The Firm* and *Cass* alongside other films about football hooliganism set in the present. She argues that some are set in the past because, while sometimes self-conscious, they seek to display "nostalgic fantasies of hooliganism" (163). While some (although certainly not *Awaydays*) display these fantasies, and while all demand consideration alongside other football hooligan films, Rehling does not note their equal relevancy to recent-past nostalgia. Also considered primarily in the context of an alternate genre is the BBC's *The Line of Beauty*, adapted from Alan Hollinghurst's 1980s-set novel of the same name. In *Consuming History*, Jerome de Groot briefly discusses how the series challenges traditional 'heritage' television serials by mimicking their codes and conventions but introducing themes and subjects that they generally omit (193-6). As I will elaborate on in Chapter 2, de Groot's reading is sound but incomplete, as he does not consider how the serial also engages competing eighties nostalgic discourses.

The Eighties Cycle production that has received the most academic attention is *This is England*; however, like some of those discussed above, it is often considered for its depiction of modern British society as if there is not much difference between the

1980s and the present. I have already noted that in *Film England*, Andrew Higson considers British films set in the recent past to be essentially interchangeable with contemporary social dramas, and he examines *This is England*, which is set in the summer after the Falklands crisis, in this light. William Brown does the same; although he points out that *This is England* is set in the eighties, he compares it to the 2001-set *The Road to Guantanamo* (Michael Winterbottom, 2006), arguing that both films “show how Britain has been and continues to treat its own citizens from ethnic minorities as outsiders” (411). *This is England* does show this, but comparing its depiction of Britain to that in a film set in 2001 suggests that it is essentially *about* the present-day. This tendency to collapse contemporary settings and recent-past settings suggests an unwillingness to acknowledge that screen fictions set outside the eras of Empire or depicting working-class and minority identities can also be classed as period dramas.

When not discussed as a contemporary social drama, *This is England* is often framed in the context of Shane Meadows’ burgeoning status as British auteur. In their introduction to the edited collection *Shane Meadows: Critical Essays*, Martin Fradley, Sarah Godfrey and Melanie Williams call *This is England*’s victory in the Best Film category at the 2008 BAFTAs the “moment that marked Shane Meadows’ indelible entry into the British cinema canon” and note that the British Film Institute’s choice to feature an image from it on its third edition of *The British Cinema Book* asserted both the film and its director as “emblematic of British national cinema” (1). Fradley, Godfrey and Williams organised a conference dedicated to his work, ‘Straight Outta Uttoxeter’, at the University of East Anglia in 2010, eventually leading to the aforementioned collection’s publication and further confirming his legitimacy as a British artist. The press has also advanced this reputation, often dubbing him the “Scorsese of the Midlands” (Said).

Accordingly, when discussed critically, the film is often situated within his oeuvre and textually and thematically linked to his other work. For instance, Jill Steans compares it to *TwentyFourSeven* (Shane Meadows, 1997), examining how both films express a post-Thatcherite disenchantment with politics that speaks to the political zeitgeist of contemporary youth. Sarah N. Petrovic compares the film to *Somers Town*

(Shane Meadows, 2008), arguing that both films contend “with the issue of hybridity, or the melding of previously separated cultures” (127) by mapping English cultural shifts onto space and location. Martin Fradley and Sean Kingston compare *This is England*’s representation of fatherhood to that in a series of his works (172). These auteur-oriented readings should not be discredited nor deemed irrelevant; Meadows’ consistent focus, across a variety of films, on regional and post-Thatcherite, post-working-class issues, as well as his development of a unique authorial style that David Forrest defines as part of an emergent ‘new British realism’ – characterised by the melding of traditional British realist conventions with “a more liberated textual approach” (37) – are certainly worthy of attention, as they reveal changes in contemporary British national cinema. However, these approaches encourage *This is England* to be read as a work of art rather than as a popular film that engaged with and impacted on future industrial and cultural trends.

There are, however, some who have focused more directly on the film’s relationship to nostalgia. These include Mark Sinker in ‘*Control, Joe Strummer: The Future Is Unwritten, This is England*’ and Tim Snelson and Emma Sutton in ‘A Message to You, Maggie’. Sinker argues that *This is England*, *Control* and the documentary *Joe Strummer: The Future is Unwritten* (Julien Temple, 2007) express longing for the authenticity of supposedly ‘pre-consumerist’ subcultural music movements. I will return to this argument with reference to *Control* below; in relation to *This is England*, it is partly true. Meadows has implied in interviews that he is nostalgic for subcultural modes of dress, and he relates their decline to the rise of consumer culture in an article for *The Guardian*, writing that as people “were given a little bit of land, the right to buy their council house and put a little satellite dish on the front of it”, they “became content and lost their will to rock the boat” (Meadows, ‘Under My Skin’). However, as I will argue in Chapter 4, this is one of several competing historical narratives at work in Meadows’ film. Snelson and Sutton acknowledge the film’s narrative multiplicity, arguing that it synthesises collectively shared systems of knowledge surrounding 80s subcultures (notably, the work of Dick Hebdige and those at the CCCS) and music movements like Ska and Oi! to appeal to older viewers familiar with the subject matter, while invoking retro style to appeal to younger audiences. This more dynamic approach rightly situates the film within a nostalgic cultural climate and



acknowledges the differing audiences to which it appeals. However, Snelson and Sutton spend much of their chapter outlining the histories with which the film engages and very little considering *how* they are depicted in the film and what this might say about how they are consumed in the present.

As mentioned above, *Control* is also linked to contemporary nostalgia in McLaughlin's and Sinker's essays. McLaughlin is less concerned with *Control*'s status as period fiction than with its depiction of Joy Division, but he does write that "rock and popular music – or more accurately its legacy in the form of popular musical nostalgia – has begun to play an interestingly conspicuous role in the types of heritage enterprise that have become a central plank in the culture industries" (102). However, McLaughlin also writes that in "one vital sense it is surprising that *Control* was so well-received critically as generally fans are resistant to imitations of originals" (108). This reveals that he first and foremost considers *Control* to be a Joy Division film for Joy Division fans, overlooking what likely appealed to younger audiences unaware of the 'original': the film's nostalgic aesthetic. McLaughlin figures *Control* in relation to the "culture industries", or as Paul Grainge might describe it, as indicative of a nostalgic mode; as described above, Mark Sinker reads *Control* as indicative of a nostalgic mood. He argues that it expresses nostalgia for Joy Division's originality, writing that "if Curtis hated Macclesfield, this camerawork certainly doesn't. [...] *Control*'s [palette] is rigorously monochrome – but the effect is to bring the inanimate to life" (27). However, Sinker also makes the mistake of assuming that *Control* is produced for Joy Division fans, focusing mostly on the band's impact and suggesting that the film satisfies fans' longing for return. In so doing, he ignores how the film engages contemporary audiences' familiarity with and taste for late-seventies and eighties revivals, whether fans of Joy Division or not, as I will elaborate on in Chapter 4.

Apart from literature on *Control*, *This is England*, Rehling's essay on football hooligan films and de Groot's consideration of *The Line of Beauty*, the only Eighties Cycle productions that have received significant academic attention are Channel 4's *This is England* serials and *Ashes to Ashes*. Two chapters in Fradley's, Godfrey's and Williams' Shane Meadows collection discuss the Channel 4 serials: Robert Murphy's

‘After Laughter Comes Tears’ and David Rolinson’s and Faye Woods’ ‘Is This England ’86 and ’88?’. Murphy’s chapter is a mostly closed textual study of *This is England* ’88; examining the serial’s characterisation, soundtrack and dominant themes, he suggests that it “proves that the provincial, the powerless, the ordinary lead interesting enough lives to provide drama and tragedy” (208) and confirms Meadows’ status as an accomplished British auteur. Although a fair analysis, the relative absence of cultural or industrial context renders it peripheral to this study. Rolinson’s and Woods’ chapter, which discusses both serials, is of greater relevance. They consider how the serials engage audiences’ collective familiarity with British TV, referencing the televisual past to map television onto the domestic sphere as a site of memory. Rolinson and Woods note the serials’ transmediality and usefully situate them within TV culture; however, as I will argue in further depth in Chapter 5, they do not fully consider the serials’ function within the broader network of narratives, products and nostalgic discourses that now encompass the *This is England* series, thus ignoring how the serials and their advertising satisfy the contemporary palate for transmedial worlds.

*Ashes to Ashes* has also received some academic attention, although this has so far almost exclusively been framed in comparison to the show’s predecessor, *Life on Mars*. This is unsurprising as *Life on Mars* was highly popular and original, while *Ashes to Ashes* was merely a spin-off, and much of the literature on *Life on Mars* was published before *Ashes* had concluded its run. Still, it has meant that most literature indicates *how* *Ashes* functions apart and differently from *Mars* without thoroughly investigating *why*. For instance, James Chapman correctly situates *Life on Mars* within “a lineage that extends back to the 1950s and the emergence of television as a mass medium” (11). He comprehensively outlines its generic origins in cop shows like *The Sweeney* (ITV, 1975-8) and in science fiction, revealing how it cleverly appropriates and self-consciously engages viewers’ familiarity with their codes and conventions. Similarly, Amy Holdsworth suggests that *Life on Mars* reveals the cultural value of television memory by filtering “the detail of everyday life in 1973 [...] through television’s past and its self-conscious use of the crime genre” (*Television, Memory* 110). However, *Ashes to Ashes* receives only a passing mention from Holdsworth (*Television, Memory* 113), and while Chapman dedicates a final section of his essay to

its first series (the only series to have aired before the essay's publication), he does not analyse it in great depth, concluding only that it follows a similar format but promotes Gene Hunt (Philip Glenister) to main character and is more ideologically conservative (16-7). As I will elaborate on in Chapters 2 and 5, these observations are accurate but beg further inquiry into what underlies *Ashes*' consistencies with and departures from *Mars*.

Attention on *Ashes* is also lacking in Stephen Lacey's and Ruth McElroy's *Life on Mars* edited collection. In their introduction, they make similar observations on *Ashes* to Chapman (10-3), but note that the book focuses primarily on *Mars* and that although they are writing after *Ashes*' conclusion, their contributors could comment on little more than its first series. Although *Ashes* is at least briefly mentioned in several chapters, it is never the primary focus. As such, it is unnecessary to outline every chapter that remarks on it here, but the relevance of some is worth establishing. Nichola Dobson argues that *Mars* is innovative in combining hybridised genres with nostalgia and narrative complexity. She suggests that *Ashes* fails to engage its audience in *Mars*' "knowing, postmodern way" (40) because it lacks effective television references. However, I will argue subsequently that this is because *Ashes* has *different* frames of reference: eighties revivalism and the *Life on Mars* world. Matt Hills does not discuss *Ashes*, but his chapter helpfully links *Mars* to trends in new media and media convergence. He suggests that it simultaneously expresses nostalgia for the quaintness of old media and fantasies of immersion initiated by new media, arguing that its quickly recognisable world reflects the needs of a multi-channel environment (111). Although he does not discuss how this applies to *Ashes*, his analysis provides a useful starting point for discussing *Ashes*' transmediality. Finally, Ruth McElroy analyses online postings from *Mars*' and *Ashes*' female fans, arguing that their fondness for Gene Hunt's traditional virility demonstrates postfeminist 'retrosexuality'. McElroy's analysis is valuable in Chapter 5, where I consider Gene Hunt fandom from a different angle, considering how it initiated *Ashes*' producers to alter *Mars*' established dynamic between him and his present-day detective counterpart. However, I also contest McElroy's assumption that the choice among some female fans to dress in eighties-inspired costumes for *Ashes*' finale necessarily reflected their desire to regress to a

supposedly simpler era, instead noting that it can equally reflect their longing for immersion in the show's universe, much like fancy-dressing fans of other fantasy worlds.

## **Conclusion**

Although McLaughlin highlights the increasing presence of “popular music nostalgia” in the contemporary culture industries and a handful of theorists situate individual productions in broader nostalgic contexts, the films and series on which I focus in this study have not yet been academically linked on the basis of their eighties settings. Even Sinker, who compares *Control* to *This is England*, does so on the basis of their common depictions of late 1970s and early 1980s *rock cultures* rather than to consider both as period films. This reflects a wider tendency in literature on British period screen fiction to place limited emphasis on the significance of post-war representations of the past. They are often discussed as alternatives to British ‘heritage’ genres or as depictions of contemporary Britain, and when they are considered as responses to pop cultural nostalgia and revivalism, this tends to be on a case-by-case basis. Their growing presence in British film and television, however, demands that they be considered alongside one another as examples of a distinct, recent-past screen fiction genre. In the upcoming chapters, I will begin to fill this critical gap by drawing on literature discussed in this review on the (both real and imagined) effects of social change in the 1970s and 80s, on recent British cinema, on contemporary media's impact on memory, on the present cultural uses of nostalgia and retro and on transmedia practices. This study will also further engage with debates on British and American period dramas and with literature that discusses individual Eighties Cycle productions. Accordingly, it will reveal how the thirty eighties retrospectives released between 2005 and 2011 interrelate and form a distinct cycle, speculating on the various functions that ‘the eighties’ served for the film and television industries during this time.

## Chapter 2

### EMBRACING THE REPELLENT: THE EIGHTIES AS STYLE

In an article published in 2010, Simon Reynolds charts what he calls the “endless 1980s [music] revival that has run the entire course of the noughties” (‘The 1980s Revival’). He describes a series of global movements in popular music that emerged in the first part of the decade with bands like Interpol and LCD Soundsystem, which recycled post-punk, new wave and ‘mutant disco’, and continued on in the latter part of the 2000s with the explosion of electroclash, a fusion of 80s new wave synthpop with 90s techno epitomised by artists like Peaches and Fischerspooner. The revival Reynolds describes also materialised in the world of fashion; it was first reported in 2001 (Kleinman) and garnered significant attention in fashion magazines and blogs throughout the decade. In the September 2009 edition of *Teen Vogue*, for instance, Evonne Gambrell calls the 1980s “the decade that just won’t quit” (116) (Figure 1). It was amidst these revivals that the British eighties film cycle materialized and it would be near-sighted not to link them, especially because the UK’s was not the only film industry to raid the eighties in this period. In Hollywood, for instance, several adaptations of 1980s TV shows and films were released, including *The Dukes of Hazzard* (Jay Chandrasekhar, 2005), *Miami Vice* (Michael Mann, 2006) and *Footloose* (Craig Brewer, 2011), while filmmakers explored the cultural landscape in artier films like *Donnie Darko* and *The Informers* (Gregor Jordan, 2008). Eighties iconography was culturally exchanged at the global level in the 2000s and eighties-set films emerged from multiple nations, as Sweden’s *Let the Right One In* (Tomas Alfredson, 2008) and New Zealand’s *Eagle vs Shark* (Taika Waititi, 2007) exemplify.

Thus, although the British Eighties Cycle was comparatively unique in breadth, the British fascination with the eighties in the late 2000s was not nationally specific. In addition, and more significantly, the above global revivals reveal that the Eighties Cycle did not *necessarily* reflect what Paul Grainge calls a nostalgic ‘mood’ in Britain. As outlined in Chapter 1, Grainge argues that nostalgia is sometimes theorised as a ‘mood’ that develops in response to sociocultural dissatisfaction with the present, and at other



**Figure 1:** An article in *Teen Vogue* on the latest “eighties revival” in fashion (Gambrell 116, 118).

times as a ‘mode’, or a style that is reflective of temporal breakdown and the favouring of the image in postmodern culture (‘Nostalgia and Style’ 28). As I will elaborate on below, a nostalgic mood does occasionally underlie the use of eighties iconography, but not always. This is because ‘mode’ nostalgias like the 2000s eighties revival arise not from a longing for the past but as a consequence of the “perpetual circulation and recirculation of signs” (246) that Jim Collins calls ‘the array’. Nostalgic modes, or styles, become increasingly prevalent as it becomes quicker and easier to access recycled media through home viewing technologies like DVD players and internet platforms like Netflix and YouTube. The wide collection of past media that is available to contemporary audiences leaves them both aware of old styles and accustomed to seeing them recycled in contemporary settings.

Thus, the predominance of eighties iconography in film, television, music and other popular cultures does not necessarily reveal a longing to retreat from the present. However, some have argued that it does erase the contextual significance of the revived genres. Reynolds suggests as much in his *Guardian* article; on electroclash he muses,

This was confusing for those of us who'd been around in the actual 1980s and for whom 'electro' meant something specific [...]. In the noughties, electro came to refer to something much more vague: basically, any form of danceable electronic pop that sounded deliberately dated, that avoided the infinite sound-morphing capacities of digital technology (i.e. the programs and platforms that underpinned most post-rave dance) and opted instead for a restricted palette of thin synth tones and inflexible drum machine beats. ('The 1980s Revival')

In other words, Reynolds laments the replacement of the revived music genres' diverse original meanings with one over-arching meaning: retro style. Other narratives frame 2000s eighties revivalism similarly, arguing that it commodified an abstract pastness that concealed historical specificities.<sup>30</sup> Yet, this reading oversimplifies the eighties as a nostalgic mode; just as it is sometimes used to express a nostalgic mood and sometimes not, it sometimes simplifies meaning and sometimes complicates it. Reynolds' argument recalls Fredric Jameson's 1991 assertion that the past has become "a multitudinous photographic simulacrum" (18) that indicates the triumph of late capitalism and the death of historicity. Yet, as detailed in Chapter 1, Jameson's take on postmodern nostalgia implies that because it engages commodity culture, it necessarily endorses it. Just as it cannot be taken for granted that the eighties mode indicates a desire to regress to a simpler time, it cannot be assumed that it is necessarily commodified or uncritical.

Still, as noted above, nostalgic modes and nostalgic moods do occasionally intersect. When Reynolds asserts that 2000s electro rejected the 'infinite' capacities of digital technology in favour of restrictive 'thin synth tones', he implies that eighties revivalism is rooted in anxieties around rapid technological change, regressing to a time when consumer culture was supposedly more authentic. Although not universally applicable, this interpretation of eighties recycling can, as I will elaborate on below, be applied to some productions in the Eighties Cycle. These are the ones in which Collins might read 'new sincerity', as they "purposely evad[e] the media-saturated terrain of the present in pursuit of an almost forgotten authenticity, attainable only through a sincerity that avoids any sort of irony or eclecticism" (257). As noted in Chapter 1, Paul Grainge,

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<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, Sternbergh, 'Hippies, Disco & Pac-man'.

Mark Jancovich and Sharon Monteith identify ‘new sincerity’ in American and British period films of the 1990s like *The English Patient* (Anthony Minghella, 1996), differentiating them from the ‘eclectic irony’ in films like *Boogie Nights*.

Grainge’s, Jancovich’s and Monteith’s observation offers a useful bridge to considering how Collins’ ‘new sincerity’ and ‘eclectic irony’ categories can be applied to contemporary retrospective productions, but by labelling period dramas as eclectic and ironic because they use “stylistic codes of media, music and fashion to create period ‘feel’” (533), they imply that productions set in very recent decades are naturally ironic and immune to sincerity. In this chapter, I will instead suggest that the same stylistic codes can be mobilised to both ends and that, in fact, irony and sincerity exist alongside one another – sometimes within the same texts – over the course of the British Eighties Cycle. I will examine four productions from the cycle closely: the BBC’s *Life on Mars* spin-off *Ashes to Ashes*, *The Business*, the three-part drama *The Line of Beauty* and *Submarine*. I will also look briefly at two other films: *Tuesday* and *Awaydays*. These series and films have been selected because each one draws attention to ‘the eighties’ as a style, or a system of mediated signifiers associated with the era such as trendy commodities, fashions, pop songs and so on, and each mobilises this style to a particular end.

I will argue that in *Ashes to Ashes*, stylistic irony is employed in the service of sincerity: the eighties style is lovingly mocked and implied to evoke a simpler, more authentic era. In *The Business*, *Tuesday* and *Awaydays* and *The Line of Beauty*, the eighties style is used to rework popular British genres; in *The Business* and *Tuesday*, it acts as a differentiating aesthetic to bolster the timeworn British crime genre, while in *Awaydays* and *The Line of Beauty*, it destabilises genre conventions. Finally, in *Submarine*, I will propose that the eighties style is utilised as a ‘retro’ language for contemporary youth. The chapter will reveal that, because the productions in the Eighties Cycle address media-savvy postmodern viewers with a rich awareness of eighties iconography, the eighties style can be and is called upon for multiple uses. In turn, the productions’ uses of the eighties mode implicitly reflect responses to the present world of digital media saturation that Thatcherite entrepreneurialism helped to



create and which has enabled such thorough knowledge of eighties iconography among viewers. Some of these are pessimistic, while others are accommodating or even espousing. Despite differing perspectives, all four productions discussed below assume prior familiarity with the eighties mode and call upon it not to convincingly reconstruct the 1980s, but to communicate with their contemporary audiences.

### **Through Grime-Tinted Glasses: Sincerity in the Eighties Mode**

Before discussing the uses of eighties stylistic codes in the aforementioned productions, it is necessary to explore how these codes might be read as signifiers of lost authenticity or sincerity. This is because, as charted in Chapter 1, academic readings of texts that depict an ‘authentic past’ often assume that it must act as the idyllic counterpoint to a squalid present. Jim Collins suggests that 90s genre films which fall in his category of ‘new sincerity’ recover purity “in an impossible past—impossible because it exists not just before the advent of media corruption, but because this past is, by definition, a never-never land of pure wish-fulfillment, in which the problems of the present are symbolically resolved” (257). Exemplary of this, for Collins, is *Dances with Wolves* (Kevin Costner, 1990), which depicts its past setting – the American frontier in the late nineteenth century – as simple, gentle and harmonious. As previously discussed, perspectives on nostalgic cinema often echo this notion, implying that nostalgia for authenticity is necessarily expressed by depicting the past as utopian. Theorists usually figure this either as the retreat to an inherently idyllic era, as does Vera Dika when she argues that American nostalgia films compulsively return to the fifties (207), or to sanitise a previously disfavoured era, as does Raphael Samuel in his analysis of Victorian costume dramas produced in Britain in the 1980s (*Theatres* 401-12).

These arguments are not unsound; it is true that *many* nostalgic productions frame the past as idyllic. However, they do not neatly apply to the British Eighties Cycle. The era is not easily sterilised – the late 1970s and 1980s are today remembered for both the rise of commodity culture and of unemployment, for both prosperity in the south and economic crisis in the north, and for both the victory of post-industrial society and the ravages of deindustrialisation – and no production in the Eighties Cycle attempts to do so. Even comedies set in the eighties like *Starter for 10* and *Killing Bono*

are marked by imagery of decay. *Starter for 10*, for instance, which will be examined in depth in Chapter 3, is an upbeat romantic comedy that adheres to the genre's expected codes and conventions, but its stylistic landscape is still downcast. In one of the opening scenes, protagonist Brian (James McAvoy) and his friends fraternise in his hometown of Southend-on-Sea, drinking beer in a seedy arcade with archaic video games squashed haphazardly against the wall, strolling through disorderly streets and sitting on a battered pier in gloomy weather listening to their ghetto blaster. The shots of the urban landscape suggest that this seaside tourist town has fallen into decay, while the grunginess of the arcade and awkwardness of their enormous boombox on the pier suggest a time of technological primitivism marked by media devices that are ugly and non-functional. Images like these – of deterioration, filth and technological primitivism – appear, although to varying degrees, across the Eighties Cycle, regardless of subject matter or setting. Sequences featuring abandoned buildings and dilapidated neighbourhoods, dull and dreary seascides, excessive smoking in public spaces, heavy beer drinking in run-down pubs and obsolete mechanical and early digital technologies that are depicted as primitive and unreliable all contribute to the stylistic language of the Eighties Cycle.

There are two possible reasons why eighties Britain might recurrently be coded as 'dirty', 'decaying', 'unhealthy' and so forth: first, that none of the productions in the cycle are stylistically nostalgic, or second, that in Eighties Cycle films and series, mode nostalgia works unlike it is typically thought to. I will argue here for the latter. The Eighties Cycle signals a different kind of mode nostalgia wherein codes of filth and decay are engaged both as 'cool' and as markers of sincerity. Nostalgia does not underlie all depictions of decay – as I suggest above, the eighties style is employed for differing purposes – but in productions like *Control* and *Ashes to Ashes*, for instance, the gritty landscape is presented nostalgically, implied to embody a lost cultural authenticity. To understand why, one must consider the source of these stylistic codes. Vera Dika notes that nostalgia in postmodern cinema requires its readers to examine the "structuring of meaning in the photographic/film image" (3), and images of the eighties will have partly garnered their meaning from 1980s British media. British cinema and television drama produced in the 1980s and set in the present tended toward social

realist depictions of poverty and unemployment, political corruption and cultural tensions in the face of increasingly fluid British identities,<sup>31</sup> while the increasing availability and immediacy of television media footage meant that protests, strikes and other crises figured prominently in the imagistic array of the period. Adding to this array were a number of British subcultural music and fashion movements, such as punk culture and skinhead culture, which marked the era as irreverent, crude and even, for some, dangerous. These harsh and discordant images impacted on memories of the era and, in turn, on stylistic expectation. Furthermore, British genres like Brit-grit and crime films had a notable effect on perceptions of ‘cool’ British culture, consequently leading to recycled tropes in certain Eighties Cycle productions, as I will elaborate on below.

Yet, the recurrent images of decay and grime in the Eighties Cycle do not nostalgically reference 1980s British film, television and media as directly as, for instance, the American *Chinatown* references *film noir*.<sup>32</sup> For one, these are not the only images of 1980s Britain in circulation; alongside media images of protests and strikes, television viewers saw footage of new commodities, technological innovations and the royal wedding in 1981, while subcultural movements were observed alongside mainstream power dressing, neon dancewear and so forth. Furthermore, 1980s British films and television dramas are not widely viewed by contemporary audiences. Re-runs of BBC shows like *Bread* (1986-91) and *Yes, Minister/ Yes, Prime Minister* (1980-8) on the archive TV channel UK Gold, as well as of the ITV series *Minder* (1979-94) on ITV3, maintain the presence of contemporaneous representations of the 1980s on British television, but these are exceptions, as British channels generally exhibit very few series from the 1980s. Furthermore, although DVD box-sets have rendered other 80s series accessible, they primarily appeal only to original fans because they receive such little contemporary exposure. This is also true of most British films produced and

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<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, several essays in *British Television Drama in the 1980s* (ed. George W. Brandt) and in *Fires Were Started* (ed. Lester D. Friedman), as well as John Hill’s book-length analysis of British cinema in the 1980s, which divides cinematic trends into representations of the past, which he argues are mostly nostalgic, and contemporary representations like *The Ploughman’s Lunch* (Richard Eyre, 1983) and *My Beautiful Laundrette*, which he suggests are primarily concerned with issues of class, gender, race and politics.

<sup>32</sup> See Jameson 19.

set in the 1980s, which are largely viewed either by their original admirers or in university modules. Despite occasional broadcasts on channels like Film4, they are generally less visible in television programming than popular American films from the 80s like the *Back to the Future* trilogy (Robert Zemeckis, 1985-90), which is recurrently broadcast on ITV2.<sup>33</sup> This last point is particularly significant; in the increasingly global media culture of the 2000s, a wealth of 1980s imagery available to contemporary British audiences is actually American, and Hollywood films produced and set in the 80s are significantly brighter in tone and style than their British counterparts. Visibility of British film, television and media from the 1980s is limited, so while their grittiness may have influenced some of those involved in *producing* the films and series, direct references are few and far between because familiarity cannot be assumed amongst those *consuming* the cycle, who are sometimes too young to remember the era.

The dingy and deteriorating stylistic landscape common in contemporary retrospectives is therefore not a direct reference to a media past with which audiences are expected to be familiar. Instead, it might be better understood as a ‘charge’ as described by Jim Collins. According to him, producers of hyperconscious genre films know that “icons, scenarios, [and] visual conventions continue to carry with them some sort of cultural ‘charge’ or resonance that must be reworked according to the exigencies of the present” (256). Unreliable technologies, excessive smoking and drinking, decaying streets and other similar codes may not call *specific* texts to mind for younger audiences, but they do carry a ‘charge’. They draw comparisons with their contemporary counterparts: complex digital media technologies that change at an exponential rate, the promotion of healthy living and consequent demonization of unhealthy habits like smoking and heavy drinking, and city centres that have been regenerated to appear pristine. In so doing, they signify an era of British culture that is irrevocably lost, near to the present and yet visibly foreign. Although they generalise Britain’s post-war history in doing so, they implicitly connote a pre-neoliberal world that was swiftly disappearing in the 1980s: the technological revolution that gave way to

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<sup>33</sup> *Back to the Future* was last screened on ITV2 on August 3, 2014 (‘Back to the Future’).

digital media was markedly hastened by 1980s consumerism,<sup>34</sup> concerns for personal health were a by-product of the Thatcherite rise of individualist values,<sup>35</sup> and as Brian Robson explains, the “eventual shape of regeneration policy” was developed by the Thatcher government, “against the background of massive social and economic change in the landscape of the country” (35).

Thus, the images of filth and decay that characterise the Eighties Cycle implicitly carry the ‘charge’ of a time before British culture was permanently changed. They do not signify negativity, but *difference*. This means that sometimes (although, as will become clear, not always), these images can be mobilised for nostalgic purposes, and can consequently appear favourable. Many of the productions in the Eighties Cycle were released during a time of economic crisis, and some bear the traces of disillusionment with the social changes that lead to it. In cases such as these, the heavily mediated, technologically progressing and consequently ephemeral world of the present is contrasted with the more tangible – whether analog or unsophisticatedly digital – world of the past; healthy living, which encourages responsible but seemingly boring behaviour, is contrasted with excessive drinking and smoking, which encourages the formation of social bonds; and urban regeneration, which has concealed but not solved economic difficulties, is contrasted with decaying neighbourhoods and city centres that do not try to conceal their hardship. This kind of nostalgia does not stylistically sterilise the past; instead, it pollutes it, assigning authenticity to degeneration. Furthermore, it does not, as Jim Collins suggests ‘new sincerity’ films do, locate purity “before advent of media corruption”, but rather at a time when media and media technologies are perceived to have been nascent and consequently more honest and innocent. Yet, it still implies sincerity, as it characterises the eighties as an era of straightforward settings, objects and characters. This reconfiguration of the *language* of nostalgic sincerity is important to productions in the Eighties Cycle, and to exemplify it, I will examine the television series *Ashes to Ashes*.

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<sup>34</sup> See Miles 72-77.

<sup>35</sup> See Black 19-21.

### **Back to the Eighties: *Ashes to Ashes***

The BBC's three-series-long primetime show *Ashes to Ashes* began its life as a spin-off of the corporation's highly popular programme *Life on Mars*. *Mars*, created by Matthew Graham and Ashley Pharoah for BBC Wales, was a critical and ratings success for the BBC when it first aired in 2006 and 2007 (See Lacey and McElroy 1). Its success was unsurprising given an innovative concept with wide nostalgic and sci-fi appeal; it follows present-day Greater Manchester Police officer Detective Chief Inspector (DCI) Sam Tyler (John Simm) who, after being struck by a car, is transported back in time to 1973, where he discovers that he is employed as a Detective Inspector (DI) under DCI Gene Hunt (Philip Glenister). The tough, straight-talking, misogynistic Hunt, who appears to be a reincarnation of DI Jack Regan (John Thaw) from Thames Television's classic cop show *The Sweeney*, is one of a wealth of references to 1970s media that drive the series as it simultaneously pits the seventies against the present and explores its penultimate question: is Sam mad, in a coma or back in time? *Ashes to Ashes*, which aired from 2008 to 2010, is based on *Life on Mars* but is set in the early eighties and replaces Sam Tyler for DI Alex Drake (Keeley Hawes), a criminal psychologist working for the London Metropolitan Police. She is revealed to be the psychologist mentioned in *Mars*' final episode who is studying police officers' traumas and for whom Sam records his experiences. After being shot in the head, Drake is transported to 1981, where she finds that like Tyler, she is stationed as a DI working under DCI Gene Hunt and alongside secondary *Mars* characters Ray Carling (Dean Andrews) and Chris Skelton (Marshall Lancaster), who have all transferred from Manchester to London.

In his review of *That '80s Show* (Fox, 2002), which like *Ashes to Ashes* was a spin-off of a popular show set in the seventies, *That '70s Show* (Fox, 1998-2006), critic Adam Sternbergh complains that it depicts the eighties as a conflation of "Rubik's cubes, leg warmers and Pat Benatar, not AIDS, glasnost and voodoo economics" (SP.1.FR). This implies that the 'real' elements of any given era are its historical events, while popular commodities, fashions and music trends are merely surface features, and that emphasising an era's style over its social and political dimensions is reductive. *Ashes to Ashes* might also be accused of this, as neither it nor its precursor was conceived to be historically interrogating. Instead, they were developed as popular

shows that would playfully invoke familiar pop-cultural pasts for knowing audiences. This is evident in their titles, which are taken from the titles of 1971 and 1980 David Bowie singles. Significantly, and as James Chapman notes in his article on *Life on Mars*, the lyrics of ‘Life on Mars’ include “Take a look at the lawman/ Beating up the wrong guy/ Oh man! Wonder if he’ll ever know/ He’s in the best-selling show”, which Chapman rightly notes hints at the possibility that “the world that Sam and Gene inhabit is a television show” (11). Indeed, *Life on Mars*’ 1970s universe is highly referential: characters, colour palettes and frequent low-angle shots of Gene’s car remind us of popular 70s cop shows like *The Sweeney*, while 1970s television icons like, for instance, the girl from the BBC’s Test Card F often communicate with Sam through his television set.<sup>36</sup> *Ashes to Ashes* maintains this: Sam Tyler’s replacement protagonist Alex Drake is haunted by the Pierrot clown from Bowie’s music video for ‘Ashes to Ashes’ and also, like Sam, receives communication from the present via 1980s television shows. Both series are self-consciously unconcerned with recreating their respective eras ‘as they really were’, instead fusing contemporary British audiences’ mediated collective memories of the eras.

This preference for referentiality over historicity does not indicate that *Life on Mars* and *Ashes to Ashes* conflate style with period, as Sternbergh suggests does *That ‘80s Show*. Instead, it reveals the producers’ decision to target the shows’ postmodern viewers, who all engage with cultural products, fashions and commodities from the 1970s and 80s through mediated repetition and reproduction. *Ashes to Ashes* production designer Stevie Herbert notes that the period props acquired for the show are “all eBayable”; in other words, anyone could acquire them (‘Set Tour’). In a world where materials from the past are so easily accessible, it is not impressive to see the past brought ‘realistically’ to life on television. Consequently, popular texts like *Ashes to Ashes* have become less about authentically reconstructing the past and more about

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<sup>36</sup> The girl from the BBC’s Test Card F was Carole Hersee. Her image appeared on BBC test cards during down periods between transmission for more than four decades, making her a distinctive figure in collective British media memory.

embracing and self-consciously invoking the past's easy obtainability. They cannot be accused of simplifying the period, as their aim is not to accurately recreate it.

Whether or not *Ashes to Ashes* does justice to the 1980s is consequently beside the point. Instead, what is worth asking is *how* the eighties mode is invoked, as the show's use of eighties style clearly resonated with viewers. Stephen Lacey and Ruth McElroy note that *Ashes* "maintained a popular audience in the UK that was similar to that for *Life on Mars*", explaining that "the series' averages were broadly comparable" (11). Of course, it was not just because it was set in the eighties that it was so popular, but also because of its protagonist; as I will discuss in detail when I return to *Ashes to Ashes* in Chapter 5, the spin-off was primarily made to profit from Gene Hunt's enormous popularity. Executive producer Jane Featherstone claims that the team felt Hunt was "a fairly extraordinary man" and that they were "not quite done with him yet" (Gilbert, 'Ashes to Ashes'). Because of this, *Ashes to Ashes* has a different *raison d'être* from its predecessor: while *Life on Mars* is primarily driven by nostalgia for old cop shows, *Ashes* is driven by nostalgia for *Mars*. Consequently, *Ashes to Ashes* does occasionally use techniques that recall shows like *The Sweeney*, but these devices primarily reference the style of *Life on Mars*. I will return to this point in more depth in Chapter 5, where I will discuss how *Ashes* constructs a fantasy universe around the retro world established in *Mars*.

However, here, the focus will be on the show's construction of a particular eighties nostalgia that exists alongside nostalgia for *Life on Mars*. Jane Featherstone has noted that *Ashes to Ashes* was set in the eighties because it was felt that this would be more exciting than setting the sequel immediately after *Life on Mars*' conclusion in the mid-seventies ('Life after Mars'). Admiration for Gene Hunt may have inspired *Ashes to Ashes*, but the eighties mode made a new story worth telling by differentiating *Ashes* from its forerunner. I will argue here that in *Ashes*, this mode appears confused because despite an emphasis on clashes between the excesses of consumerism and the deteriorating remnants of pre-neoliberal Britain, both extremes are depicted as equally unsightly. Yet, these ugly contrasts are in fact the object of nostalgia in *Ashes*, where their absurdity is fetishized and favoured over the present's homogeneity. By



stylistically privileging the eighties, the show implicitly encourages viewers to feel dissatisfied with contemporary Britain's widespread globalisation, extensive standardisation and sterility, thus stimulating nostalgia. Still, *Ashes*' self-conscious irreverence toward eighties media prevents viewers from taking its perspective too seriously. As such, the show reveals the complex and even contradictory manner in which stylistic nostalgia operates in an era of diverse and accessible media.

Several defining elements in *Life on Mars* have a new eighties counterpart in *Ashes to Ashes*. Gene Hunt's Ford Cortina from *Mars* becomes an Audi Quattro in *Ashes*, Hunt's signature brown jacket is traded in for signature snakeskin boots, the *Mars* team's local pub The Railway Arms is replaced by Italian restaurant Luigi's in *Ashes*, and so forth (Figure 2). However, there is a significant difference between *Mars*' and *Ashes*' iconography. In *Life on Mars*, many of the settings, costumes and mise-en-scène recall those from 70s police shows; the Cortina, for instance, was one of several cars featured in *The Sweeney*. Their counterparts in *Ashes*, by contrast, are chosen to reflect transitions that have taken place in the eight years between the two series. The Quattro, one of the epitomic cars of the 1980s, denotes technological innovation and a shift toward stylistic excess, while Hunt's new attire highlights the transition to 'go-getter' consumerism. The move from an English pub to a tacky Italian restaurant indicates increasingly open markets and consequent product diversity, but also the commodification of 'exotic' products. In all ways, these stylistic changes mark the shift



**Figure 2:** Gene Hunt's Ford Cortina in *Life on Mars* (left) is traded in for an Audi Quattro in *Ashes to Ashes* (right). (*Life on Mars* publicity photo [1], *Ashes to Ashes* publicity photo [1])

to enterprise culture. Perhaps most explicit is the move from Manchester to London; if *Mars*' deindustrialised Manchester represents the last remnants of a bygone era, *Ashes*' London represents Britain's emergent post-industrial society.

Equally, London is more globally symbolic of Britain than the relatively regional Manchester. The change in locale indicates that it is the global, consumerist version of 'the eighties' that the producers wished to depict. While the seventies in *Life on Mars* is uniquely tied to Manchester, the eighties in *Ashes to Ashes* is almost an anywhere eighties. British and American music trends are fused as if they are not distinct; Edmund Butt's theme song, for instance, is inspired less by British music like new wave than by America's Journey-style stadium rock. Furthermore, global commodities are often highlighted; for example, a Rubik's cube is used as a recurrent metaphor in one episode ('Episode 1.6'). Specifically British signifiers, while not absent, are noticeably less emphasised in *Ashes* than in its predecessor. Particularly telling of this is the fact that the Test Card Girl (Rafaella Hutchinson/ Harriet Rogers) that haunts Sam in *Mars* is replaced in *Ashes* with David Bowie's Pierrot clown; although the latter is as much a British cultural reference as the former, David Bowie is a global figure and is therefore less regionally specific. Given that *Ashes to Ashes* was geared primarily at a British audience, this might be said to have less to do with widening the show's appeal than it does with the fact that in light of a growing consumer culture, collective memories of the eighties became more heavily influenced by global trends. In turn, it also indicates the extent to which contemporary viewers' collective memories of eighties Britain are globalised; it reflects a contemporary cultural array that knows few boundaries.

This global 'eighties' is also, however, characterised by stark contrasts in settings and mise-en-scène between iconography that represents the new, global, mainstream culture and that which denotes the older, distinctly British pre-neoliberal culture. Significantly, both are ugly: signs of the new are emphasised as kitschy and obnoxious, while signs of the old are depicted as filthy and decaying. Gaudy commodities like Gene's red Quattro and Alex's bright outfits are set against abandoned buildings and overgrown grass, while the absurdly lavish and orientalist set design for

Luigi's restaurant clashes with the excessive cigarette smoke that lingers in it, recalling old-fashioned pubs. Mainstream pop cultures are also contrasted with subcultures; in the soundtrack, dreamy synthpop sits uneasily alongside punk and post-punk. Often, subcultural music is reductively associated with delinquency and crime; in one scene, for instance, punk band The Buzzcocks' 'Autonomy' plays while the team locate a series of prostitutes in an abandoned building covered in graffiti ('Episode 1.3'). However, the intent is not to demonise subcultural movements over and against mainstream commodities, as the latter often signify greed and materialism. Furthermore, although punk and delinquency are often linked stylistically, young police officer Shaz (Montserrat Lombard) also dresses as a punk when not in uniform ('Episode 1.2', *Ashes*). Rather than making value judgements on various cultural and subcultural trends, the driving force behind the show's simplified contrasts appears to be to highlight *that very contrast itself* as the stylistic code of the eighties: it is an era of clashing excesses. Production designer Stevie Herbert comments that those working on the set used the motto "embrace repellent" ('Set Tour'): the settings and mise-en-scène are decidedly and *deliberately* ugly.

This begs one to ask how audiences are meant to read *Ashes*' excessive ugliness. 'Ugly' is traditionally a pejorative term, but the show's implied perspective toward this ugliness is not negative. Instead, it tends to fluctuate between parody and fetishization. Herbert comments, "We've really overstated things: the colour palettes, the reds, the props, so it sort of becomes a chance to play. It's a pastiche and parody as well as literal" ('Set Tour'). Parody drives the show's aesthetic, visible in the overt emphasis on eighties colours like black, grey and red as well as in the laughably orientalist Luigi's set design. It also underlies several media references; for instance, in the series' final episode the team emerge from the Quattro in slow motion to the theme from *Chariots of Fire* (Hugh Hudson, 1981). This ironic play on an overused, sentimental theme acknowledges, as Collins writes, "the increasing sophistication of the cinematic literacy of [...] audiences [...] but also the entertainment value that the ironic manipulation of that stored information now provides" (249). Yet, other moments tend more toward stylistic fetishization, the irony contained in funnier moments dissipating. This is typical of several highly stylised scenes like, for example, one during which Gene rescues Alex,

who is being held hostage, by shooting at a window to break it ('Episode 2.7'). Shot in slow motion, the camera focuses first on Hunt's gun, then subsequently on the slowly crumbling glass and on Hunt's snakeskin boots climbing through it, as Ultravox's 'Vienna' plays in the background. The sequence fetishizes Gene's gun, his boots and the music as signifiers of Gene's status as tough and cool.

Still, this sequence can also be read as ironically recalling the music video for 'Vienna', much of which is shot in slow motion, or even as a general reference to the increasing stylization that marked music videos during their rise in the 80s. It is this very doubleness – of simultaneous parody and fetishization – that delineates *Ashes'* approach to the eighties mode. As discussed in the literature review, Vera Dika suggests that *Grease* depicts the past as 'silly' as a way of marginalising it, explaining that the silliness "places the viewer in a privileged relation to the past and its foibles" (125). In *Ashes*, it is the *present* that is often marginalised by the show's parodic take on the eighties: the past is privileged precisely *because* it is silly, ugly and obnoxious. This is notable in an opening scene that recreates the 1983 music video for Billy Joel's 'Uptown Girl' nearly shot-for-shot with Gene Hunt in Joel's place as head car mechanic and the secondary characters in the place of the video's background singers ('Episode 3.2'). (Figure 3) The scene serves no narrative function (it is eventually revealed to be Alex's dream). Instead, it exists solely to parody an 80s music video while fetishizing Gene Hunt by severing him from his serious position as a DCI. The scene's eclecticism is pleasurable to watch, particularly because Joel's fifties-inspired video itself invoked nostalgia playfully and eclectically. As such, the music video (and by extension eighties pop culture) is simultaneously parodied and fetishized precisely because of its uniquely excessive tackiness. To emphasise this, the eighties' ugly excesses are often set against the present's homogeneity. Throughout the series, both tackiness and filth are juxtaposed with the pristine cleanliness of the present, expressing longing for a more repellent but accordingly less sterile and standardised past. When, for instance, Alex briefly wakes in a present-day hospital room, the widescreen television mounted on the wall depicts actual BBC News presenter Simon McCoy reporting on her disappearance ('Episode 2.1'). Using an actual presenter is a wink at the audience but it also augments familiarity, while whites and blues emphasise the surrounding environment's sterility



**Figure 3:** Privileging the ‘silly’ past by recreating Billy Joel’s 1983 ‘Uptown Girl’ music video. (*Ashes to Ashes* publicity photo [2]).

and lifelessness. In the ensuing scene, it is juxtaposed with a 1980s news report which, by comparison, appears awkward and primitive. However, the stylistic *novelty* of this archaic newscast places it in a privileged position in relation to the entirely ordinary scene in the present, depicting the eighties as more dynamic and, by extension, sincerer than the present.

To better understand what underlies *Ashes*’ stylistically nostalgic perspective, it is useful to consider the sincerity that is also ascribed to dating effects. In scenes depicting events that occurred in the *actual* 1980s, the film is altered to appear grainy and old-looking to aesthetically differentiate them from those that take place in the alternate eighties fantasy that Alex now inhabits. These image modifications reveal how media have affected contemporary memories of the eighties: the decade is so often recalled in blemished-looking archival videos that it is considered best depicted by mimicking a rough, vintage look. The way that *Ashes* employs this effect implies that old media is sincerer, able to capture the ‘true’ past. This suggests a shift away from 1990s expressions of sincerity identified by Collins: rather than rejecting the media array altogether by depicting a supposedly sincerer time before its advent, *Ashes* locates past sincerity in the now primitive-looking images captured by its antiquated media

technologies. Matt Hills and Amy Holdsworth note how *Ashes*' precursor, *Life on Mars*, reveals the nostalgic significance of 1970s British television, "a 'quaint' time", as Hills describes it, "when television programmes were not broadcast twenty-four hours a day, and when television sets slowly switched on and off" (109).<sup>37</sup> It is possible that *Mars*' and *Ashes*' references to British TV, as well as the vintage visual effect described above, both suggest fears surrounding the implications of technological change for British media. As outlined in Chapter 1, Helen Piper links anxieties around changes in media technology to the growing feeling that "the specifically national strength and character of British broadcasting is in jeopardy", and that by extension, so too is Britain's national identity (417). Given that by their own admission, *Mars* and *Ashes* creators Matthew Graham and Ashley Pharoah were inspired by their own nostalgic love for *The Sweeney*, to the point that they originally considered developing a fully-fledged remake of the classic series ('Take a Look'), the nostalgia Piper describes likely underlay the series' production. Certainly for some *Ashes* viewers, especially those with a clear memory of 1980s media, the simulated 'old media' look will recall an array of distinctly British media that is increasingly threatened by new media technologies that facilitate a globalised media sphere.

Still, comparing the nostalgic perspectives in *Life on Mars* and *Ashes to Ashes* ignores a crucial difference between them: in *Mars*, nostalgia for television's past is tempered by ambiguity surrounding the purpose of the media references, and this ambiguity dissipates in *Ashes*. It is never precisely clear in *Mars* whether the 1973 world actually exists or has been formulated in Sam's mind, and nor does the audience know for definite if, in the show's final sequence, Sam actually wakes up from his coma and commits suicide or if he has merely imagined it. The final episode highlights the non-reality of *both* worlds; in the present, Sam is unable to feel, but it concludes in 1973 with a shot of the Test Card Girl, who departs from her friends playing in the street to face the camera and 'switch off' the image, emphasising that this 1973 universe is also a mediated fabrication ('Episode 2.8'). These ambiguities bring depth to the show's media references by encouraging audiences to consider how the media affect

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<sup>37</sup> See also Holdsworth, *Television, Memory and Nostalgia* 111.

contemporary memory: if a contemporary person *were* to reconstruct the past psychologically, might it less resemble how things *actually* were and more how that person has engaged with the past through TV and other media? However, as James Chapman notes, the initial set-up in *Ashes to Ashes* “actually closes off the multiple readings of what happens at the end of *Life on Mars*” (16): it now becomes evident that Sam did wake up and did eventually commit suicide. Adding to this, as pointed out above, the eighties references in *Ashes* are less indebted to memories of eighties TV and are instead chosen as ‘eighties counterparts’, so to speak, of *Life on Mars*’ references.

As a result, *Ashes to Ashes*’ referentiality is less about calling contemporary memory into question and more about recalling the original series while stylistically invoking eighties media, music, fashions and commodities for the viewer’s pleasure. In this way, *Ashes* is less reflectively nostalgic than *Mars*, to use Svetlana Boym’s term: it does not reflect on the transformations of vestiges from the past (in this case, TV shows) as they have moved through time toward the present, or on the “shattered fragments of memory” (49) that make up contemporary viewers’ past knowledge. As such, its vintage film effects evoke a more restorative nostalgia than the TV references in *Mars*, expressing longing for return to a more authentic era of British mediation. In its third and final series, *Ashes* becomes less referential and more focused on establishing the eventual revelation that the universe to which both Sam and Alex have travelled does indeed exist and is a purgatory for deceased police officers. In this series (ironically, the one that most departs from period drama and ventures furthest into the realm of sci-fi), restorative nostalgia becomes more pronounced. As the episodes start to make sense of the show’s world, they increasingly encourage viewers to believe in the legitimacy of all of its internal components, including its eighties style. This opens up the possibility of true return: by entering the show’s alternate universe, an eighties style can be fully restored. Then again, a clip from *Dixon of Dock Green* (BBC, 1955-76) appears after the credits run in *Ashes*’ final episode, reminding viewers that *nothing* they have just witnessed is real (‘Episode 3.8’); it is television, like *The Sweeney* before it and *Dixon of Dock Green* before that. In other words, it is a final wink to the show’s artificiality and indebtedness to past media after an episode that largely avoids media references and encourages suspension of disbelief. This highlights the extent to which irony and

sincerity, as well as reflection and restoration, can intermingle in 2000s period drama, and, ultimately, how complexly nostalgia functions in heavily mediated, postmodern cultures.

### **The Eighties Mode in Popular British Screen Genres**

*Life on Mars* and *Ashes to Ashes* synthesise popular mediated memories; history is relevant only insofar as it relates to these memories. This method of approaching the recent past has become increasingly commonplace in British screen representations, calling into question the common distinction between heritage genres set in the Victorian and Edwardian eras and critical, alternative genres set in recent decades. As discussed in Chapter 1, the distinction stems from leftist readings of 1980s ‘heritage films’ (Higson, ‘Re-presenting’ 91; Wollen 175-6) which, Claire Monk argues, ignored questions of audience reception as well as differing agendas and degrees of critical inquiry, labelling them unanimously as conservative and consumerist (‘The British heritage-film’ 177, 189-91). This in turn led several films, like *Dance with a Stranger*, *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives* and *Small Faces*, to be read as subverting the supposedly conservative tendencies of heritage films in their depictions of more recent decades (Murphy, ‘A Path’ 12-3; Powrie 317; Street 105). These readings implicitly assume that because the cited films’ narratives reject upper-class and bourgeois identities and concerns in favour of working-class and minority ones, and because they do not aesthetically fetishize Victorian and Edwardian bourgeois commodities, they are inherently subversive, or “alternative”, to quote Powrie (317).

Whether or not pre-millennial British recent-past period dramas are ‘alternative’ and avoid dwelling on surface detail is up for debate, and arguably requires further inquiry. It is possible that in the 80s and 90s, British filmmakers and TV producers were compelled by theoretical devaluations of ‘heritage’ to release historically critical dramas set in recent decades. Still, the claim relies on a selective consideration of recent-past screen fictions; despite the steady production of populist and/or commercial ones, they are generally disregarded because they either tend toward “cosy nostalgia” (Powrie 316) or fail “to engage successfully with history” (Sargeant 214). Apart from inconsistently disregarding that which they deem relevant in ‘heritage’ dramas, these perspectives



ignore the contemporary cultural exchange values of ‘nostalgia’ and ‘retro’ within which *all* of these films operate, whether historically critical or not. In addition, such outputs are becoming increasingly difficult to ignore, as the post-World War Two era has been a prominent time setting for 2000s British film and TV production. Socially and historically critical films like *Vera Drake* and *Hunger* have constituted some of this, but they have increasingly existed alongside comedies (*The Boat that Rocked* (Richard Curtis, 2009); *Killing Bono*), family films (*Son of Rambow*; *Is Anybody There?*), political thrillers (*The Last King of Scotland* (Kevin MacDonal, 2006); *Fifty Dead Men Walking*), horror (*When the Lights Went Out* (Pat Holden, 2012)) and others.

The Eighties Cycle encompasses a range of populist/commercial genres: comedies and romantic comedies, family films, crime films and football hooligan films. In these, the ‘eighties’ is often (although not exclusively) a stylistic device that assists in product differentiation and invokes eighties revivalism. As such, the theoretical narrative that positions these films in opposition to those set in empirical and immediately post-empirical eras can no longer be sustained; as Monk argues for heritage films, Eighties Cycle productions are multitudinous and function toward differing ends. I will concentrate here on two crime film examples, *The Business* and *Tu£sday*, and will then discuss two productions – *Awaydays* and the BBC mini-series *The Line of Beauty* – which use the eighties mode to disrupt popular genres. These cases reveal how markedly varied are the uses of stylistic nostalgia for the contemporary media industries.

### *The Business and Tu£sday*

Although the Eighties Cycle truly burgeoned after *This is England*’s critical and popular success in 2006, its origins can be traced back to the 2005 release of Nick Love’s *The Business*, a less universally acclaimed but still reasonably popular crime film set in the early eighties. Love, whose style has been likened to *Snatch* (2000) director Guy Ritchie (Pool), was already known in 2005 for directing the comical but violent ‘lad’ films *Goodbye Charlie Bright* (2001) and *The Football Factory* (2004). Like Ritchie’s films, Love’s invoke a lineage of British crime drama. Andrew Spicer notes that British genre films centring on a ‘tough guy’ who is disillusioned, self-confident and virile have been

visible since the post-war period, when “dislocations of the war and the problems of readjustment were refracted in a spate of crime films” (‘The emergence’ 81) that offered welcome alternatives to the traditional British gentleman figure. Those which Steve Chibnall and Robert Murphy classify as ‘underworld’ films – British crime films “in which the activities of professional criminals feature significantly or which are set in an underworld milieu” (3) – have sustained an active presence in British film production ever since. They took the shape of gangland films like *The Criminal* (Joseph Losey, 1960) and *Get Carter* in the 60s and 70s and transformed in the 90s into what Claire Monk calls ‘underclass’ films, which she argues reflected social changes brought about by Thatcherism, shifting gender roles and the “blurring of moral boundaries” and “cynical disillusion with the law” (‘From Underworld’ 180). Monk also points to 90s nostalgia for an “idealised, parochial 1960s gangland”, epitomised in now ‘classic’ British crime films like *Get Carter*, which was often expressed in ‘lad’ media like the men’s magazine *Loaded* (‘From Underworld’ 180). Nick Love has not explicitly stated that he is nostalgic for ‘classic’ gangland films, but given that both *The Business* and his next film, *Outlaw* (2007), are gangster films, and that he targeted *The Business* at readers of “lads’ mags” (‘Nick Love’), it is likely that he is at least aware of this nostalgia among his viewers.

Set in the eighties, *The Business* follows Frankie (Danny Dyer), a young man who flees to Spain after assaulting his mother’s abusive boyfriend and becomes involved in drug dealing alongside nightclub owner Charlie (Tamer Hassan). Love elaborates on the remark that his film is for readers of ‘lads’ mags’ by explaining that it is for

[...] people who want to be entertained. [...] You make a choice. I could have spent ten minutes of screen time developing the relationship between the criminals and the Mayor as a metaphor for what was going on between Britain and Spain at the time, or I could have spent the time seeing the speedboats get the dope in and showing how the kids got killed. And I decided I wasn’t making a film for Guardian readers. (‘Nick Love’)

Despite being set in the eighties, Love acknowledges consciously avoiding historical examination in order to appeal to an audience seeking entertainment. Interestingly, however, the film was not an utter critical failure. Its response was mixed, and while

'lad' media like the magazines *Front* and *Nuts* did account for much of the film's praise,<sup>38</sup> it was also lauded elsewhere; the BBC's Paul Arendt called it "an impressive take on a familiar genre" (Arendt) and *Variety*'s Derek Elley praised it for "reinvigorating a genre well past its sell-by date" (Elley). The emphases on how it refreshes a conventional genre suggest that its eighties setting helped it to stand out amidst other typical 'lad' films.

Furthermore, Love's conscious choice to avoid critical inquiry and yet to set his film in the 'eighties' suggests that the 'eighties', for Love, is not a historical period, but rather a style. He comments that he did not do extensive research on the era but rather relied on his own memories, which included "Rubik's cubes to Toffos to Peperami, to the videos, to the clothes, [...] to the Gazelles, so much stuff I remember from the eighties" ('Making of Featurette'). Love's memories are comprised of commodities and media imagery, and these are the references from which the film's audience is expected to derive pleasure. Indeed, speaking on set, production designer Paul Burns rather prophetically comments, "I think we're onto something good. I think there will be an eighties revival. It's coming and I think this might be the film that just pushes it in that direction" ('Making of Featurette'). Evidently, the film seeks to both engage with a burgeoning stylistic revival and contribute to its development. As such, *The Business*' eighties aesthetic is exaggerated: its colour palette is bright and saturated, the costumes are stark – in an opening sequence, for instance, Frankie and Charlie run past a girl dressed in an oversized white t-shirt and red heels – and the soundtrack features energetic pop hits like Blondie's 'Heart of Glass' and The Buggles' 'Video Killed the Radio Star'. Given its stylistic excess and lack of historical criticism, it can be argued that *The Business* shares much in common with American nostalgia films discussed by Fredric Jameson, in which the use of pastiche is argued to reflect the "new culture of the image" and "consequent weakening of historicity" (6). The film might, by extension, also be linked to Higson's application of this reading to 1980s British heritage films,

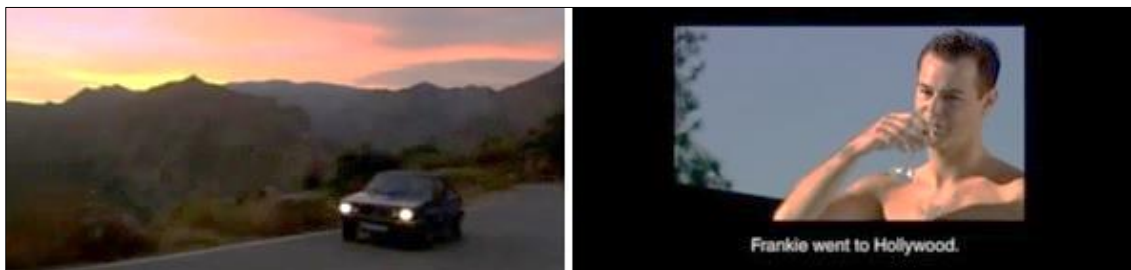
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<sup>38</sup> These magazines are cited on the cover of the UK DVD release. *Front Magazine* is quoted as claiming that the film has "more cocaine than *Casino*, more guns than *Goodfellas*, more swearing than *Scarface*", while *Nuts* calls it "savagely funny". (*The Business*)

wherein he argues that the past is “reproduced as a flat, depthless pastiche, where the reference point is not the past itself, but other images, other texts” (‘Re-presenting’ 95). Immediately, then, it becomes apparent that *The Business* cannot be understood in mere opposition to British heritage cinema.

At the same time, *The Business* complicates not just the distinction between superficial films set in more remote eras and interrogative films set in recent ones but also the notion that period films without historically critical perspectives are automatically ‘depthless’. The absurdly excessive stylistic elements in *The Business* mirror its tongue-in-cheek approach to the crime genre, suggesting an ironic perspective toward contemporary cultural modes of expression. Telling of this is the film’s representation of its female characters. Claire Monk argues in ‘From underworld to underclass’ that “subordination/ exclusion of women had been accepted traits” (173) in 1970s gangland films, noting that certain 1990s crime films attempted, to varying degrees of success, to break with this convention. *The Business* revives the convention excessively; the gang members’ wives, for instance, are described by Frankie as “more aggressive than the flying squad”. This is especially true of Carly (Georgina Chapman), the young wife of gang member Sammy (Geoff Bell), who Frankie explains is nicknamed ‘the snake’ because she “fucked with people’s heads” (*The Business*). Carly repeatedly manipulates Frankie, but Frankie has his revenge in a final sequence in which he knocks her unconscious and steals a package of cocaine they had planned to steal together, driving, in his words, “off into the sunset” (*The Business*) as she is pictured lying in the middle of the road. This absurdly happy ending, augmented by a shot in which Frankie literally drives into a setting sun, is followed by a pre-credit title card sequence that describes each character’s fate. It is revealed that “Frankie went to Hollywood”, referencing the popular 1980s British band, Frankie Goes to Hollywood (Figure 4). This conclusion exemplifies the film’s consistent awareness of, and playful relationship to, cultural modes. *The Business* recalls and underscores both generic film conventions and eighties revivalism, and while it does so largely uncritically, its playful self-awareness encourages a distanced audience perspective that acknowledges the constructed nature of both of these modes.

In this way, *The Business* reflects a broader tendency, in several generic Eighties Cycle productions, to interpret the ‘eighties’ as a *contemporary* ‘retro’ mode rather than as an actual historical period. Indeed, the film might be argued to have introduced the possibility of taking a significant British popular genre typically set in the present – in this case, the British ‘underworld’ crime film – and setting it in a kitschy, parodied past. As its production designer Paul Burns predicted it would, *The Business* initiated a series of films that interpreted ‘the eighties’ as a filmic style more closely aligned with eighties revivalism than with social history. In the later crime film *Tuesday*, for instance, ‘the eighties’ also functions primarily as a stylistic device that bears little weight on the narrative but lends an otherwise generic film a degree of uniqueness. This film’s eighties mode is different from *The Business*’; its style lacks Love’s parodic humour and is markedly darker in palette and tone. Director Sacha Bennett notes that he wished to distinguish it from *The Business*, which had “made a comedy” of the eighties, by styling his film more subtly so that its setting would slowly “dawn on people” (Bennett). Implied in Bennett’s comment is that he wished to avoid portraying the past as silly in the way that Vera Dika argues is done in *Grease*, where “disruptions of the past are restabilized by presenting them a-historically and by rendering them harmless” (125). Yet, although different in tone, the style in *Tuesday* is still self-conscious; it recalls 1960s and 70s crime films in its opening credit sequence and its jazz-influenced score, suggesting that its gloomy palette is meant to invoke the palettes of films like *Get Carter*. As such, *Tuesday* typifies a growing trend in British crime and other genre film production, arguably initiated by *The Business*, to utilise eighties iconography mainly for aesthetic uniqueness and to ‘reinvigorate’, as *Variety*’s Derek Elley put it in reference to *The Business*, an overworked and tired genre.



**Figure 4:** Frankie drives into the sunset (left) and is revealed to have gone to Hollywood (right). (*The Business*)

*Awaydays* and *The Line of Beauty*

The productions discussed above illustrate that the eighties mode varies too greatly in function to label it as either innately regressive or progressive. In *Ashes to Ashes* it carries the undertones of a nostalgic mood, while in *The Business* and *Tuesday* it is almost devoid of any mood at all, satiating viewers' fondness for eighties revivalism instead of tapping into some supposed longing for return. These productions prove that what the eighties mode will denote depends very much on intended *audience*.

Accordingly, those productions targeted at audiences that are expected to look back unfavourably on the 1980s can use the eighties mode to critical ends. Accepting this requires one to reject the commonly held belief that historical criticism demands avoiding commodified period iconography. As detailed in Chapter 1, Vera Dika reclaims the postmodern nostalgic mode from criticisms that its simulacral replication of past images renders it depthless, suggesting that instead, its meaning depends on the assumed audience response to how it structures its cinematic, televisual or other mediated references (3).

This is a useful way of approaching certain Eighties Cycle productions that operate critically from within conventional British genres. One example is Pat Holden's *Awaydays*, adapted from Kevin Sampson's 1998 novel of the same name. *Awaydays*, set in 1979 Liverpool, is one of three football hooligan films in the Eighties Cycle, along with Nick Love's *The Firm* and *Cass*. Nicola Rehling notes that the genre tends to "offer nostalgic fantasies of hooliganism, communal bonds, and hard, British (in most cases white and regionally London), working-class masculinity" (163), arguing that they are set the past because they seek return to a 'golden age' of hooliganism. However, if one considers their depictions of the eighties more closely, it becomes apparent that each has a different reason for being set in the past. Like *The Business*, *The Firm* is set in the eighties for the sake of aesthetic flair, while *Cass*, which will be further discussed in Chapter 4, is set in the 1980s because it is based on actual events. *Awaydays*, by contrast, uses its eighties mode to complicate the football hooligan genre. While Rehling acknowledges that *Awaydays*' rejection of homophobia and focus on homosexuality is unusual (170), she does not read the film as an absolute counterpoint to conventional football hooligan dramas.

Yet, the homoerotic relationship between protagonists Carty (Nicky Bell) and Elvis (Liam Boyle) is only one device in *Awaydays* that undermines the white, working-class masculine fantasies usually expressed in football hooligan films. Stylistically, the film emphasises the desolation of the post-industrial north, but here decay is not the object of nostalgia; instead, repeated lines of dialogue, non-chronological editing and recurrent shots of characters looking out at the sea produce the sense of being trapped in an inescapable cycle. Commodities associated with football hooligans' so-called 'casual' subculture are first fetishized in scenes that emphasise their allure, including one that uses slow-motion shots to dwell on the cool and intimidating aura of Carty's and Elvis' firm as they advance on another firm (Figure 5), but eventually fail to provide the sense of community for which Carty longs. Additionally, while the



**Figure 5:** Slow-motion shots fetishize the commodities (top) and intimidating aura (bottom) of Carty's and Elvis' firm. (*Awaydays*)

soundtrack borrows from popular post-punk bands like Joy Division, Ultravox and The Cure, many of the chosen tracks are notably dreary and obscure, like Joy Division's 'Insight' and The Cure's demo track for '10:15 Saturday Night' recorded on a Rhodes piano. Others draw attention to distortions of time, like Ultravox's 'Slow Motion' and Magazine's 'The Light Pours Out of Me', thus underscoring the film's stylistic repetitiveness. The eighties mode in *Awaydays* therefore works alongside its narrative to deflate the idealised depictions of hooliganism in more conventional football hooligan outputs like *The Football Factory* and *Green Street* (Lexi Alexander, 2005).

Another production that is interesting to consider from this perspective is the BBC's TV adaptation of Alan Hollinghurst's 2004 novel *The Line of Beauty*, which aired as a three-part mini-series on BBC Two in May of 2006. The novel, which is set in the early to mid-1980s, trails its young, gay, middle-class protagonist Nick Guest (Dan Stevens) as he moves to London to pursue postgraduate studies in Henry James at University College London. There, he lodges with his Oxford friend Toby Fedden's upper-middle-class family, headed by Conservative MP Gerald Fedden. Although other productions in the Eighties Cycle – namely, *Awaydays*, *Starter for 10* and the *Red Riding* trilogy – are adapted from novels, *The Line of Beauty*'s status as a recent award-winning work of *literature* separates it from these other popular/ generic novels. As a BBC adaptation of a literary work, the mini-series generically shares less in common with a film like *Starter for 10* or even a Channel 4 television trilogy like *Red Riding* than it does with classic costume drama serials, which Jerome de Groot notes "convey a sense of the depth and richness of British literary history" while establishing "the cultural hegemony and standing of the channel (generally the BBC)" (185). Of course, *The Line of Beauty* differs from classic costume drama serials in the sense that it is adapted from a contemporary literary historical novel rather than from a classic novel published in the eighteenth, nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, but its past setting further associates it with the genre. It was also adapted for the screen by Andrew Davies, who is known to British audiences for scripting television and film adaptations of classic British literature, including the highly popular BBC series *Pride and Prejudice* (1995).



However, despite the production's obvious generic alignment with costume drama serials, it rests uncomfortably alongside adaptations of novels by Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and Evelyn Waugh. While *The Line of Beauty* adapts a literary 'great' set in the past, written by a screenwriter known for adapting classic British literature for the screen, the serial explores such subjects as homophobia, interracial sexual relationships, AIDS, mental illness, drug use, class conflict and the effects of the burgeoning Thatcherite enterprise culture. As such, it addresses a young, middle- to high-brow left-wing audience that is assumed to have a keen awareness of the so-called 'heritage film' and its associations to Thatcherism. In his analysis of the adaptation of *The Line of Beauty*, Jerome de Groot highlights the narrative importance of its 1980s setting, writing that it "takes place at the high point of the heritage movie" and the "political characters it presents are those who are instituting the mid-1980s conservative Englishness that the heritage theorist Patrick Wright so decries" (194). De Groot rightly positions the mini-series alongside a number of costume dramas produced by the BBC in the 2000s that demonstrate an increased self-awareness in their tendency to "mimic the style and production values of costume drama", but deploy "the historical serial format in a more self-conscious style" (193).

De Groot's reading is valid but incomplete. He explores how the mini-series stylistically mimics classic heritage television but narratively questions the validity of heritage and explores subjects and themes generally omitted from heritage dramas. However, *The Line of Beauty* complicates the classic costume drama serial genre stylistically as well as narratively, disrupting the stylistic conventions of heritage drama in its use of the eighties mode. This stylistic discordance is notable immediately in the font used for the opening credit sequence: it is flowery and old-fashioned, recalling heritage television serials, but it is also neon pink, a colour commonly associated with the eighties mode. The sequence that follows temporarily establishes an aesthetic consistent with conventional costume dramas: a classically inspired score plays as Nick observes the expensive homes in the Feddens' Notting Hill neighbourhood from his car and subsequently explores their house. A series of shots foreground the home's antiquated style; a long shot of the living room reveals antique paintings, mirrors, wallpaper and furniture that recalls the *mise-en-scène* of typical Jane Austen

adaptations. However, the eighties mode increasingly upsets the aesthetic fluidity. In a later scene in the same episode, Nick sits down to the piano to play a piece of classical music and is promptly interrupted by Toby's sister Catherine (Hayley Atwell) who remarks, "For God's sake, darling, it's not a fucking funeral," after which New Order's 'Blue Monday' plays on the soundtrack ('The Love Chord').

As the eighties mode disturbs the stylistic coherence of the classic costume drama serial, its own nostalgic coherence is also disturbed. A party scene at the Fedden family's country home exemplifies this; it opens with guests sipping champagne and socialising on the house's grounds while shots foreground the home's grandeur and a string quartet is heard in the diegetic background. After an aesthetically consistent dinner scene, the sequence cuts to a series of shots of Renaissance portraits illuminated by flashing neon party lights as Duran Duran's 'Planet Earth' blasts on the stereo. Before the audience is able to indulge in the eighties mode's aesthetic pleasures, the scene cuts again to a string quartet playing in a room where older guests are mingling. De Groot notes that the scene highlights the "clash of the old with a modernity of flash and surface" (194), a contrast that Hollinghurst is known for exploring in his literature (Quinn, 'The Line of Beauty'). Thematically, this is true, but stylistically, the scene also draws on its audience's preconceptions of both 'heritage' costume dramas and pop cultural revivalism. Because the series is targeted at younger, left-leaning viewers, preconceptions of heritage dramas can be assumed to be mostly consistent with generalisations identified by Monk: viewers will likely see them as conservative in their concern for period detail and as produced to appeal to "cultural snobberies" ('Heritage-film Debate' 178). Eighties nostalgia will probably not fare much better among the series' liberal, higher-brow viewership, as it will recall Thatcherism and commodity culture. As such, the back-and-forth editing in the party scene calls upon its viewers' assumed distrust of *both* the heritage mode *and* the eighties mode. Shots linger on one mode just long enough for the audience to start to take pleasure in it before swiftly revoking it by reverting to the other mode. This fluctuation between modes highlights the constructed nature – and consequent arbitrariness – of each.

As exemplified by this party scene, *The Line of Beauty* addresses the left-leaning viewers it targets by invoking two styles – the ‘heritage’ mode and the eighties mode – with which they are assumed to be familiar, and toward which they are expected to be suspicious. As such, *The Line of Beauty* employs eighties style and heritage style as critical devices to question the validity of English traditions and to explore the social landscape of Thatcherite Britain. This, incidentally, is probably a more genuinely ‘alternative’ heritage than the one Powrie describes because rather than avoiding stylistic nostalgia altogether, the series *uses it alternatively* to critique the values that underlie it. In this way, *The Line of Beauty* has a similar agenda to *Awaydays*; although the two productions appear to be quite different, they share in common a concern to question the values underlying established British genres – the costume drama serial and the football hooligan film – as well as those underlying eighties style. The eighties mode is therefore used to *break down* genre, unlike in *The Business* and in *Tu£sday*, where it is used to *refresh* it. Because these two techniques are markedly opposed, the four productions discussed in this section show that mode nostalgia operates in generic outputs in a variety of ways. Popular genres do not necessarily promote “cosy” mood nostalgia, as Powrie puts it; in fact, they often invoke it in unique and complex ways, and ought not to be academically ignored.

#### **‘The Same Handful of Images’: Retro in *Submarine***

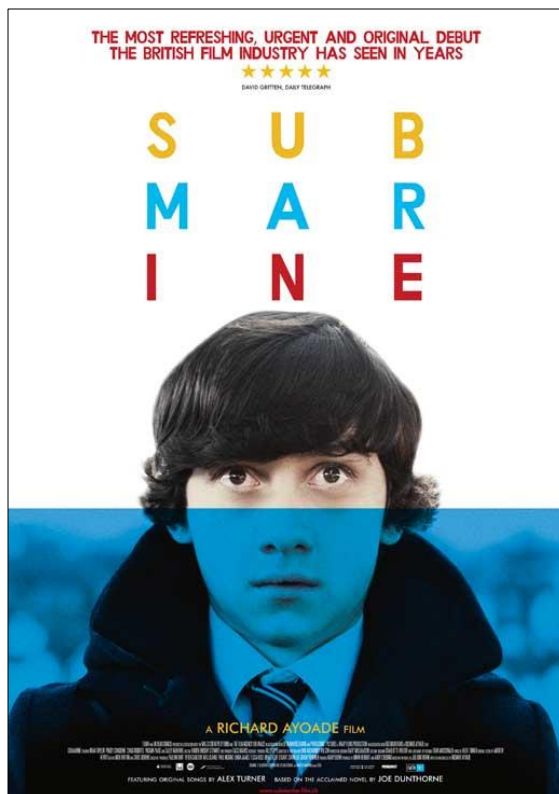
As outlined in the literature review, Elizabeth Guffey identifies a distinct mode of revivalism that she argues developed from the 1960s onward, labelling it ‘retro’. The term ‘retro’, as Guffey explains, has a series of connotations and is used to varying ends, but for her, it is a form of ironic revivalism that “regards the past from a bemused distance” (12), tempering “ideas of exile and longing” with “a heavy dose of cynicism or detachment” (20). She suggests that unlike other forms of revivalism, retro is implicitly subversive in its active avoidance of historical accuracy (10-1). It has become evident through this chapter that instances of irony like those Guffey describes can be identified across the cycle; yet, even the most ironic productions usually aim for verisimilitude, suggesting a concern, if not with historical accuracy, with stylistic accuracy. In other words, they are *explicitly* set in the eighties, however imaginary their

versions of the eighties mode may be, and they call upon eighties iconography so that their viewers will recognise them as such. However, although Guffey is primarily concerned with fashion, architecture and other material revivals, a similar trend to the one she describes is becoming increasingly identifiable in cinema, not just in Britain but globally. This concept of retro, which has been visible for some time in certain ‘indie’ American outputs like director Wes Anderson’s films, utilises the past as a *language* more than as a subject matter, reflecting the contemporary tendency to *communicate through* references to recycled media. Here, pastness is not called upon to signal a particular decade, but instead to connect effectively with audiences.

This sort of pastness is still relatively uncommon in British film production, but it is notable in comedian Richard Ayoade’s debut film *Submarine*. Set vaguely in the late eighties and almost as vaguely in Wales, it is adapted from Joe Dunthorne’s cult hit novel of the same name. It follows Oliver Tate (Craig Roberts), an intelligent but alienated and self-absorbed 15-year-old whose dissatisfied accountant mother Jill (Sally Hawkins) is on the verge of leaving his meek, depressive marine biologist father Lloyd (Noah Taylor) for her ex-lover Graham Purvis (Paddy Considine), a New Age mystic. Oliver simultaneously seeks to save his parents’ marriage and court his pyromaniac classmate Jordana (Yasmin Paige). Despite its eighties setting, *Submarine* is not really about the past at all, but instead about the impact of recycled pasts – or, more specifically, retro – on the present. Ayoade calls up the postmodern tendency to invoke old media, highlighting the ways in which film, television and media references are engrained in postmodern realities and shape identities. In doing so, *Submarine* signals a new retro mode which, instead of seeking to recreate a particular signifying system (in this case, the eighties mode), blurs the lines between systems, thus reflecting the inconsistent ways in which past signifiers are often experienced in the present.

A Warp Films production, *Submarine* was released in the wake of Warp’s 2006 eighties-set success *This is England* and was targeted at a similarly young, ‘indie’ audience. One might accordingly assume that marketers would have wished to highlight the film’s eighties setting, thus drawing associations with both *This is England* and trends in eighties revivalism. Yet, there were no attempts to connect it to *This is*

*England* or more generally to eighties nostalgia; the poster evokes a vague retro feel but does not invoke a particular period (Figure 6). In this way, the poster reflects the aesthetic of the film, which is also difficult to classify. Subtle technological and stylistic details do suggest that *Submarine* is probably set in the late eighties; Oliver and Jordana listen to music on cassette tapes and records but not on CDs, and a combination television and audio cassette player rests at the edge of Oliver's bed. Graham Purvis' New Age self-help film 'Through the Prism', clips of which are featured throughout the course of the film, also recalls the eighties; its archaic computerised effects and low-fi electronic music signal late-1980s documentary production. In the film, Purvis dons a mullet and sits in front of a glass block wall, drawing associations with yuppie consumerism (Figure 7); indeed, Purvis' involvement in what Oliver calls "mystic bullshit" can be seen to symbolise the burgeoning 'me' culture of which New Age spiritualism was a part and, as a threatening figure, he evokes the anxieties felt in the wake of encroaching consumerism. Still, despite these clues that *Submarine* is set in the eighties, it lacks typical signifiers associated with period films: a year is not denoted, characters do not sport stereotypically eighties fashions and instead wear either school



**Figure 6** (left): *Submarine*'s poster conveys only a vague retro feel rather than specifically recalling the eighties. (*Submarine* publicity poster)

**Figure 7** (above): Graham Purvis' (Paddy Considine) mullet and the glass block wall behind him evoke yuppie consumerism. (*Submarine*)

uniforms or nondescript clothing, and the soundtrack's featured songs are not from the 1980s, but rather original works by indie band Arctic Monkeys' lead singer Alex Turner. Commenting on this last point, Craig Roberts claims that Ayoade "didn't want any songs with baggage for this film. [...] He didn't want audiences to hear a track they already associated with a memory or a movie" (Jones). This would have meant consciously avoiding what soundtracks in period films generally seek to do: conjure associations with a particular era.

In fact, it does not appear as if Ayoade *really* meant for it to be set in the eighties, but instead for it to invoke a cinematic past. Asked about the film's setting in a BBC interview, Ayoade responds, "I definitely didn't want to make it all 1980s, with hilarious clothes and music" (Jones). In another interview, Ayoade notes that coming-of-age films like Satyajit Ray's *The World of Apu* (1959) and François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* (1959) have unclear time settings and are merely set "in a slightly remembered past" (Sullivan). It is clear that Ayoade was less concerned with exploring *his* recent past than he was with echoing the tendency of coming of age films to be set in *their own* recent pasts. He cites cinema history directly in *Submarine*, stylistically referencing French New Wave and New Hollywood films. For instance, the justified, coloured capital lettering used for its titles explicitly references Godard films like *Tout va bien* (1972). (Figure 8) Furthermore, expressive shots that evoke Oliver's alienation recall the cinematography of New Hollywood films about alienated young men like *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967). (Figure 9) These references are partly influenced by Ayoade's own cinematic nostalgia; in *Sight and Sound*, he comments that he admires films like *The Graduate* and *Badlands* (Terence Malick, 1973), as well as French New Wave films, claiming that his "favourite film for a long time was *Zazie dans le metro* (Louis Malle, 1960). I guess when you really love a film you end up subconsciously ripping it off" (18). However, as noted above, Guffey defines retro as a process of both longing *and detachment*, wherein an ironic stance tempers nostalgic sentiment, and this particular process is at play in the film's references to 1960s and 70s political/art film movements. While *Submarine* 'rips off' the visual styles of these films, it



**Figure 8:** *Submarine*'s opening credits and title cards (above) resemble those of Godard's *Tout va bien* (below). (*Submarine*, *Tout va bien*)



**Figure 9:** Several shots in *Submarine* (above) recall those from New Hollywood films like *The Graduate* (below). (*Submarine*, *The Graduate* screen capture)

simultaneously ironises the modernist notions of directorial vision, originality and formal destabilisation that drove them, knowingly poking fun at the individualistic desire to express oneself through original forms and at the ultimate impossibility of doing so in a postmodern context.

This desire and its ultimate futility are also mocked in the film text itself. After the Godardian opening titles, Oliver narrates, “Most people think of themselves as individuals. That there’s no one else on the planet like them. This thought motivates them to get out of bed, eat food and walk around like nothing’s wrong. My name is Oliver Tate” (*Submarine*). Jump cuts then close in on Oliver and he looks at the camera. Assuming a vague familiarity amongst its audience with New Wave conventions and their auteurist connotations, and suggesting that Oliver is invoking this style to express his ultimately imaginary individuality, the sequence establishes a tongue-in-cheek stance toward its own stylisation. In a later scene, Oliver composes a pamphlet to help a classmate who is being bullied, suggesting that she must discover who she is, and writes, “I don’t quite know what I am yet; I’ve tried smoking a pipe, flipping coins, listening exclusively to French crooners. Other times I go to the beach and stare at the sea. Someone made a documentary about a prominent thinker who struggled with

unspeakable loss” (*Submarine*). As he narrates this in voiceover, excessively expressive shots picture Oliver performing these tasks; while staring at the sea, for instance, he is pictured from the side with the sun setting behind him, his hands in his pockets and a pensive expression on his face (Figure 10). Comedy is derived here from the shared recognition that the pictured actions – smoking, listening in solitude to music, staring at the sea – are common signifiers of thoughtfulness, depth and alienation in films and other media. As Vera Dika argues is characteristic of postmodern nostalgia films, the scene’s humour is dependent on the extratextual knowledge viewers bring with them and their assumed response (108). It is funny not only because it pokes fun at the artificiality of the images, but also because it draws attention to the audience’s shared recognition of the “charge” these images carry, to cite Collins (256). In doing so, the sequence also pokes fun at the nostalgia for filth, decay and primitive technologies that characterises many contemporary perspectives on the past.

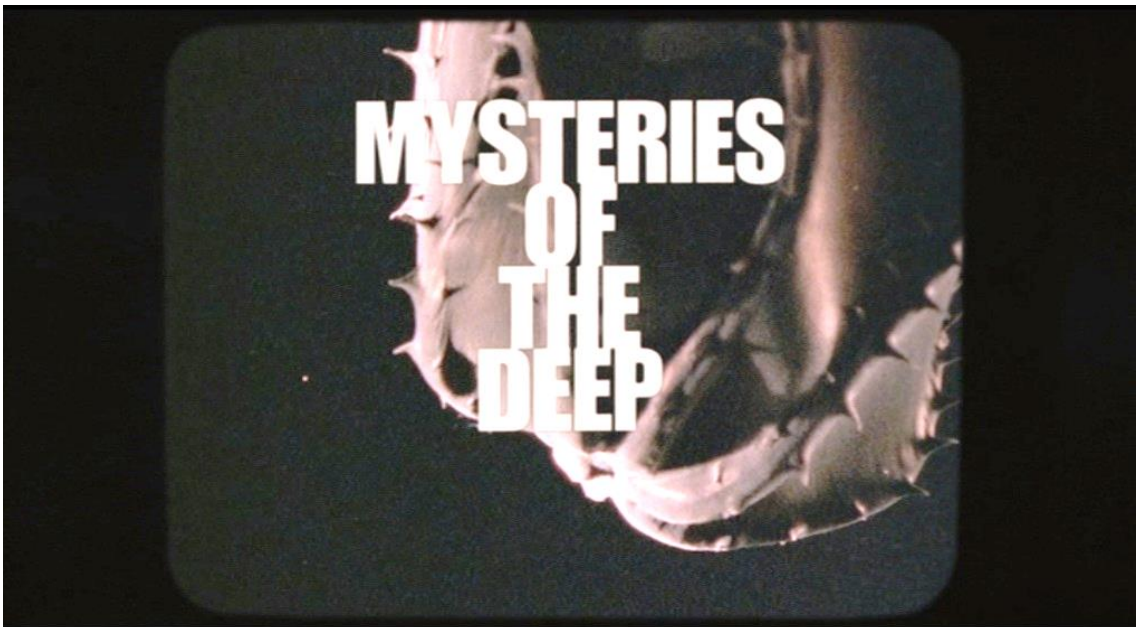
Despite *Submarine*’s heavy irony, it is not cynical. As well as referencing actual media, it also contains artificial media produced for the film that shed light on various characters. As mentioned earlier, Graham Purvis is introduced to viewers through his New Age self-help film ‘Through the Prism’, which features briefly in the film’s diegesis but was produced as a complete film that can be viewed on *Submarine*’s DVD



**Figure 10:** Staring pensively at the sea as a shared signifier of depth and alienation.  
(*Submarine*)



release. Similarly, Oliver’s father Lloyd is introduced in a clip from a documentary on aquatic life that he presented, ‘Mysteries of the Deep’. The segment’s dated fonts, washed out colours and 4:3 aspect ratio framing with curved corners all recall informational documentaries from the 1980s (Figure 11). Using this false array, Ayoade explores both the positive and negative ways that the media can shape identity. On one hand, ‘Through the Prism’ is presented as a threatening use of media. Its use of colourful computerised effects, orientalist Native American-style music and false information, such as Purvis claiming he can see colours in people, are evocative of the media’s abilities to distort truth and negatively shape perspectives. However, on the other hand, when Oliver reveals to his parents that he is dating Jordana, his father offers him a cassette tape – as he claims, “a compilation of songs I used to listen to during some of my early formative relationships” (*Submarine*) – in order to help him process his newfound emotions. As Oliver presses the ‘play’ button, Alex Turner’s original song ‘Hiding Tonight’ begins to play, ensuring that the audience will not be moved by nostalgic impulses and will instead experience the song as Oliver might: as a cultural media product from the past that is positively shaping his identity in the present by helping him to understand his youthful love for Jordana.



**Figure 11:** ‘Mysteries of the Deep’, one of *Submarine*’s several fictional media artefacts, has the curved corners and aspect ratio of a 1980s informational documentary. (*Submarine*)

The artificial ‘old media’ serves a second purpose in the film. Attention is often called to the technological datedness of its pseudo-media. Apart from the computer effects in ‘Through the Prism’ and the archaic framing in ‘Mysteries of the Deep’, dated media are also emphasised in an early scene in which Oliver points out that he often imagines how others would react to his death, and the ensuing scene features an eighties-style news report. Furthermore, Oliver’s descriptions of his relationship with Jordana are often depicted using Polaroid pictures and vintage-looking home footage. Here, the visual effects that achieve a dated look work differently than in *Ashes to Ashes* as discussed above. The effects lend the footage authenticity in *Ashes*, but as the actual period is unclear in *Submarine*, they simply evoke a general sense of remembering. Signs of pastness such as archaic rounded corners and poor colour balance are etched in the media images because they form the language of memory for postmodern viewers. They express Oliver’s process of remembering his own coming of age and resonate with contemporary viewers who also often remember their own childhoods in this mediated way.

All of its stylistic complexity aside, *Submarine* is essentially a coming-of-age tale for adolescent and young adult audiences, and Craig Roberts has compared it to other recent American ‘indie’ coming-of-age films like Jason Reitman’s *Juno* (2007), starring Ellen Page and Michael Cera. Certainly the film’s off-beat, ‘cool’ aura – extratextually assisted by its association with Warp Films and its original indie retro-folk songs composed by popular indie musician Alex Turner, but also by its sharply witty screenplay and retro aesthetic – enabled it to garner a substantial cult following in both the UK and the USA, where its box-office receipts outstripped most other British Eighties Cycle productions.<sup>39</sup>

Yet, *Submarine* ventures beyond the average young adult ‘indie’ product. It mildly mocks the affected nature of films like *Juno*, which un-self-consciously adopt ‘art film’ conventions as a means of appealing to youths who identify themselves outside the mainstream. *Juno* ultimately strives for sincerity; its formal originality is

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<sup>39</sup> Although the film’s worldwide gross was lower than that of *This is England*, its American gross was actually higher. (‘Submarine’, ‘This is England’)

suggested to be in natural harmony with its quirky identity. *Submarine*'s irony abates this; yet, paradoxically, this irony lends it a degree of honesty that is lacking in a film like *Juno*. In a pivotal moment in the film's epilogue, tragic non-diegetic music swells as Oliver stares at the sea and narrates, "I feel shrunken, as if there's a tiny ancient Oliver Tate inside me operating the levers of a life-size Oliver-shaped shell. A shell on which a decrepit picture show replays the same handful of images. Every night I come to the same place and wait till the sky catches up with my mood" (*Submarine*). As he narrates, shots depict him staring longingly out to sea; then, when he mentions the 'handful of images', a montage of artificial home footage depicts him and Jordana playing happily on the beach. A shot of the waves at sunset accompanies his final comment. Like those discussed above, this scene comically highlights the affectation inherent in expressing one's identity through formal idiosyncrasy, setting it apart from *Juno*'s sincere quirkiness. Yet, at the same time, it embraces the impact of media on young contemporary identities. Far from being depthless, the 'same handful of images' Oliver describes is held up here as a vital tool with which to work through his emotions. As such, *Submarine* may say very little about the eighties, but it says a great deal about how 'retro' functions as a language for the present.

### **Conclusion: A "False Memory Syndrome"?**

Close consideration of how 'the eighties' works as a stylistic system in various film and TV productions has revealed that it was, over the course of the Eighties Cycle, called up for multiple purposes. Although its roots likely lie primarily in the "endless" eighties revival described by Simon Reynolds, the messages it is used to elicit vary greatly. In the BBC's *Ashes to Ashes*, the style's repulsiveness is caricatured, but its parodying tone implicitly expresses longing for what is implied to be a simpler time than the present. As such, the show's eighties mode is nostalgic in mood, indicating a modification of traditional stylistic nostalgias that cleanse the past and portray it as pleasant. In this show, as well as in other Eighties Cycle productions like *Control*, the past is privileged precisely because it is not clean and pleasant, but rather dirty, deteriorating and ugly. However, not all film and television producers invoke eighties style to express longing for the past; in fact, many do not. In *The Business* and *Tu£sday*,

the eighties mode is instead used to refresh the British crime genre by lending it an aesthetic uniqueness that will appeal to viewers' taste for eighties revivalism. In *Awaydays* and *The Line of Beauty*, it is conversely utilized as a device to complicate genre conventions and criticise English society and traditions. Finally, in *Submarine* its signifying system's cohesion is thwarted altogether, and instead of recalling the eighties specifically, it functions as a retro language that reflects the heavily mediated world that contemporary youth and young adults navigate.

In essence, then, the eighties style is adaptable, varying in both character and meaning depending on the particular requirements of the text in which it appears, and these requirements are always dictated by *present* concerns, not past ones. In his article on the 2000s eighties music revival, Simon Reynolds describes this as if it were a failing. He notes that electronic band Daft Punk reclaimed 'plastic pop' in the 2000s, a genre that was resisted by indie bands in the 1980s, by "[shedding] its negative associations (synthetic, fake, disposable, inauthentic) and [recovering] its original utopian aura (the idea of plastic as the material of the future)" ('The 1980s Revival'). He argues that mimicking the 80s 'plastic' sound was partly achieved by using a vocoder, but claims that doing so was "actually a form of false memory syndrome: apart from certain Kraftwerk songs and the breakdance-oriented electro tracks they inspired, vocoder and other robotic voice treatments weren't widely used in the real 1980s" ('The 1980s Revival'). Reynolds goes on to explain that the characteristics and connotations of most 1980s synth-pop differed from Daft Punk's reimagined version of it. He does not explain why the music genre's original meaning need be taken into consideration, but the answer to this is implied in the term "false memory syndrome". For Reynolds, not considering its initial significance equates to historical ignorance. Yet, this assumes that a decade's fashions, music, commodities and so on are tied irrevocably to that decade. This is increasingly difficult to argue in a world where they can be (and are) accessed, experienced and shared in a wide variety of contexts. The films and television series discussed in this chapter show that 'the eighties' style no longer belongs to the 1980s: whether used as a symbol for longing, a visual flourish, a critical tool, a language or something else, it now exists solely in and for the present.

### Chapter 3

#### GENRE, GLOBAL MEDIA AND MEMORY: THE EIGHTIES AS ERA

This chapter will examine five screen dramas – *Starter for 10* (Tom Vaughan, 2006), *Clubbed, Is Anybody There?*, Channel 4's *Red Riding* trilogy and *Son of Rambow* – that textually define 'the eighties' less as a style than as an *era*. My definition of 'era' is different from a 'historical period', which will be the focus of discussion in Chapter 4. While a 'historical period' can be defined as a set of dates during which significant events occurred and particular historical figures lived, an 'era' can be understood here as a concept formed from a series of abstractions that are collectively associated with a particular time period in a particular culture. In depictions of the British 1980s specifically, these commonly include profuse greed, glamour and excess; simultaneous rises in poverty and unemployment, especially in the North of England; an overall value shift away from social consensus toward individualism; political polarisation and unrest; and globalisation and increased access to foreign media and cultural products, among others. Although these generalities exist as a consequence of actual events and people which were significant to the 1980s, they are not historical *truths*. Instead, they are broadly recognisable characteristics of a collective construct, or what Daniel Marcus would call a 'web of meaning' (3): 'the British eighties'. When they surface thematically in eighties retrospectives, their degree of accuracy is less important than how effectively they conjure viewers' conceptual understanding of the decade.

In this way, representations of era are closely tied to notions of 'collective memory'. Definitions vary, but here I will use Andrew Hoskins' definition as described in 'New Memory: Mediating History', where he calls it "the ongoing collaborative re-casting of 'the past'—of a particular group, event or experience—in the present" (336). Crucial here is the word 'ongoing'; Hoskins suggests that memory should not be compared to the "original time, place and event", but rather understood in the context of "the *process*—the way in which memory has 'lived' across this time in many different forms" (335). Collective memory, in other words, is an imagined version of the past that is forged by its constant reiteration. This is useful when considering the relationship

between an era and representations of it in film and TV, as it is via the media that collective memories are usually repeated. In their introduction to *On Media Memory*, Motti Neiger, Oren Meyers and Eyal Zandberg contend that “collective memory is an inherently mediated phenomenon” because there “can be no ‘collective memory’ without public articulation” (3). As detailed in Chapter 1, new media’s breadth and accessibility has implications for how private and collective memories are formulated and expressed and, as Neiger, Meyers and Zandberg emphasise, it demands further inquiry (2).

In fact, the significant impacts on memory first of analog and subsequently of digital media platforms, new media and intermediality have compelled some to reject the term ‘collective memory’ altogether. For instance, Allison Landsberg differentiates ‘prosthetic memory’ from “collective memories, which tend to be geographically specific and which serve to reinforce and naturalise a group’s identity” (149). Instead, she argues that prosthetic memories, made possible by “new technologies of memory on the one hand and commodification on the other” (146), are memories of events experienced through mediated representations that allow for an understanding of human experience that extends beyond the geographically collective community. Landsberg’s term is useful, as it highlights how mediated depictions of the past now often interweave with private memories. However, Hoskins shows how the very process of broadening memory beyond localised experience signals a change in the meaning of the ‘collective’; he writes that “in late modernity, the collective is forged, or at least *mediated*, at a global level, if not a global ‘community’”, suggesting that the contemporary relationship to the past is “appropriately considered in terms of its *mediation* and *remediation* in the global present” (334). Thus, according to Hoskins, collective memory continues to exist, but the ‘collective’ is increasingly experienced globally as access to global media eases.

As I will elaborate on below, the dramas discussed in this chapter are either semi-autobiographical (*Is Anybody There?* and *Son of Rambow*) or based on semi-autobiographical novels (*Clubbed*, *Starter for 10*, *Awaydays* and the *Red Riding* trilogy). All except *Red Riding* are coming-of-age stories about boys or young men and

all express the personal recollections of their directors, scriptwriters and/or authors. Their depictions of the eighties are consequently informed more by memory than by nostalgic ‘modes’, to use Grainge’s term (‘Nostalgia and Style’ 28), but as period fictions they are inevitably stylised, making it necessary to distinguish them from those discussed in Chapter 2. Paul Grainge echoes Hoskins when he comments that globalisation challenges “the notion of authentic and territorialised memory” (*Memory and Popular Film* 7), suggesting that this must be taken into account when considering how memory is expressed in contemporary popular film. He cites *Schindler’s List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) to exemplify how personal, collective and mediated memories can intertwine in period fictions produced in the globalised present, arguing that by both invoking personal memories of the Holocaust and stylistically recalling media genres collectively associated with it, it draws out “the multiple facets of cultural memory as lived in history and experienced through the auspices of twentieth-century media” (*Memory and Popular Film* 6). In other words, mediated referents are invoked not for their own sake as a retro aesthetic, but to convey memory processes. Unlike the films and series discussed in Chapter 2, it is chiefly for this purpose that styles and media are invoked in those examined here.

Each displays effects of remembering, from a present standpoint, a past marked by fast-expanding globalisation and mediation. Yet, these effects and standpoints vary, and this chapter accordingly divides the productions into three subgroups. The first includes *Clubbed* and *Starter for 10*, which use a popular film genre as the narrative and stylistic structure with which to tell a localised coming-of-age story. As such, they signal the fading distinction between what is perceived as lived reality and the consumption of popular genres, implying a cohesive relationship between memory and genre. Yet, their representations of collective memory are inevitably affected by the requirements and constraints of the genre in question, and neither film highlights this concern. As a result, they contribute to the ongoing process of rewriting collective memory as described by Hoskins in sometimes inconsistent (as in *Starter for 10*) or even problematic (as in *Clubbed*) ways. As such, they highlight the increasing need to consider how popular genre impacts on reiterations of collective memory.

The second and third subgroups can be differentiated from the first by their more explicit engagement with the contemporary relationship between memory, media and globalisation. The second, demonstrated here by *Is Anybody There?*, involves metaphorically rejecting the expanding media landscape and scope of cultural referents. In this film, ‘the eighties’ is both longed for as an era that is less hindered by global media and lamented as the era that gave way to contemporary woes. Textually, *Is Anybody There?* rejects mediation in favour of ‘the real’ while simultaneously emphasising the value of the more localised memories of the older generations. Furthermore, director John Crowley’s decision to avoid invoking genres or playing with pop cultural referents reveals his intention to sever memories of the eighties from global media influences. The final subgroup – comprised of the *Red Riding* trilogy and *Son of Rambow* – consciously embraces the role that the media play in iterating and reiterating contemporary memory. These examples are unique in genre and agenda: the films in the *Red Riding* trilogy combine real archival media with fabricated old media and employ *film noir* conventions to express collective memories of the North in the 1970s and 80s, while *Son of Rambow* conveys its protagonist’s memories by referencing films and film genres rather than depicting his experiences realistically, celebrating the positive impact of participatory global media. Yet, each shares in common its self-conscious use of recycled media as tools for exploring memory. Together, the films and television trilogy discussed below reveal how inflows of foreign media and advances in media technology in Britain since the 1980s have impacted on both the formation and the reiteration of public and private memory.

### **Localised Memories, Globalised Genres: *Starter for 10* and *Clubbed***

In his essay on ‘alternative heritage’ discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, Powrie names what he claims had become an identifiable genre in British historical cinema by the 1980s: the “rite of passage film” (316). These films, Powrie argues, were set in the recent past and were told from the perspective of a child or adolescent protagonist, whether male or female. As I have already outlined, Powrie lists a series of comedic films produced mainly in the 1980s that he calls nostalgic, contrasting them with some produced later which, he argues, exhibit “a darker side” (316). He exemplifies his point by focusing on



*Distant Voices, Still Lives, The Long Day Closes* (Terence Davies, 1992) and *Small Faces*, to define what he sees as a rite of passage subgenre: the “alternative heritage” film (317). In Chapter 2, I used Powrie’s essay as an example of the common tendency to read aesthetically pleasing depictions of the past as necessarily nostalgic and stylistically grim and dark depictions as necessarily critical. I return here to Powrie’s essay because it also typifies another perspective that is often implicit in discussions on screen dramas set in the past: that, generically, they are *primarily* period fictions and can be categorised as such. This causes productions that differ in tone and style to be grouped together, their common defining trait being their past setting. This can be problematic; in Powrie’s case, it establishes a false hierarchy wherein some ‘rite of passage’ films are granted a higher status than others because they are historically critical. For example, the made-for-television film *Those Glory Glory Days* (Channel 4, 1983), an uplifting drama-comedy about a group of young girls in the 1960s who take an interest in football, is one of several productions that Powrie pejoratively describes as nostalgic. However, like other films he names, it is primarily set in the past because it is a memoir; critically examining British history is arguably not its chief thematic concern. As such, classifying a production as a ‘period drama’ was already questionable in 2000 when Powrie published his essay, and fifteen years later it is even more problematic because, as noted in Chapter 2, commercial genres are now increasingly set in the past. These productions’ depictions of the past must be understood in the context of their genres, as genre affects intended audience, theme, narrative structure and other components of a production that impact on representation.

In the previous chapter, I considered how genre films like *The Business* utilise eighties iconography as a differentiating aesthetic. It is particularly difficult to label these productions as ‘period dramas’ as they adhere structurally and thematically to popular genres that are not dependent on period setting and which are often set in the present. Generically, *Starter for 10* and *Clubbed* are similar; both function only *secondarily* as period films, adhering primarily to other genres. *Starter for 10* is a coming-of-age romantic comedy. Based on the 2003 novel by David Nicholls and set in 1985, it tells the story of Brian (James McAvoy), a young working-class man from Southend-on-Sea with a passion for knowledge that he developed by watching

*University Challenge* (ITV, 1962-87; BBC, 1994-present) with his now-deceased father. He enrolls as an English literature student at the University of Bristol and joins the University Challenge team, and the film follows him through his first university year as he struggles to discover who he is, becomes infatuated with fellow team member Alice (Alice Eve) and eventually falls in love with his friend Rebecca (Rebecca Hall), while also navigating tensions between he and his working-class Southend friends Spencer and Tony (Dominic Cooper and James Corden).<sup>40</sup> The film follows the basic format of a romantic comedy as described by Tamar Jeffers McDonald in her overview of the genre, where she explains that a romantic comedy “has as its central narrative motor a quest for love, [...] portrays this quest in a light-hearted way and almost always to a successful conclusion” (9). The central narrative impetus of *Starter for 10* is Brian’s pursuit of Alice, and his eventual realisation that he has been pursuing the wrong woman and that Rebecca is the right woman for him. *Starter* is secondarily a coming-of-age tale, or bildungsroman,<sup>41</sup> but structurally it is primarily a romantic comedy, as Brian’s process of finding himself is framed by his pursuit of love; by discovering who he truly loves, he comes to understand what he really values.

Crucially, McDonald’s definition refers specifically to American romantic comedies. *Starter* is generically global, following a format that has been popular throughout the 1990s and 2000s in both British cinema (*Four Weddings and a Funeral* (Richard Curtis, 1994), *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (Sharon Maguire, 2001)) and in American cinema (*Sleepless in Seattle* (Nora Ephron, 1993), *Legally Blonde* (Robert Luketic, 2001)). Nicholls, who adapted his novel for the screen, also refers to the film as a romantic comedy in a short essay written for *The Guardian* (Nicholls). He continues by outlining the original novel’s indebtedness to American and British university genres, claiming to have been inspired by “repeat video viewings” of the American college

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<sup>40</sup> Essex is commonly associated with the growth of entrepreneurialism under Thatcherism; schemes such as the right to buy council homes encouraged aspiring members of London’s working-class to move to Essex, eventually leading to the term ‘Essex man’ to define this new group of working-class conservative voters. (Webber 205)

<sup>41</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica defines a bildungsroman as a “class of novel that deals with the maturation process, with how and why the protagonist develops as he does, both morally and psychologically” (‘Bildungsroman’).

films *Animal House* (John Landis, 1978) and *Revenge of the Nerds* (Jeff Kanew, 1984). He also cites his love for British depictions of university life in the BBC's *The Young Ones* (1982-4) and in campus novels like those by David Lodge, but describes his frustration that they either do not show the actual experience of attending university or focus primarily on faculty (Nicholls). Thus, the original novel, borne from a desire to accurately capture British university life while invoking well-known domestic and American campus genres, was already heavily influenced by popular screen genres before being adapted for the screen in a typical romantic comedy format. Nicholls acknowledges the inevitable balancing act between genre and period authenticity in the film adaptation, writing that the filmmakers aimed to stay true to the "pessimistic, sour, grey, indignant, a little bit sexless" quality of the mid-1980s, but only "as true as it's possible to be in a romantic comedy" (Nicholls).

Like *Starter for 10*, *Clubbed* adheres to a genre not typically associated with period cinema: the crime film, in both its British and American forms. Set in Coventry in the early 1980s, the film follows Danny (Mel Raido), a meek factory worker who is bullied emotionally by his ex-wife (Maxine Peake) and physically by local thugs in the presence of his daughters. His life is improved when he starts boxing, befriends fellow boxers Louis (Colin Salmon), Rob (Shaun Parkes) and Sparky (Scot Williams), and takes a job alongside them as a nightclub bouncer. Sparky's involvement in the drug trade leads to a series of violent episodes and eventually to Rob's murder. Danny and Louis enact violent revenge, but Louis lies to officials for Danny's sake, and he is able to evade prison, become a better father and write his first book. *Clubbed* is based on the memoir *Watch My Back* by Geoff Thompson, a writer, self-defence instructor and former bouncer who is known for his coarse, 'real world' approach to self-defence. As such, the film is directed at the particular male audiences to whom Thompson's work generally appeals: the same 'lad' audiences to whom Steve Chibnall and Robert Murphy argue British underworld crime films, as outlined in Chapter 1 and discussed in Chapter 2 in the context of *The Business*, have been appealing for decades. Chibnall and Murphy suggest that underworld films have appealed to male audiences faced with social transitions in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain, explaining that in *Get Carter*, for instance, the characters' "cold machismo" and "blustering and beleaguered patriarchy" helped to

cushion anxieties surrounding economic change and increasing gender equality in the work force (2). Similar anxieties have resurfaced in those 1990s and 2000s ‘lad’ films often classified as ‘Brit-grit’; as in the earlier underworld films, Brit-grit depictions of women as threatening have been linked to the anti-feminism backlash and to fears around the loss of traditional male communities.<sup>42</sup> As previously outlined, Claire Monk has also noted how this most recent cycle of ‘lad’ films expresses optimism for the individualist spirit of ‘New Britain’ (‘Underbelly UK’ 276).

*Clubbed* invokes the conventions of previous British underworld films, foregrounding physical violence, assuming a tough, masculine tone and lauding the unreconstructed man. It echoes Brit-grit and earlier underworld films by depicting Danny’s ex-wife as excessively aggressive and by marking his personal growth in his eventual ability to stand up to her. It also recalls Brit-grit by resolving emasculation via the rewards of individualism, contrasting the drabness of Danny’s working-class life, evoked in the washed out colours of his factory and the destitute state of his flat, with the brilliant colours of the nightclub where he eventually works. He carries himself more confidently as a result of his indulgence in stylish clothing; no longer bound by a collectivist society that forces him into an immobilised working-class existence, Danny’s commodities afford him power. Director Neil Thompson implies that *Clubbed* is indebted to a lineage of British underworld and especially 90s and 2000s Brit-Grit films, calling it a “gritty British movie” (Carnevale). In the same comment, however, he also notes that he was “hugely influenced” by what he calls “New York-style” American crime films such as *Mean Streets* (Martin Scorsese, 1973) and *Goodfellas* (Martin Scorsese, 1990). He explains his choice to invoke the “glossy” stylisation in these American films as a way to “elevate” *Clubbed* above a typical Brit Grit film (Carnevale). Thompson implies, here, that British and American crime genre conventions can be easily fused, revealing the diminishing generic importance of regional specificity.

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<sup>42</sup> See Hallam 266-7, Hill, ‘Failure and Utopianism’ 183 and Monk, ‘Underbelly UK’ 280.

Both *Starter for 10* and *Clubbed* consequently belong to commercial genres that are not dependent on time setting and that are ‘global’ in their fusion of British and American trends. As modest-budget productions, both are primarily targeted at domestic audiences (especially *Clubbed*), but they are designed to appeal to mainstream contemporary British viewers who are as familiar with American genres as they are British ones, drawing in turn from both. The secondary importance of period setting in and generically formulaic structures of *Starter for 10* and *Clubbed* liken them to *The Business* as discussed in Chapter 2. However, in *The Business*, ‘the eighties’ primarily serves a stylistic purpose, lending the film a degree of uniqueness. The stylistic value of an eighties setting was clearly not lost on the makers of *Starter for 10* and *Clubbed*; David Nicholls notes, in reference to the film’s period setting, that “there’s no reason why comedy shouldn’t be as nice to look at” (‘Cast and Crew’), while Neil Thompson explains that he wanted “to have a nice sort of pumping soundtrack on it” (Carnevale).

Yet, unlike *The Business*, these films’ eighties settings were not stylistic decisions; instead, they reflect the semi-autobiographical source material. Nicholls explains that *Starter* has a “strong autobiographical element” and that “both book and film are a fairly accurate account of my feelings and behaviour at that time” (Nicholls). The novel, and by extension the film, are set in Bristol in 1985 because that is where and when Nicholls attended university. *Clubbed* is presented as fiction and its protagonist does not share Geoff Thompson’s name, but its early 1980s Coventry setting reflects Thompson’s personal experiences as outlined in his memoir. The author explains that “the main thrust of the film is very true and all the other stuff is true but just in a different order” (Carnevale). As such, unlike *The Business* and other genre films set in the eighties like *Tuesday* and *The Firm*, *Starter for 10* and *Clubbed* are inspired by memory over and above music, fashion and other period styles. Their semi-autobiographical statuses do not promise historical accuracy, but they do imply a process of truth-telling, evident in Nicholls’ and Thompson’s above uses of terms like “accurate” and “true”. Those unaware of this exterior information may, of course, not recognise them as semi-autobiographical, but because they are structured as retrospective stories – both are narrated by their protagonists in the past tense – they emphasise processes of remembering and of personal revelation. This structure of

remembrance in *Starter for 10* and *Clubbed* draws on and re-forges the ‘web of meaning’ that surrounds ‘the eighties’ for viewers, whether it triggers and reframes personal memories or, among younger viewers, ‘prosthetic’ ones, to use Landsberg’s term.

The blend of memory and popular genre in *Starter for 10* and *Clubbed* reflects what Jim Collins calls the “reality of the array” (255) as discussed in the previous chapter. Collins argues that what he calls the ‘array’ – the set of universally recognised mediated signs that circulate and recirculate in the postmodern present – is as real to those living in highly mediated cultures as any other aspect of experience. Because the conventions of screen genres form part of contemporary British viewers’ collective memory, they are seen to have the capacity to convey real stories about the past. The films also, as I have already suggested above, confirm that collective memory is now experienced globally: conventions from American college films like *Animal House* and American crime films like *Goodfellas* are considered suitable for telling localised British stories and are integrated seamlessly into British genres. Still, using a popular genre to tell a story rooted in memory has its difficulties. While it is easy to apply an eighties aesthetic to a fictional genre output, a semi-autobiographical narrative that promises veracity can be complicated by genre conventions. Later in this chapter, I will suggest that certain screen fictions successfully foreground the role that popular genres play in the mediation and production of contemporary memory, but because neither *Starter for 10* nor *Clubbed* acknowledge their own genericity, their formulaic structures complicate the supposedly ‘true’ memories they depict. As such, the meanings they project, and in turn how they contribute to the ongoing process of rewriting collective memory, are inconsistent and even at times problematic.

In *Starter for 10*, inconsistency arises from a conflict between the film’s formulaic narrative structure and its supposed scepticism toward Thatcherism. Although *Starter* is not overtly political, it calls upon collective memories of changing class structures, political upheaval and mass unemployment, expressing cynicism for Thatcherite ideologies. This is notable in character portrayals: the left-wing or working-class tend to be honourable while the conservative, posh and apolitical are

untrustworthy. The working-class Brian is also left-leaning and politically conscious and the audience is invited to identify with his liberalism, even if the script occasionally mocks his youthful concern for how political activism will enrich his identity over and above his actual concern for the causes he endorses. His friend and eventual love interest Rebecca, who turns out to be far more dependable than Brian's first love interest Alice, is more fiercely left-wing than Brian, often participating in protests and at one point wearing a shirt that bears the phrase 'coal not dole' in reference to the 1984-5 miners' strike. Alice, on the other hand, hails from an upper-middle-class family and shows no interest in politics (Figure 12). Also, when Brian's Essex friend Spencer visits him in Bristol, tensions arise between the unemployed Spencer and Patrick (Benedict Cumberbatch), the posh and ostentatious captain of the University Challenge team, who accuses Spencer of abusing the tax money of "law-abiding citizens" (*Starter for 10*). Here, the audience is encouraged to side with the good and honest Spencer over the haughty and generally unlikeable Patrick.

These character details are evidently meant to bring historical richness to the film's straightforward romantic narrative, but they also announce how the eighties ought to be remembered: as a time during which growing individualism and simultaneously



**Figure 12:** Above, the dependable, left-wing Rebecca (Rebecca Hall), and below, the untrustworthy, posh, apolitical Alice (Alice Eve). (*Starter for 10*)

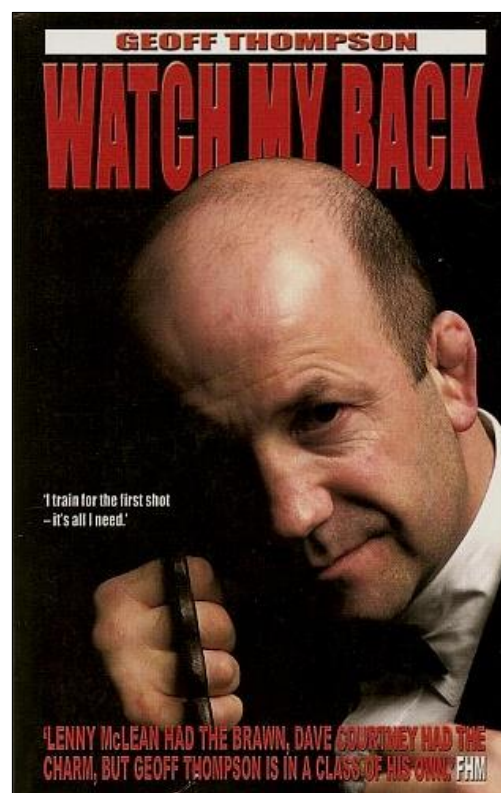
declining collectivism (epitomised in Patrick's denouncement of unemployment benefits) caused political injustice and social conflict. However, while the script draws from and remediates a decidedly left-wing memory of the eighties, it simultaneously upholds the demands of a coming-of-age romantic comedy, projecting a conflicted message. The structure of a romantic comedy is innately individualist, as it ranks the protagonist's desire for romance over other concerns and rewards him or her for pursuing it, and Brian's self-improvement and recognition that he loves Rebecca are prioritised over his or Rebecca's political or social concerns. The script does, as mentioned above, poke fun at Brian's rather self-absorbed approach to political activism, but his participation in protests is validated because it ultimately helps him to secure Rebecca's affections. The film ends when Brian approaches Rebecca while she is protesting; he draws her away from the demonstration to apologise for his foolishness and to ask her to be his girlfriend, to which she accepts. This final exchange is, of course, a genre requirement – as a romantic comedy, it naturally ends with Brian's and Rebecca's happy union – but it also implies that political activism functions primarily as a facilitator for romance. Furthermore, although the film summons memories of social tensions that arose during Britain's transition from collectivism to individualism and treats the latter with scepticism, its requisite happy ending paradoxically trivialises these tensions. For instance, a conflict that arises between Brian and Spencer as the latter begins to feel his friend has abandoned his origins, stressing the repercussions of an individualist 'enterprise culture' that allows those with ambition, like Brian, to rise above their means but also enables others, like Spencer, to descend into poverty, is effortlessly resolved in the conclusion. This implies that the difficulties introduced by Thatcherite individualism are easily surmountable, which is inconsistent with Brian's and Rebecca's adamantly anti-Thatcherite stances.

*Starter for 10's* genre structure therefore confuses the generally left-wing outlook it strives to express. The film projects the semblance of genuine memory, but the era that it remediates – and, in turn, that it encourages viewers to remember – is ideologically muddled. A similar phenomenon is identifiable in *Clubbed*, where Brit-grit conventions complicate its apparently apolitical depiction of the 1980s. *Clubbed* is more explicitly autobiographical than *Starter*; Thompson's memoir from which it is



adapted features his photograph on the cover, highlighting its authenticity (Figure 13). The film's veracity was also widely publicised; the summary on its official website describes it as an adaptation of Geoff Thompson's book ('Clubbed'), and Geoff Thompson was more often featured in publicity articles and interviews than was director Neil Thompson. It is clear that promoters wished to sell the film as Geoff Thompson's story. However, *Clubbed* is also more generically conventional than *Starter*, which stands apart from orthodox romantic comedies in its multiple storylines and cultural and historical depth. It does appear that attempts were made to differentiate *Clubbed* from an average British underworld crime film, most notably in its interracial casting. Of the four main characters in the film – Danny, Louis, Rob and Sparky – Danny and Sparky are white while Louis and Rob are black, and Sparky is in an interracial relationship. This decision to represent a wider cultural demographic distinguishes *Clubbed* from the mostly white casts in Brit-grit and other underworld crime films. Apart from this, though, *Clubbed* is a fairly predictable output, drawing thematically from British crime traditions and stylistically from American ones to appeal to its British but globally savvy 21<sup>st</sup> century 'lad' audience.

**Figure 13:** The cover of *Watch My Back*, on which *Clubbed* is based, features an image of author Geoff Thompson, signalling that it is a memoir. (*Watch My Back* cover design)



Probably because it is produced to appeal to fans of Brit-grit and other British and American crime films whose political views (if any) cannot be easily predicted, *Clubbed* is decidedly apolitical. The Thatcher government is not mentioned and the story remains self-contained, ignoring broader issues and events that marked the early 1980s. Still, the version of the eighties it recalls is filtered through the thematic demands of Brit-grit and other British underworld films, which impact on its depictions of women and masculinity. As noted briefly above, protagonist Danny is consistently victimised by his ex-wife Angela. Her harshness is made unreasonable by the fact that Danny's behaviour never appears to warrant the abuse; he is portrayed as a good father who wishes to retain a strong relationship with his daughters. In time, it is revealed that Angela has been manipulating their daughters' opinions of Danny; he overhears one daughter say to the other, "Mom says you shouldn't expect anything from dad because he's weak" (*Clubbed*). Angela's behaviour is consistent with depictions of women in Brit-grit and underworld films, and as a threatening female character, she recalls Carly (Georgina Chapman) in *The Business* as discussed in the previous chapter. However, where *The Business*' tongue-in-cheek style parodies Carly's excessive immorality, the earnest representations of both Angela and Danny in *Clubbed* conceal the characters' generic origins. As such, the film's implied veracity problematically suggests that this is a 'true' representation of difficulties faced by men in late 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain.

Similarly, the resolution that the film presents for Danny's predicament does more than satisfy the audience's expectations for a 'lad' film. Danny builds his assertiveness and finds the confidence to stand up to Angela through his incorporation in an all-male boxing culture and his new position as a nightclub bouncer. Like the film's depiction of Angela, its depiction of unreconstructed masculinity as the resolution to male anxieties is typical of Brit-grit. Yet, in conjuring collective memories of the 1980s, it also realises the Thatcherite fantasy of equal opportunity for the ambitious, regardless of race, gender or class. Despite initially living in poverty, Danny's restored self-assurance is enough for him to rise above his dreary position as a factory janitor to become a successful doorman and eventually a successful writer. Louis, Rob and Sparky have also been empowered by embracing their masculinity; Rob, for instance, has resisted following in his drug-addict father's footsteps through his dedication to

boxing. This simplistically drawn correlation between honing one's virility and achieving personal success is especially problematic for black characters Louis and Rob: neither one is ever subjected to racist abuse, even when reprimanding belligerent nightclub patrons, and this problematically suggests that in 1980s Britain, ambition and self-actualisation were enough to overcome social bigotries.

*Clubbed*, like *Starter for 10*, is therefore at a difficult junction between the genre to which it adheres and the memories of the 1980s it invokes. The particular collective memories of the eighties that *Clubbed* and *Starter* remediate are filtered through the demands of their respective genres, rendering them ideologically inconsistent and, in the case of *Clubbed*, problematic. Both films are testament to the influence that film and television genres have on memory formation in increasingly media-saturated cultures, but they also highlight the need to consider how using a popular genre to *reiterate* memory affects what meanings of the era are diffused. It is not appropriate, as Phil Powrie implicitly suggests it is, to group all films set in the past under the genre of 'period drama' and to judge their representations of the past against one another; as *Starter* and *Clubbed* exemplify, a film with a period setting may primarily belong to another popular genre, and the conventions of this genre can have an impact on era representation.

In *Starter* and *Clubbed*, the trouble arises because textually, neither film *acknowledges* its generic origins; rather, their genre structures are naturalised and implied to be in harmony with the 'true' memories of the eighties that they convey. Interestingly, however, *Starter for 10* does call attention to the effects of increased mediation in its references to *University Challenge*: as I have previously noted, Brian explains that it was his habit of watching the show with his father that inspired in him a love of knowledge and the desire to attend university. This detail reveals the growing cultural impact, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, of popular media in Britain; for Brian, a television programme has formed the basis for memories of his father and has also broadened his knowledge of British social life beyond the confines of his particular working-class environment. Furthermore, the film directly calls upon audiences' collective memories of popular media by recreating a *University Challenge* episode on

which Brian appears, meticulously mimicking the set design and featuring an uncanny impersonation of the show's original host Bamber Gascoigne by actor Mark Gatiss. This scene draws from its viewers' shared media knowledge and, in so doing, reminds them of the close relationship between their memories of the era's media and memories of the era more generally. Still, the film does not formally draw attention to *its own* indebtedness to a mediated genre – the romantic comedy – and it is from here that the film's ideological contradictions arise. The next two sections of this chapter will identify productions that *do* call attention to media influences and their impact on memory formation and reiteration. In the first case, this is to reject the popular media as legitimate components of postmodern memories, and in the second, to embrace and incorporate them. Each approach has its own implications, but both tend to avoid the confused ideologies expressed in *Starter* and *Clubbed*.

### **In Search of an Unmediated Real: *Is Anybody There?***

The 2009 film *Is Anybody There?* offers a counterpoint to *Starter* and *Clubbed*. Like these films, it is semi-autobiographical: the script was written by Peter Harness, who grew up in a retirement home and based much of the script on his own experiences (Roberts). Set in 1987 in the southern seaside town of Hastings, it tells the story of a ten-year-old boy, Edward (Bill Milner), who lives in a retirement home that is owned and run by his parents, referred to only as Mum and Dad (Anne-Marie Duff and David Morrissey). The solitary Edward, who must deal with his parents' failing marriage and with the constant demands of the elderly people living in his home, has become obsessed with the afterlife and spends much of his time trying to communicate with ghosts by using his tape recorder and camera, among other devices. However, he befriends the home's newest resident Clarence (Michael Caine), a retired magician, and through their growing bond learns to face the world of the living while Clarence comes to terms with his past. Director John Crowley has remarked that he and Harness chose to set the film in the 1980s "because that was the period that Pete and I had grown up in" (Douglas). Thus, like both *Starter* and *Clubbed*, *Is Anybody There?* is not based on actual events but draws from sincere memories of the era: in this case, those of both the writer and the director. Although it is not narrated in a past-tense voiceover, its coming-

of-age narrative structure and focus on a child protagonist, when combined with a past setting, imply retrospection.

Unlike *Starter for 10* and *Clubbed*, however, *Is Anybody There?* suggests a very clear and consistent perspective on the eighties as an era. Crowley explains that the film

[...] was informed by the fact that it was the era, '87, when Margaret Thatcher said, 'There's no such thing as society, only as individuals', and this was a little snapshot of the country in a very unusual way, [...] of the marginalized people of the very old and someone very young who are left on the wayside because Mum and Dad are too busy working their asses off to be able to really properly give time to either group. (Douglas)

Thus, although *Is Anybody* is not overtly political, Crowley acknowledges that it was written and produced with an anti-Thatcherite stance, and this message is consistently expressed in the film text. As Crowley implies in the comment above, Edward's parents struggle to make ends meet. When Edward asks if he can have the larger bedroom that used to be his, his father tells him, "You can move back into your old room if you can pay us fifty quid a week" (*Is Anybody There?*), emphasising how the Thatcher government's fostering of an entrepreneurial culture has required everything to be assigned a monetary value. Individualism is also implicitly criticised. Edward's father, for instance, who is undergoing a midlife crisis, becomes disinterested in helping the retirees and instead obsessed with 'finding himself', cutting his hair into a mullet and sporting a jean jacket. He begins to neglect his family, forcing his wife to work harder, and attempts an affair with his eighteen-year-old employee Tanya (Linzey Cocker), causing his marriage to break down. Implied, here, is that following individualist ambitions (which, of course, is precisely what Thatcher's famous 'no such thing as society' comment encourages) leaves others to work tirelessly and leaves those in need – in this case, his child and the elderly people in his home – without appropriate care.

Unlike in *Starter for 10*, popular genre conventions do not contradict the anti-Thatcherite message that is projected in *Is Anybody There?*. In fact, Crowley actively avoids invoking recognisable genres or other references from popular media; the film's pessimistic stance on Thatcherism also translates, here, to a pessimistic stance on postmodern mediation. Crowley almost wholly rejects the media as positive

contributors to human experience, both formally by sidestepping references to media and metaphorically in subject matter. Discussing his decision to set the film in the 1980s, he comments that “even though there was a slew of films in the ‘80s since then – *Son of Rambow* has come along and all that – [...] this is a very different ‘80s”. He continues by explaining that his is not the “‘80s of kitsch pop culture” but rather “the ‘80s in the backwaters, [...] where a lot of the cultural elements of the ‘80s didn’t really turn up” (Douglas). He also explains that Harness’ story, about a boy who is obsessed with ghost-hunting, seemed “pre-mobile phones”, “pre-digital” and “old-fashioned” (Douglas). Whether ghost-hunting is actually old-fashioned is debateable, but Crowley’s perception of the eighties as a time before digital media and mobile phones and his determination to depict a region of Britain not affected by the spread of global media and popular culture reveal his intent to disavow the value of depicting shared memories of the eighties through the lens of media references.

Furthermore, when an interviewer comments that *Is Anybody* reminded him of Hal Ashby’s cult classic *Harold and Maude* (1971), Crowley agrees that his film was tonally inspired by Ashby’s but explains that he avoided referencing it in the same manner as the recent “generation of indie filmmakers” (Douglas). By ‘indie filmmakers’, Crowley is referring to filmmakers like Richard Ayoade who, as discussed in the previous chapter, cultivate a quirky style by formally referencing cinema history. Crowley claims that he wanted *Is Anybody There?* “to be true to itself. I didn’t want it to be pretentious and I don’t particularly like to make films which remind you of other films. I want to make films about the material that is in front of you” (Douglas). Crowley reveals here his personal distaste for the postmodern practice of referencing past media. As such, it is unsurprising that *Is Anybody*’s style is understated and seamless, maintaining the viewer’s attention on the story itself, and that it does not conform to or reference any popular genres, implying that expressions of genuine experience and references to popular media are mutually exclusive. It is also one of very few productions in the Eighties Cycle that does not use popular 1980s songs for its non-diegetic soundtrack. Using pop songs in this way naturalises their place as expected signifiers of the eighties and, as such, in *Is Anybody There?* they only surface

diegetically. When they do, they seem awkward and out of place in Edward's small, quiet town and home surrounded by elderly people.

Textually, the film reflects Crowley's pessimistic stance on mediation, dismissing it in favour of an unmediated 'real'. This is not achieved by denying the existence of media, but rather by calling attention to the widening availability and impact of media technologies in the 1980s and criticising British people's growing reliance on them. Edward's fixations on media or media technologies are likened either to escapism or an inability to accept the truth. At one point, he desperately wants to watch a television programme on ghosts, drawing a metaphorical link between his naïve belief in ghosts and faith in the equally spectral media, which have long been doctored to prove ghosts' existence. In addition, Edward's primary ghost-hunting tools are a portable sound recorder and a camera, and he listens to a Walkman on his way to school. These technologies are depicted as escapist tools that draw Edward from reality: he uses the sound recorder to indulge his obsession with ghosts, attempting to record the spirit of a recently deceased retirement home resident. In one scene, when listening intently to his Walkman for the sound of a ghost on his recording, he fails to hear Clarence driving toward him and forces him to veer off the road. In two other scenes, Edward rewinds one of his tape recordings and the film image reverses along with it, as if recorded on videotape. This formal device breaks the otherwise seamless editing, calling attention to the scenes' inauthenticity and reminding the audience that mediated representations of reality are precisely that: mediated, and not real themselves.

Naturally, a comparison is also implicitly drawn between media and the retired magician Clarence's slight-of-hand tricks, as both derive entertainment from illusions. However, magic is assigned greater value due to its reliance on human bonds for success. It is Edward's and Clarence's budding friendship that eventually draws Edward from his world of ghosts: Edward learns to perform Clarence's tricks, which helps him to make friends at school and bond with his family. Archaic cultural forms are elsewhere compared to their 1980s equivalents and also foster social interaction; for instance, at Edward's birthday party, he and his classmates play 'musical statues' to the Dexys Midnight Runners song 'Come on Eileen'. They do not sing along and instead

awkwardly play the game, begging comparison with an earlier scene in which Clarence performs Gracie Fields' 'Wish Me Luck (As You Wave Me Goodbye)' on the piano and all of the retirees sing along and dance.

Subtle points of comparison like these evoke nostalgic longing for an era before global media and consumer culture. The decision to cast renowned British actors to play the retirees intertextually contributes to this; as well as Michael Caine, they include Thelma Barlow, Rosemary Harris, Leslie Phillips, Ralph Riach, Elizabeth Spriggs, Sylvia Syms and Peter Vaughan. This casting feature is hailed by the filmmakers; quoted in the production notes for the film's Australian release, producer David Heyman notes that it "was a joy to build up such a brilliant ensemble of veteran British acting talent", while Crowley comments that "These actors were particularly fun for me [...]. You never get to cast this many great older actors in one project. A lot of them had worked together years and years ago. It was quite jolly and eccentric. There was a lot of reminiscing" ('Production Notes'). Crowley's emphasis on memory is key here: older actors who were once well-known represent and conjure nostalgia for the more localised and culturally specific popular cultures that existed in Britain before globalised media had spread so exponentially.

The film's outlook on media and media technologies does improve somewhat near the end. Although Edward's already difficult relationship with his father worsens when his parents' marriage breaks down, they rekindle their bond by watching *Back to the Future* together at the cinema. Also, as Edward eventually learns to let go of his obsession with ghosts and embrace the world of the living, he attaches a message to his tape recorder that reads, 'When you want to remember something say it into this'. This detail acknowledges the value of media technologies when they are used to record memories. Yet, watching *Back to the Future* is depicted as constructive because it initiates a connection between Edward and his father, and the sound recorder is embraced as a vessel for memories of, rather than a creator of, positive experiences. Meanwhile, the film depicts Edward's life as enriched because he has learned to socialise with others in old-fashioned ways: he plays football with a friend, inviting one retiree to join, and performs magic tricks for another retiree. As such, rather than



accepting global media and media technologies as valid components of postmodern experience, Crowley's film ultimately locates their worth in their ability to *facilitate* genuine experiences. This leaves Edward nowhere to turn but back to archaic social practices, revealing the difficulty with *Is Anybody's* perspective on mediation. While its self-conscious reflection on the effects of mediation on memory formation and reiteration in global cultures avoids pitfalls like those in *Starter for 10* and *Clubbed*, its pessimistic outlook on the global spread of media and popular culture encourages viewers to long for a time before the 1980s, when these phenomena started to gain real traction in the midst of Thatcherite consumer culture. Its stance on postmodern culture is escapist, seeking the perceived sincerity of an unmediated real.

### **Embracing Global Mediation: The *Red Riding* Trilogy and *Son of Rambow***

I will conclude by discussing two more productions centring on memory: Channel 4's *Red Riding* television film trilogy and Garth Jennings' popular theatrical release *Son of Rambow*. Unlike *Starter* and *Clubbed*, I will examine *Red Riding* and *Son of Rambow* separately; while the dynamics at play in the former two are broadly comparable, *Red Riding's* and *Son of Rambow's* divergent approaches demand individual consideration. Yet, despite differing in tone and subject matter, both bring to bear the role that the media play in iterating and reiterating memories by consciously calling on film genres and collectively recognisable references from past films and other media. In this way, they are similar to *Starter* and *Clubbed* in their genericity but similar to *Is Anybody There?* in their self-consciousness. Both actively engage the notion that in the postmodern period, as Hoskins suggests, collective memory is heavily mediated and forged at a global level.

#### The *Red Riding* Trilogy

Channel 4's 2009 *Red Riding* television films – *In the Year of Our Lord 1974* (Julian Jarrold, 2009), *In the Year of Our Lord 1980* (James Marsh, 2009) and *In the Year of Our Lord 1983* (Anand Tucker, 2009) – are adapted from three of a quartet of novels by crime writer David Peace. Set in Leeds and the surrounding area of West Yorkshire, the novels follow investigations into a series of interrelated and mostly fictional crimes.

One, however, is based on actual events: the Yorkshire Ripper case, in which Peter Sutcliffe murdered 13 women between 1975 and 1980. Peace has noted that the crimes themselves are peripheral; in an interview he explains that his fiction is less about crime itself than about what it can reveal about a particular time and place, commenting that “crime is the best way to examine our society” (Barretta 100). In essence, then, Peace’s novels explore collective memories of an era in the North marked by economic decay, cultural stagnation and corrupt systems of power.

Unlike *Starter for 10*, *Clubbed* and *Is Anybody There?*, Peace’s novels are not explicitly based on personal experiences and nor are their television adaptations. Channel 4’s trilogy was produced in conjunction with Michael Winterbottom’s and Andrew Eaton’s production company Revolution Films, which hired British screenwriter Tony Grisoni to adapt the novels. Subsequently, three separate directors were hired to head each of the films: Julian Jarrold for *In the Year of Our Lord 1974*, James Marsh for *In the Year of Our Lord 1980* and Anand Tucker for *In the Year of Our Lord 1983*. The films’ depictions of the seventies and eighties are consequently less influenced by personal memory than those discussed in the previous sections, having been adapted by a professional screenwriter and directed by those who were only brought in for one film and had little input in the trilogy’s overall development. Yet, the novels are based on Peace’s memories of growing up in West Yorkshire amidst Peter Sutcliffe’s, or the Yorkshire Ripper’s, murdering spree. He explains that from the age of ten, inspired by Jayne McDonald’s 1977 murder, he was “obsessed with trying to solve the case. I used to cut out photographs of dead prostitutes and all kind of articles related to the killer” (Barretta 101). Peace consequently *did* experience events detailed in his novels, however mediated this experience may have been. He also claims that his fascination with the Yorkshire Ripper case likely stemmed from an interest “in *Sherlock Holmes*, in *Batman* and in *Marvel* comics”, commenting that he initially wanted to be a comic book writer (101). What rendered the Yorkshire Ripper case particularly meaningful to him, then, was how it was filtered through his obsessions with other media: detective novels and action/ adventure stories.

Peace's comments make clear that his *Red Riding* quartet is indeed semi-autobiographical, but not in the manner of David Nicholls' novel *Starter for Ten*, Geoff Thompson's memoir *Watch My Back* and Peter Harness' screenplay for *Is Anybody There?*. While Nicholls, Thompson and Harness claim to have been primarily inspired by actual lived experiences (going to university, learning to box and growing up in a retirement home) and only secondarily, if at all, by other media (Nicholls cites his love of university-set literature, films and television, but Thompson and Harness do not cite any media), Peace asserts that he was *only* inspired by mediated memories. This gives credence to the notion that in highly mediated cultures, the media are experienced as lived realities. Having been born in 1967, Peace was likely exposed to a great deal of news media and international genres – in his case, *Marvel* comics – during his 1970s/80s childhood and adolescence, and he acknowledges these as crucial elements of those experiences. Drawing from such memories collapses the distinction between individual and collective memory; as Peace draws on his own experiences, he simultaneously draws on shared experiences of the Yorkshire Ripper case's mediation.

Despite not having a personal stake in Channel 4's adaptations, the directors reveal that they too drew from memory in their instalments. Julian Jarrold, director of *1974*, explains that he chose to shoot his film on 16mm because "I wanted the film to evoke my memory of the 1970s, and the graininess of 16mm captures that drab, smoky era" (Lodge). Jarrold's generalised memory of the seventies as drab and smoky likely stems as much from contemporaneous and retrospective media depictions that are drab and smoke-filled (like, for instance, *Life on Mars*) as it does from his own memories. In addition, associating the 'graininess' of a particular film stock with a memory is typical of the ever-shrinking boundary between memories of mediation and those of lived experience. 1983 director Anand Tucker also emphasises the importance of memory to the films' protagonists, commenting that all three instalments are "about memory. That's what's great about it. And each film is about one person's – or, in my case, two people's – memory of stuff that happened, and [...] we all remember the same moment completely differently" (Poland).

Two of the *Red Riding* directors also point to the importance of myth and of genre – namely, *film noir*. Peace has been called a *noir* author and has been described by some as having invented a new subgenre: ‘Yorkshire *noir*’. With regard to this, he notes that while there is not “a strong *noir* tradition in England, like in America, in France or in Italy”, there is now “a kind of globalization, people are interested in Swedish *noir* literature” (Barretta 100). Here, Peace recognises the impact of globalisation on artistic expression; because international genres (especially those popularised by Hollywood cinema, like *noir*) have been rendered easily accessible to media-saturated societies, their conventions have been adopted as the basis for exploring stories that are set outside of their typical contexts. Furthermore, several theorists have pointed to the sustained cross-cultural impact of *film noir*. Andrew Spicer, for instance, dedicates a chapter in *Film Noir* to what he identifies as British *film noir* (175-203), naming films such as *The Third Man* (Carol Reed, 1949) and *Hell is a City* (Val Guest, 1960) as well as more recent neo-*noirs* like *Dance with a Stranger*. Thus, while Britain may not be commonly known for producing *noir*, the genre has certainly had some impact on its cinema, as it has had on many global cinemas, indicating the widespread influence of its conventions.

The television adaptations of *Red Riding* translate Peace’s literary *noir* to the screen by stylistically recalling *film noir*; however, comments made by Anand Tucker and 1980 director James Marsh suggest that the films’ genericity may serve a secondary purpose. Both have openly called their instalments *noirs* while simultaneously emphasising their mythicism, suggesting that the former may function as a way of expressing the latter. Tucker comments that his and the other films are “*noirs* of the mind” (Poland) and elsewhere describes the film series’ mythological underpinnings, claiming that “the series isn’t really about the Yorkshire Ripper at all” (Feeney). He explains,

The series is about something much older and darker. It’s even older than this century. It’s a very Blakean idea of evil. It’s that weird Yorkshire landscape [...] where civilization ends, with untamed and unspeakable forces. [...] That idea of evil forces at work that affect the way men operate. It’s not just small-town bad men, it’s something much worse. (Feeney)

Thus, Tucker describes *Red Riding* less as a depiction of a particular region and time period and more as a mythological tale that explores an ambiguous notion of Yorkshire ‘evil’, one Tucker implies is embedded in British collective consciousness. When taken in this context, his comment that the films are ‘noirs of the mind’ implies that their *noir* elements evoke this shared idea of ‘evil’. James Marsh also describes his film’s genericity, calling it a “classic *film noir*” (‘Making Of’, 1980). He calls attention to the novels’ indebtedness to American genres, commenting that they have “all the aspects of the American *policier* procedural. [Peace has] managed to take that genre and set it completely, organically in Yorkshire” (‘James Marsh’). Later in the same interview, Marsh outlines how he chose filming locations that featured Brutalist architecture “to express what is a very, very brutal world”, and explains that he wanted his film to feel “dare I say it, mythical”. Thus Marsh, like Tucker, aimed to make a period film that was in many ways *unrealistic*, drawing from *film noir* and representing eighties Yorkshire mythically rather than authentically. More explicitly, both Marsh and Tucker reveal their interest in depicting memories of the eighties as mediated: mediated by *film noir*, but also mediated by a shared myth of the North.

To more closely examine how genre, media and memory intertwine in the *Red Riding* trilogy, I will focus here on James Marsh’s film, *In the Year of Our Lord 1980*, as it would be redundant to discuss all three. Each film differs stylistically and tonally, and as such I do not wish to suggest that my analysis of *1980* can be neatly applied to *1974* or *1983*. However, as outlined above, each film was inspired by similar concepts, and much of what is argued here is true across the series, however execution may differ. *1980* has been chosen because it is one of two that are set in the eighties, and also because it is the only one that directly explores collective memories of the Yorkshire Ripper case. The film follows Manchester detective Assistant Chief Constable Peter Hunter (Paddy Considine), who at the start of the film is assigned to travel to West Yorkshire to head the Yorkshire Ripper investigation, which has now been ongoing since 1975. Also on the investigative team are Helen Marshall (Maxine Peake), with whom Hunter once had an affair, and Officer Bob Craven (Sean Harris), with whom he previously worked on an earlier case: the shooting massacre that occurs at the end of *1974*. Over the course of the film, Hunter wards off his lingering feelings for Marshall

while uncovering evidence that the shooting massacre was actually committed by a series of corrupt police officers, and that one of the Yorkshire Ripper's supposed victims, Clare Strachan, was actually murdered by Bob Craven because she bore witness to the massacre. At the end of the film Hunter reveals this information to his superiors, and as a result he too is murdered, revealing West Yorkshire's deeply corrupt systems of power. As he suggests above, Marsh's aim in *1980* is to evoke memories of the early eighties rather than to depict the time faithfully, and to do so, he utilises both *film noir* conventions and archival news media. The *film noir* elements function as a language with which the programme's postmodern viewers are assumed to be familiar and through which a tone of despair and corruption can be evoked, while the archival media actively conjures shared memories of the Yorkshire Ripper and explores the disconnect between public and private memory. In the use of these techniques, *1980* differs from the films discussed in the above sections; here, mediation is consciously incorporated into the expression of memory, and therefore embraced as a crucial component of the iteration and reiteration of postmodern memories.

In his chapter on *film noir*, Steve Neale discusses the difficulties inherent in defining it as a genre. He explains that unlike most Hollywood genres that were developed by studios to satisfy certain imperatives, *film noir* was defined in retrospect by critics. As a result, he notes that the genre's "unity and coherence are presumed in the single term used to label them rather than demonstrated through any systematic, empirical analysis" (153); in fact, most key *films noirs* do not meet all of the genre's characteristics because they were never intended to follow the conventions of an industrial genre. However, Neale points out that "somewhat ironically, if in Cowie's words *noir* is a 'fantasy', or if an attachment to the term can in Naremore's words mark 'a nostalgia for something that never existed' (1995/6: 25), the phenomenon of neo-*noir* – itself a vehicle for this fantasy – is much more real, not only as a phenomenon but also as a genre" (174). In other words, cinematic nostalgia for what was perceived as a classic genre resulted in its reiteration in much more consistent, calculated ways, resulting in the development of a coherent genre decades after the original *films noirs* were produced. Although neo-*noirs* differ substantially, they share in common their self-consciousness, invoking *film noir* styles, narrative techniques, themes and

characterisation with which their audiences are already assumed to be familiar. These include, according to Andrew Spicer, a dingy and gaudy night-time city setting where it is often raining, high contrast (chiaroscuro) lighting, odd camera angles and narratives that include flashbacks and ellipses and end ambiguously. Common characters include an alienated male protagonist and a *femme fatale* who is deceitful, alluring and dangerous (*Film Noir* 4-5).

*1980* can be labelled neo-*noir*, as it knowingly conjures the ‘fantasy’ of noir that Neale describes, and in so doing it conveys a fantasy of the English North in the early eighties. Creating a neo-*noir* style enables Marsh to disassociate his film from the *actual* year of 1980 in West Yorkshire, and to instead draw attention to the mediated process of remembering. Stylistically, the lighting in *1980* is usually low-key, emphasising shadows, and the film is often shot from unsettling camera angles (Figure 14). Many scenes are shot at night and it is often raining; Marsh comments that fake rain was created (*‘Making Of’*, 1980). Furthermore, Spicer comments that *noirs* “are frequently oneiric (dream-like), where every object and encounter seems unnaturally charged” (*Film Noir* 4). This is consistent with Marsh’s comment that he was aiming to create a ‘mythical’ universe, and is notable in a sequence in which Peter Hunter travels to Fitzwilliam, West Yorkshire to visit recurring character Reverend Laws (Peter Mullan). As he drives in at dusk, fires burn in bins along the side of the road and a lone child stares at him (Figure 15). The mise-en-scène, lighting and cinematography render this



**Figure 14:** *1980* is shot in low-key, high-contrast lighting to recall *film noir*. (*Red Riding: In the Year of Our Lord 1980*)

commonplace street supernaturally malevolent and the otherwise ordinary boy strangely eerie. In the sequence that follows, boys in demonic homemade masks jump up from tall grass and shoot toy guns at Hunter. The editing is frenzied, jumping between shots of the children and close-ups of Hunter, and intense non-diegetic music swells, augmenting the sense that West Yorkshire is a nightmarish world that is haunted by unknown creatures and where, as Spicer describes, everything ‘seems unnaturally charged’.

Supplementing these stylistic details are neo-*noir* characterisations. Hunter is a troubled protagonist whose relationship with his wife appears strained and who feels alienated from his coworkers, reminding of typical film noir protagonists. In addition, Helen Marshall in many ways echoes the classic femme fatale figure; she is blonde, openly sexual and irresistible to Hunter, who rekindles his affair with her. At the end of the film, she reveals that she fell pregnant with his child and had an abortion without telling him, recalling the tendency of *femmes fatales* to hide secrets that are disclosed in the conclusion. Marshall’s secret, of course, does not expose her as conniving or duplicitous like typical *femmes fatales*. Nor does her character carry the same ideological weight, as *femmes fatales* often connote male anxieties around strong and independent women by depicting them as treacherous (Neale 160). This is because the aim in *1980* is not to repeat the *moral* messages embedded in original *films noirs* but rather echo the ‘fantasy’ of *film noir* etched on the consciousness of the series’



**Figure 15:** Fitzwilliam, West Yorkshire is filmed to look like a nightmarish fantasy world. (*Red Riding: In the Year of Our Lord 1980*)



postmodern viewers. This detaches *1980* from historical realism, instead emphasising the mediated nature of contemporary recollection. While the *film noir* echoes are used to different ends, they recall a universe that Spicer describes as “dark, malign and unstable where individuals are trapped through fear and paranoia, or overwhelmed by the power of sexual desire” (*Film Noir* 4). Specifically, Hunter is both of these things, unable to resist Marshall and terrified by the threats he receives as he begins to uncover truths about the West Yorkshire police force. However, more generally, Marsh’s (as well as Jarrold’s and Tucker’s) intended depiction of the North is as “dark, malign and unstable” – to hearken back to Tucker’s statement, as a place governed by “untamed and unspeakable forces” – and the American conventions of *film noir* prove the perfect vehicle to depict this very British collective fantasy.

As such, *In the Year of Our Lord 1980* makes use of its contemporary viewers’ extensive media knowledge to explore memories of the North in the early eighties era. This is also evident in the use of archival news footage, which appears twice in the film: in a montage during the opening credits and at the film’s close, immediately after Peter Hunter is murdered. The opening montage intercuts actual photographs, video footage and radio footage regarding the Yorkshire Ripper with false ‘footage’ that is filmed to appear contemporaneous with the 1970s and 80s footage. It relays the story of the Yorkshire Ripper, beginning by establishing that several women have been murdered and that the community is frightened, and culminating in reports on the Wearside Jack tapes, which were claimed to have been sent in by the murderer but were a false lead. This establishes historical context for the viewer, as *1980* opens during the fruitless Wearside Jack investigation. Yet, it also reflects mediated articulations of memory in its unique blend of actual footage and fictional material. For those old enough to remember the Yorkshire Ripper murders, the montage appears uncanny, as some images are familiar while others – including the photographs of the victims, which appear similar to the actual media photographs but which are different – look unusual. For those who do not remember, the montage initially appears historically accurate, but is made strange when footage of Assistant Chief Constable Bill Molloy (Warren Clarke), who is a recognisable character from *In the Year of Our Lord 1974*, is intercut with the other footage.

Regardless of age, the montage has a two-pronged effect: on the one hand, its dated film stock triggers memories of the early eighties, whether obtained through personal experience or ‘prosthetic’, as described by Landsberg. On the other, its obvious falsehood reminds the viewer that his or her memories of the recent past are impacted by media representation, as the uncanniness of the fake footage indicates that it is, in fact, the *film stock* that is triggering his or her memories of the early eighties. The montage therefore invites viewers to consider how media impacts on memory before the narrative even begins. Then, in the final scene, immediately after Hunter is murdered by fellow police officers, one more segment of news footage is used, this time of Peter Sutcliffe being led by police as the surrounding people curse him. The message here is clear. In heavily mediated cultures, the media affect collective memory in what they display, but also in what they do not display. As the media focus attention on a lone serial killer, stirring up public hatred for Sutcliffe, they divert attention from the deep-seated police corruption that has caused Hunter’s death. Viewers are thus reminded that memory is necessarily mediated and is always a fantasy.

### *Son of Rambow*

Another film that actively calls upon mediated memories of the eighties, although in a very different way from the *Red Riding* trilogy, is Garth Jennings’ popular *Son of Rambow*. Set in 1982, the film was one of the most commercially successful in the Eighties Cycle, grossing over \$11 million USD theatrically worldwide (‘Son of Rambow’). It focuses on Will (Bill Milner), an artistic young boy whose family are Plymouth Brethren and who is not permitted to watch film or television or to listen to popular music.<sup>43</sup> As Will is banished one day to the school corridor while his class watches an educational video, he meets the rougher-around-the-edges Lee (Will Poulter), who has been kicked out of class. Lee is interested in filmmaking and his parents’ perpetual absence leaves him free to do as he pleases. When Lee’s older brother asks him to use his video camera to record a copy of *First Blood* (Ted Kotcheff, 1982) from the cinema, he decides to use the footage to make his own film and employs

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<sup>43</sup> The Plymouth Brethren are a conservative Evangelical Christian movement.

Will to assist him. The two eventually become friends, and intercutting the *First Blood* footage with their own recorded scenes, they produce a sequel in which Will plays Rambo's (Sylvester Stallone) son. *First Blood*, a big-budget Hollywood film, thus becomes the outlet for Will's creativity, which is perpetually stifled by his deeply religious mother (Jessica Stevenson) and the other Plymouth Brethren. However, Will's rejection of his family's traditions is eventually validated when his mother rejects them herself and defends her son.

Like the other films discussed in this chapter, *Son of Rambow* is semi-autobiographical. However, as with David Peace, the narrative is based specifically on Jennings' childhood experiences of media. In several interviews he cites his childhood love of movies and interest in making home films as his inspiration; he comments,

The first film I ever saw was *Star Wars* when I was five years old. It blew my head off, and from then on I loved films. But then *First Blood* came out when I was about 12 and it blew my socks off because it was the first film I'd seen that wasn't meant for my age group, and it was also a brilliant, brilliant film. [...] It struck so many chords that my friends and I decided we should make our own film. It was sort of my production: we got my dad's video camera, even though we had no idea how to use it, and we made this action movie called *Aaron, Part 1*. It was a tremendous hit! It was a day shooting, it was 10 minutes long, it was cut in camera. (Dawson, 'Garth Jennings')

*Son of Rambow* is therefore based on Jennings' experience of having been inspired by *First Blood* to produce his own film. In another interview, producer Nick Goldsmith, with whom Jennings works closely on his projects, points out that the original draft was more autobiographical, but that the script was "dull" because he and Jennings had had "fairly ordinary, nice upbringings". However, they found in a subsequent draft that by telling the story from the perspective of a child raised by Plymouth Brethren, they could "get that feeling across of how it was when we were kids, when you see a film, and it really has an effect on you in a much more filmic way" (Singer). In other words, Jennings and Goldsmith altered what was a mostly true story in order to render it more cinematic, as the intent was to summon memories of watching films.

In fact, in several interviews, Jennings stresses the film's indebtedness to other films. In contrast to *Is Anybody There?* director John Crowley, who details his aim not

to recall other films, Jennings describes actively invoking them. Apart from the obvious references to *First Blood*, there are other references as well; for instance, Jennings comments that a montage in which Will performs stunts for Lee's film was meant to invoke *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952), an earlier film about film production (Goldsmith et al.). He explains that even before working out the plot, he and Goldsmith had agreed on the referential style, commenting that "it was never going to be slavish to reality – it was always going to be a romantic view of that time. *Stand By Me* (Rob Reiner, 1986) has a similar sort of thing where it's all heightened and they're dodging big trains and it's a little fantastical" (Utichi). In *Son of Rambow*, stylistic and musical conventions from 1980s Hollywood action/ adventure films are frequently cited. Will's reality is also 'heightened' by stylistic embellishments that depict his surrounding environment as he imagines it rather than as it is; in one scene, Will's cartoons come to life as he pretends to fight a villain. Sequences also emphasise how cinematically Will experiences the world around him; in one early on, Lee turns on the lights to the storage room where he edits films, and as they flicker for several seconds, shots of various items in the room are cut in time with them, producing a montage effect. *Son of Rambow* thus conjures *filmic* collective memories: by citing earlier films and by stylistically recalling past genres, it actively engages its viewers, who are assumed to possess the requisite knowledge to make sense of it.

Simultaneously, Jennings and Goldsmith explore anxieties around the very phenomena they put to action: increased mediation and its cousin, globalisation. The former is primarily depicted through tensions that develop in Will's family due to his rebellious behaviour. As he becomes more deeply involved in producing his film, he more frequently lies to his mother about what he is doing, causing concern amongst her and the other Plymouth Brethren. Although the Brethren's absolute rejection of contemporary media and popular culture is an extreme and uncommon example, it embodies generalised fears surrounding global media's impact on children, which were especially common in the early-80s 'video nasties' era. The film also illustrates concerns around globalisation in its comic depiction of Didier Revol (Jules Sitruk), a French foreign exchange student who spends a month at Will's school. Didier epitomises impinging European influences in British cultural life, sporting outlandish



**Figure 16:** Didier Revol (Jules Sitruk) stands out from the English boys in his flamboyant attire and suave manner. (*Son of Rambow*)

French attire and carrying himself far more suavely than any of the English students (Figure 16). As he arrives, the students fall silent in intimidation.

*Son of Rambow* responds to the cultural anxieties it addresses by revealing how greater globalisation and mediation in Britain positively shape contemporary experiences and memories. When, in an interview for an American website, Jennings and Goldsmith are asked if there is anything particularly British about the film's humour, Goldsmith responds by stating that

[...] we wanted to make a film—not a British [or] American film. It's very much like when you're a kid and you see *Rambo* for the first time, you're not like, 'Oh, look! There's an American hero. I'm going to be like that American guy.' [He's] just a hero. That's how we approach comedy. Some of my favorite comedies are American and some of them are British. ('Interview with Garth')

This approach stands in notable contrast to John Crowley's in *Is Anybody There?*; while Crowley sought to depict one of the 'backwaters' of England less touched by globalisation, Goldsmith reveals that he and Jennings made very little effort to make the film distinctly British in any way. Instead, they were keen to embrace the globality of childhood memories formed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the film, the presence of foreign influences in Britain are not lamented on but rather welcomed for the ways they can enrich human experiences. After all, it is a Hollywood film that inspires Will's imagination and draws him out of his dull, contained religious existence. Furthermore, the anxiety felt by other students on Didier's initial arrival proves invalidated: he is

revealed to be a very nice boy with an interest in acting, and takes on a supporting role in Will's and Lee's film. In doing so, he encourages his band of English followers to also become involved in the filmmaking process, ultimately improving the quality of the final product.

*Son of Rambow* therefore celebrates the positive impacts of global culture on childhood experiences, in turn valorising the media-rich childhood memories of its Generation X and Millennial viewers. In addition, the film makes a case for contemporary participatory media, which is partially rooted in the DIY filmmaking enabled by technological advances like VHS and the home video camera. As outlined in Chapter 1, Henry Jenkins argues that advances in technology have enabled media content to be appropriated and recycled in new contexts: in short, actively participated in. He outlines tensions that often arise between those in control of the media content and those who wish to appropriate it, but makes a case for participatory media practices by likening them to those of folk cultures, wherein stories are actively shared, appropriated and adapted (140). Jennings' and Goldsmith's film echoes Jenkins' optimistic perspective, which is unsurprising as Jennings' homemade childhood films borrowed footage from Hollywood movies. He admits that when producing *Son of Rambow*, he did not anticipate the extensive difficulties he encountered in using footage from *First Blood* (Edwards). In *Son of Rambow*, it is Lee's pirated copy of *First Blood*, filmed with his video camera in a cinema, that inspires him and Will to produce a film, and the final product is achieved by intercutting footage from the video. The film also exhibits the emotional value of sharing media knowledge; Didier bonds with Will and performs an impromptu audition to be an actor in his film by leading him into a church, lighting up a cigarette and mimicking Patrick Swayze in a scene from *The Outsiders* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1983) as operatic music swells. Didier draws on and actively reconstructs what he assumes is their shared cinematic knowledge (which, of course, is false due to Will's lack thereof). Moments like this accentuate how media genres can inspire imagination, celebrating the value of citing them for forming friendships and finding outlets for creativity.

In light of this, John Crowley's comment quoted in the previous section that *Son of Rambow*'s approach to the eighties is 'kitschy' somewhat misses the point. The film is deliberately *cinematic*, revelling in its own fakery and in the power of media to inspire. The eighties signifiers in the film are no exception. Although the 'eighties' acts primarily as an era in *Son of Rambow* rather than as a style, exploring the relationship between global media and memory in the ways described above, Garth Jennings does draw attention to eighties fashions in one scene that breaks the fourth wall. Just prior to a 6<sup>th</sup> form dance scene, a montage portrays a series of adolescents in tableaux, staring at the camera and modelling embellished eighties clothing (Figure 17). The montage pokes fun at eighties clothing and at the 1980s obsession with commodities, but in breaking the fourth wall it also caricatures the process of cinematically reconstructing eighties fashions by highlighting the fact that they are mediated representations. In the dance scene that follows, the adolescents appear to indulge in every eighties teen fad



**Figure 17:** A montage of tableaux breaks the fourth wall, poking fun at embellished reconstructions of eighties fashion. (*Son of Rambow*)

imaginable; Will is offered Pop Rocks and Coke, a young couple kiss while both listening to their Walkmans, and one girl wears roller skates. The so-called ‘kitsch’ in this sequence is so comically embellished that it disrupts one’s suspension of disbelief; like much of the film, it never feels like a real party, but rather a cinematic representation of an eighties party. Still, in keeping with the film’s optimistic perspective on participatory popular culture, these silly eighties fads are shown to have a positive effect on Will, who can finally participate socially. Ultimately eighties commodities, so commonly rebuked for reflecting Thatcherite consumer culture, mean only what is made of them.

### **Conclusion: New Rites-of-Passage**

The productions discussed in this chapter make clear that memories of childhood, adolescence and early adulthood were a significant inspiration for the burst of eighties retrospectives in the late 2000s. This is nothing new; period fictions set in recent eras, whether made for the screen or otherwise, have long told coming-of-age stories and have often been linked to processes of memory, as Powrie’s discussion of 1980s and 1990s ‘rite-of-passage’ films exemplifies. Yet, unique about this particular cycle was the fact that changes in Britain’s media accessibility, brought about mainly by expedited globalisation and the proliferation of digital technologies from the 1980s onward, affected how memories were represented onscreen. In the cases of *Starter for 10* and *Clubbed*, it encouraged screenwriters and directors to conform to a commercial genre in their adaptations of personal coming-of-age stories; the films’ seamless and unconscious incorporation of genre codes into narratives of private recollection reveal how media genres are enmeshed in the experience and expression of mid-2000s daily life. Yet if, as Andrew Hoskins suggests, collective memory changes continually as it is reiterated in the present, one must consider how generic codes might confuse an era’s onscreen repetition. Both *Starter* and *Clubbed* depict ideologically muddled memories of the eighties and may problematically affect notions of the eighties as era.

Sometimes, however, *conscious* attention is paid to the growing presence of global media and its impact on memory. This can mean rejecting the media as legitimate sources for and producers of memory as in *Is Anybody There?*. The film



recalls the eighties as the last era to bear traces of a distinctly British way of life that encouraged strong community bonds and that was being systematically undermined by globalisation and media proliferation. Thematically, the media represent the Thatcher-era disintegration of genuine social relationships, while textually, references to them are avoided. This response to contemporary mediation is unsustainable, however, as it is predicated on escapism; it reflects what Svetlana Boym describes as ‘restorative’ nostalgia, ignoring the passage of time from the past to the present and attempting to reinstate a previous moment in time, even if that moment never truly existed (44). Although equally self-conscious, *Red Riding* and *Son of Rambow* figure the media differently. They reconstruct eighties memory through the lens of media, whether archival news, pop cultural media or genres like *film noir* which, while not decade-specific, are widely recognisable and which codify contemporary memory. Self-consciousness helps these productions to avoid the pitfalls of those that seamlessly use genre codes and conventions, but more vitally, they depict and engage with the era as it is *actually* remembered, shared and experienced in the present. The eighties era is not invoked to escape into an imagined past, but to reflect upon its role in contemporary cultural consciousness.

## Chapter 4

### IMAGES AND REALITIES: THE EIGHTIES AS HISTORY

The previous two chapters considered how ‘the eighties’, as stylistic and era-based concepts, are constructed around perspectives on the increasing prevalence of media and commodity. These phenomena also had implications for how *actual* national figures and events were depicted and understood, as well as for how history is today diffused and consumed. Jeremy Black explains TV’s effect on British cultural life by recalling an incident from 1989 when Margaret Thatcher

[...] was attacked by Denis Healey of the Labour Party for adding ‘the diplomacy of Alf Garnett to the economics of Arthur Daley’. This attack was based on the assumption that listeners would understand the reference to prominent television characters. It was also an aspect of the blending of image and reality that was to become so insistent with the reality television shows of the early 2000s. (50)

This anecdote lays bare the extent to which, by the end of the 1980s, the media had become defining components of culture and society in Britain and now shaped collective knowledge. The media’s growing pervasive presence from the 1970s onward meant that national events were now more widely depicted, interpreted and revised in the media of the time. The ease with which this media can today be accessed and manipulated means that much of it is still recognisable to Britons, from Margaret Thatcher reading a quote from St. Francis of Assisi on her arrival at 10 Downing Street, to footage of Prince Charles’ and Princess Diana’s wedding, to footage from the Falklands war, of the 1984-5 miners’ strike and of the 1989 Poll Tax riots.

Eighties Cycle productions that depict actual historical events and figures expose the impact of this ‘blending of image and reality’, as Black puts it. Alongside reviving eighties style and revisiting coming-of-age memories, exploring recent history is a motive that accounts for several eighties-set screen fictions. These range from Shane Meadows’ *This is England*, which revisits the Falklands War and subcultural histories, to the biopics *Control* and *Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll*, about subcultural music figures Ian Curtis and Ian Dury, as well as *Killing Bono*, a comedy film about Bono rival Neil

McCormick, *Killing Bono*. They also include a biopic concerning racial violence and subculture, *Cass*, two films concerning the Northern Ireland Troubles, *Fifty Dead Men Walking* and *Hunger*, and, finally, three Margaret Thatcher biopics: the BBC's television productions *Margaret: The Long Walk to Finchley* and *Margaret* and the feature film *The Iron Lady*. Many of these use archival television footage and radio segments and as many more invoke mediated iconography such as photographs, interviews, music videos and so forth, showing the influence of media on contemporary considerations of 1980s history.

Given this, it is important to consider how the media have supported official, national narratives of history. Svetlana Boym distinguishes between what she terms "national memory" and "collective memory", writing that while national memory "tends to make a single teleological plot out of shared everyday recollections", collective memory is defined by only by its collectively remembered "signposts" that "could suggest multiple narratives. These narratives have a certain syntax (as well as a common intonation), but no single plot" (53). The discord between the two is an essential element to historical films like *This is England*, *Cass* and *Hunger*, which use archival media to highlight the disconnect between national narratives expressed in media and the lived realities of British people. Yet, the media themselves also function as the 'signposts' Boym describes; they are not just purveyors of pre-crafted historical narratives but also provide the 'syntax' and 'intonation' for the often conflicting private memories of historical events. Relevant to this is Hayden White's assertion that the immediacy with which modern media can now capture events renders them "not only impervious to every effort to explain them but also resistant to any attempt to represent them in a story form" ('The Modernist Event' 23). Although increased mediation meant that media-imposed interpretations of cultural and social life were more widespread, it also prevented linear narratives of the decade from developing by encouraging multiple readings.

I will focus on this tension in this chapter, beginning with a discussion on the popular and influential film *This is England*. While it is not based on an actual historical event or figure and could equally have been explored in the previous chapter as a

coming-of-age drama, it is different from other films focused on memory in its engagement with the 1980s as a historical decade, exploring how history is diffused, manipulated and tied in with identity. It also uses a combination of archival television and radio segments while simultaneously invoking mediated representations of skinhead culture, and I will suggest here that it emphasises the infinite and often conflicting meanings inherent in mediated images, as well as their susceptibility to being manipulated and renarrativised.

Yet, the film's sometimes euphorically nostalgic style also lent it retro appeal upon its release in 2006, helping to fuel the craze for eighties mode nostalgia, and I will consider the impact of mode nostalgia on history in discussions on *Control*, *Cass*, and *Hunger*. Each of these films respond to the tension between eighties nostalgia and 1980s history in different ways; *Control* mimics widely known Joy Division iconography while avoiding historical interrogation, *Cass* also sidesteps historical inquiry by copying *This is England's* archival style and fusing it with the football hooliganism genre, and *Hunger* takes the opposite route, resisting nostalgic stylisation to prevent nostalgic emotions from being summoned. I will conclude by examining the three Margaret Thatcher biopics released during the cycle: *The Long Walk to Finchley*, *Margaret* and *The Iron Lady*. These films depict Thatcher in differing ways which reflect contexts like budgets and target audiences. However, while *The Long Walk to Finchley* employs a combination of comedy and irony, *Margaret* uses generic tropes from other BBC political thrillers and resists directly invoking Thatcher's iconography, and *The Iron Lady* opts for a combination of stylistic verisimilitude and extreme historical subjectivity, all three use these representational strategies to address the inescapable difficulty in invoking Margaret Thatcher's highly familiar motifs while simultaneously pleasing their polarised audiences.

### ***This is England: The Burden of Media on History***

Although *The Business* was released a year prior to it, *This is England* was the first film in the Eighties Cycle to approach the eighties not just as a revivalist style or an era to be remembered, but also as a historical period. The 1980s, here, was a part of *history* rather than a time just slightly past. Because Meadows' distinct authorial style gained it wide

critical attention, it helped to bring 1980s history into public attention. Set in 1983, it follows Shaun (Thomas Turgoose), a twelve-year-old boy who has just lost his father in the Falklands crisis. Shaun is bullied at school for his dated clothing until he is rescued by an older group of skinheads, led by a boy named Woody (Joe Gilgun), who shave his head, buy him a Ben Sherman shirt and help him to select the appropriate jeans, braces and Doc Martens. This relatively benign group challenges media representations of skinheads as threatening: they offer Shaun friendship and a sense of self-empowerment in the face of an economically depressed social climate. However, *This is England* also depicts the historical reality of the National Front and its effect on skinhead subculture; after the older and fascist Combo (Stephen Graham) is released from prison, he infiltrates Woody's group and politicises some of its members, including Shaun. The film's depiction of far-right politics in the 1980s and its references to the Falklands war serve to raise questions surrounding nationalism and national identity.

As noted in Chapter 1, *This is England* has received some academic attention, but it is often either discussed as a contemporary social drama or in the context of Meadows' body of work. Only two essays, one by Mark Sinker and the other by Tim Snelson and Emma Sutton, consider it alongside eighties nostalgia. Sinker suggests that the film expresses longing for music movements that are remembered as 'pre-consumerist'. This, as I explained in Chapter 1, has some validity, as Meadows has expressed this perspective in interviews. However, the film is more complex than that, drawing on multiple conflicting past narratives, a fact that Snelson and Sutton acknowledge. They suggest that by synthesising collective knowledge surrounding British subcultural and music movements and invoking retro style, the film appeals to a wide age range. Although this reading is more dynamic, acknowledging the complex junctions at which *This is England* is situated, Snelson and Sutton do not adequately consider *how* various histories are depicted or what this reveals about their present consumption. I will focus on these questions here. The film stresses history's mediation by using extensive archival media and invoking preconceptions of the Falklands crisis and of skinheads which originate from the news, music culture, films and books. In so doing, it reveals the impossibility of accurately depicting the 1980s when so many conflicting narratives exist. In addition, Meadows' film implies that narrativising

histories – or, to cite Boym, turning ‘collective memories’ into ‘national memories’ – is not only futile but dangerous.

Archival media is prominent in *This is England*. Clips of television media are collated to form two montages, one at the film’s opening and the other near its close. The first fuses news and popular media, while the second compiles official Ministry of Defense footage of the Falklands crisis. Three radio segments are also used, taken from a news report, a speech Thatcher gave at a Conservative youth rally and an interview with her on the Falklands crisis. This archival device is usually ignored in literature. However, Snelson and Sutton do briefly discuss the opening montage which, accompanied by Toots and the Maytals’ ‘54-46 Was My Number’, features segments from pop and punk concerts, from the American television show *Knight Rider* (NBC 1982-86), from video-recordings of CDs being manufactured and of a boy playing a video game, and from footage of riots and racist violence, National Front marches, Margaret Thatcher in various contexts, the marriage of Prince Charles and Princess Diana and the Falklands crisis. Snelson and Sutton argue that the montage establishes the film’s subjects and themes, juxtaposing the images with Ska music “to build a complex and conflicted picture of British national identity” and celebrate “the diasporic influence on post-war Britain while indicating the ongoing dismantling of working-class communities and the backlashes against immigration therein” (122). Snelson’s and Sutton’s reading is partly valid: the montage poses the question of national identity that will become crucial to the narrative, overlaying the film’s title to encourage the audience to decide what, precisely, England ‘is’ (Figure 18).

However, their reading does not account for the clips of Roland Rat or of a man solving a Rubik’s cube, which do not thematically relate to the film. Meadows explains his use of archival footage as follows:

We had a relatively small budget so we couldn’t afford to recreate every last detail of the Uttoxeter of 1983. Instead, I set the scene by using archive news footage at the start and end of the film. Going through footage of the Falklands war really made me think again about the whole thing. As kids, we thought it was like going into a World Cup campaign. It was exciting and we were cheering on our lads to go and do the Argies. But the scenes of soldiers’ coffins



**Figure 18:** *This is England's* descriptive title, when laid over the film's opening montage, asks viewers to consider what England 'is'. (*This is England*)

shocked and appalled me. In many ways the country was a mess. (Meadows, 'Under my Skin')

Meadows reveals that his initial desire to 'set the scene' using media footage – or, rather, to summarise the narrative of the 1980s with which he was already familiar – was complicated by the conflicting historical narratives that the footage betrayed. He does not explain how this experience changed his approach, but the opening montage encourages open interpretation, suggesting that he wished for viewers to be similarly surprised by the footage. By using very general material that sometimes does not relate to the film's subject matter, the montage conjures a series of commonly recognised 1980s narratives, such as the rise of 'me' culture evoked in the aerobics clip and of consumerism in the clip of CD manufacturing. Recognisable as symbols of the eighties to most viewers, these images act as 'signposts' of recent history, to quote Boym. Because the archival material is spliced together incoherently, jumping from one subject to another, the montage resists a logical narrative structure and consequently avoids *telling* viewers what to think. Instead, the various narratives that the images summon conflict with one another, presenting the complications inherent in narrativising history. In turn, it becomes increasingly apparent to the viewer that it is impossible to denote what England 'is'.

The montage thus introduces the concept that historical meaning is slippery. This is crucial to the rest of the film, which explores the development, dissemination and corruption of two histories: the Falklands crisis and the rise of fascist politics in skinhead subculture. The former is depicted almost entirely through archival media, the mere presence of which highlights the Thatcher government's objective to develop and promote a single, national narrative. As historians like Robert Harris and Robert Dillon have outlined in depth, the government forged an imagined communal relationship with the Falklanders after their island was invaded by Argentina in 1982. This meant modifying the government's previously disinterested stance on the Falkland Islands, possibly because it felt an aggressive response might foster national solidarity and temper its waning popularity (Hewison, *Culture* 217). As such, it drew on racial ties and emphasised the Falklanders' loyalty to Britain and their right to self-determination. In speeches, Thatcher called upon Britain's imperial power in the Victorian period and its victory in the Second World War, developing a narrative of supremacy and of moral obligation to those who had fought for the nation's freedom. Supplementing and confirming the government's national narrative was the television coverage of the war, which was heavily censored and controlled. As Harris notes, "The number of stories which went missing or were altered suggests that the military and the MoD were always ready to 'improve the image' of the war wherever possible" (135). The film's archival segments summon the government's war narrative, and for those too young to remember how sanitised and nationalistic it was, the second montage stresses this, bookending images of death and devastation with an opening shot of a British soldier mounting the Union Jack and closing shots of the British soldiers' happy and victorious return home. So too does a radio segment from an interview with Margaret Thatcher in which she proclaims that "the islanders have made it perfectly clear: these islands are British. They are the Queen's loyal subjects" (*This is England*).

Yet, even as the radio and television news segments call attention to the official narrative's pervasiveness in media, they are also renarrativised. Using the 'syntax' of collectively remembered moments in media history, the film presents Shaun's individual experience while simultaneously stressing the impossibility of depicting a single history in the face of infinite individual histories. The radio segments, for



instance, are edited to stress their omnipresence and underscore the disconnect between what they communicate and lived realities. In two sequences that feature them – one a news report on the crisis and the other the interview mentioned above – the radio clips initially seem to transcend space, overlaying sequences which only reveal the source of sound after depicting several shots of landscapes and cityscapes. This renders the effect of a national narrative pervading collective consciousness; however, the sounds and images are disjointed. In the news report sequence, the clip tells of Thatcher’s promise to take the Argentine “threat” seriously and comments on small victories for the British, thus participating in an on-going narrative of triumph and solidarity, but the viewer is offered landscapes of Shaun playing alone by a desolate seaside, of empty streets and of windows with the curtains drawn (Figure 19). This visual impression is one of division and isolation that contradicts the radio’s implied narrative of communal unity.

The second archival montage, in particular, underlines the discontinuity between the ‘official’ narrative of the Falklands crisis and Shaun’s individual experience of it. It depicts British soldiers searching Argentinean soldiers, men clearing up dead bodies and Argentinean soldiers suffering. These, as noted above, are sandwiched by depictions of



**Figure 19:** Images of isolation accompany the radio segment’s narrative of war solidarity. (*This is England*)

British victory celebrations. Superficially, the emphases on the Falklanders' joy and on the happy reunions in Britain suggest that the suffering of Argentineans was a necessary side effect of a predominantly just and successful war. However, this narrative is complicated in a number of ways. The montage is accompanied by Ludovico Einaudi's melancholic orchestral score, and its minor key and subtle piano melody ironise the triumphant images of victory. The music first cues in the previous scene during which the fascist Combo beats the Jamaican-descended skinhead Milky (Andrew Shim), establishing a thematic link between this act of racist violence and the first shot of the montage in which a soldier mounts a Union Jack. The Falklands crisis is accordingly implied to be another instance of the same engrained cultural racism that has led to Combo's behaviour. In addition, the juxtaposition of Argentinean suffering and British joy highlights the absence of footage displaying British suffering, which does not exist because what little was taken was mostly censored. That gap is filled in the shot that follows the montage: Shaun holds a photograph of his father who was killed in the war, revealing one of the many omissions that are unavoidable in constructing such a neat and coherent national narrative.

Thus, the Falklands war media clips, which in their initial use provided the syntax of what has now become a national memory of the crisis but which are reappropriated in *This is England*, indicate the multiple ways that mediated events can be interpreted and absorbed by individuals in a community. They also highlight the ease with which the signposts of mediated collective memory can be recycled and renarrativised, a matter that is further explored through the film's depiction of skinhead subculture. The conflict here, however, is not between an 'official' national memory and individual memories, but rather between contradicting narratives that have informed collective perspectives on skinheads. The subculture was, from its inception in the 1960s, at a complicated juncture between the conflicting cultures that influenced it. On one side, the increasingly ethnically diverse working-class led to West Indian-inspired music and fashion, while on the other, white working-class iconography inspired elements of the dress, like work boots. The subculture's meaning was further complicated upon its revival in the late 1970s, when some skinheads joined far right political groups like the National Front. Influenced largely by mass unemployment,

these groups connected the influx of racial minorities to the unavailability of work for the white working-class. Thus, despite the subculture's multicultural roots, a strain of racism began to permeate it. This rightward shift among some skinhead factions led to highly publicised anti-immigration National Front marches, impacting on collective memories of the subculture. From the 1970s onward, skinheads became culturally associated with violence, racism and neo-Nazism.

This reading was at odds with the subcultural narratives established in the sociological work on subcultures led by Stuart Hall and carried out at Birmingham University's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the 1970s and 1980s. The centre's work, most famously expressed in Hall's and Tony Jefferson's edited collection *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* and in Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, read subcultures' unique clothing and rituals as politically motivated. For instance, in *Subculture* Hebdige quotes fellow subcultural theorist Phil Cohen, who calls skinhead attire "a 'kind of caricature of the model worker': cropped hair, braces, short, wide levi jeans or functional sta-prest trousers, plain or striped button-down Ben Sherman shirts and highly polished Doctor Marten boots" that metaphorically attacks the "process of social mobility" (55). Hebdige also saw media representations of subcultures as suppressing their political potential by defining them according to their associated commodities, like Ben Sherman shirts and Doc Marten shoes in the case of skinheads. This led them to be dismissed, as Dick Hebdige explains is often true of subcultures, for being "sexist/ racist/ brutalised/ narcissistic/ commodified/ incorporated: 'commercial' not 'political'" (*Hiding* 19). While Hebdige's and the CCCS' readings of subculture emerged in academia, the appearance of one of Hebdige's essays in the more populist publication *Skinhead* gained them wider public attention. The CCCS narrative has since been criticised, notably by David Muggleton, who argues that its assessments are based on modernist structures and that, instead, "contemporary subcultural styles can be understood as a symptom of postmodern hyperindividualism" (6). However, the narrative's wide exposure meant that it continues to impact on contemporary subcultural readings.

It is clear that Meadows was influenced by the CCCS narrative and at least to a degree supports it. In an article for *The Guardian*, he reveals his belief in the political potential of subcultures, contrasting the commercialised youth of the present with past subcultural youth who apparently sought to “rock the boat” (Meadows, ‘Under My Skin’). Snelson and Sutton suggest that *This is England* bears the traces of Meadows’ idealist outlook on skinheads, pointing out that in an early brochure for the film, he references Hebdige’s essay in *Skinhead*; it is titled ‘This is England! And They don’t live here’ and likely inspired the film’s title (Meadows, ‘Under my Skin’). They argue that many of the complaints levelled against the CCCS – that their theories over-politicise subcultures, suggest a coherence within them that does not exist and show bias toward subcultural men – can also be levelled against parts of *This is England* that sentimentalise skinheads. However, they also argue that other parts of the film criticise them (Snelson and Sutton 122). Snelson and Sutton are right to note that *This is England* in turn romanticises and critiques skinheads, but they do not consider that this may have been consciously done, implying that the occasional instances of sentimentality are slippages on Meadows’ part due to his own rose-tinted nostalgia.

I would suggest, however, that reading Meadows’ depiction of subcultures as inconsistent ignores the film’s wider thematic concern with historical narrativity. When read in this context, Meadows’ references to CCCS theory do not reflect his own sentimental longing but instead a conscious engagement with an idealist history of skinhead subculture as a positive subversive force that was forged and has been repeatedly reiterated in academic and popular media. It is the antithesis of those histories, also constructed by media, which characterise skinhead subculture as founded on racism, fascism and violence. Indeed, like the Falklands crisis, the history of skinheads is depicted in *This is England* as a series of complex events and signifiers that have been problematically simplified into two coherent but opposing historical narratives. The tension that exists between them is emphasised by the fact that both can be summoned by the same skinhead (in this case, Combo) depending on the situation. Just prior to the scene in which Combo beats Milky, for instance, Milky comments that the soul music Combo is playing is the music of his childhood. Combo calls himself an “original skinhead: ‘69” and points out that skinhead culture is based on unity between

black and white people. Combo then tells Milky, “You’re still flying that flag in that fucking get-up you’re wearing” (*This is England*); here, skinhead clothing is a ‘flag’, a marker of an identity founded on the subculture’s multicultural origins. However, when calling upon his friends to join the National Front, Combo cites a very different historical narrative:

That’s what this nation has been built on, proud men. Proud fucking warriors. Two thousand years this little tiny fucking island has been raped and pillaged by people who have come here and wanted a piece of it. Two fucking world wars men have laid down their lives for this. For this, and for what? So we can stick our fucking flag in the ground and say yeah, this is England, and this is England, and this is England. For what? For what, now? Hey, what for? So we can just open the fucking flood gates and let them all come in [...]. (*This is England*)

Here, the ‘flag’ that Combo lauds represents white supremacy. Skinheads are indebted not to the cultural legacy of multiculturalism, but to their ancestral ‘warriors’ who defended against foreign invasion. The fact that opposing histories of skinhead culture can be invoked by a single character reminds viewers of the unsteady foundations upon which historical narratives tend to be built.

The incongruous histories implied in skinhead iconography are also explored in two non-archival narrative montages. The first depicts a history of skinhead subculture as politically subversive and visually and sonically innovative, while the second presents a history of the same subculture as racist, fascist and delinquent. The high stylisation of these montages clashes with the film’s otherwise subdued and realist aesthetic, stressing that each is an idealised fantasy. To highlight each narrative’s slippages, common skinhead signifiers (or, to quote Boym, ‘signposts’) are used in the montages but are assigned opposing meanings. The first montage, which depicts a fantasy of subcultural subversion, likely contributed to some critics’ assertion that the film sentimentalises subcultures. It depicts the gang members in bright, saturated colours, sometimes in slow motion and sometimes acknowledging the camera directly, as they walk down streets and through alleyways, play football in the street and line up along a graffitied wall under a bridge skipping stones, among other activities. The montage sidesteps questions of delinquency and aggression, celebrating their sense of community and the disruption to traditional English iconography (pastoral images,

country houses, etc.) that their unique clothing represents. The slow motion shots and shots of gang members walking toward the camera while looking directly at it reflect Hebdige's reading of subcultures as attacking the social system of surveillance upon youth by turning "the fact of being under scrutiny into the pleasure of being watched" (*Hiding* 35). Shots of graffiti open the montage in a quick succession that is rhythmically aligned to the song to which the montage is set, Toots and the Maytals' 'Louie Louie', suggesting an optimistic coherence between the subculture's multicultural history, its artistic ingenuity and its subversive energy.

Contradicting this fantasy is the one depicted in the second, mirroring narrative montage, which appears after Shaun has converted to the National Front movement. This montage also emphasises a sense of community, features slow motion shots of characters addressing the camera directly and walking toward it and ascribes meaning to skinhead style and graffiti. However, here, a community is formed around a shared collective *white*, rather than multicultural, history. Graffiti transforms into racial violence; the group spray paint racist remarks on an underpass that Combo describes as "where all the fucking Pakis come to work in the chicken factory" (*This is England*). Skinhead style is redefined in alignment with cultural absolutism as Combo gives Shaun a cross tattoo on his hand; the tattoo recalls a St. George's Cross that Combo lionises earlier in the film, and which more broadly has become collectively associated, through media representations, with the National Front and other far-right organisations like the English Defence League. In an echo of the previous montage, the group play football in the same street, but here, Combo acquires their ball by drawing a knife on a Pakistani boy and stealing his. The slow motion shots and direct-to-camera address, which in the previous montage were decontextualised and consequently suggested a metaphorical attack on the dominant order, are here linked to a continuing shot of the group approaching the young Pakistani boys, transforming the stylistic device's meaning to reflect an actual violent attack. Reordering signs used in the first narrative montage establishes the ease with which conflicting meanings can be assigned to skinhead subculture (Figure 20). In so doing, the two montages work together to comment on the inevitable and problematic simplifications involved in trying to logically narrativise what is ultimately a fluid, complex and indefinable identity.



**Figure 20:** Similar signs are assigned conflicting meanings in each narrative montage. For instance, graffiti celebrates the subversive spirit of the group in the first montage (above), but is used for racist violence in the second (below). (*This is England*)

*This is England* is therefore a collage of historical narratives. As well as those described above, others are extratextually invoked. For instance, along with Hebdige's, the title recalls other accounts of English history and identity: Humphrey Jennings' Second World War pride film *This is England* (1941) and the magazine *This England*, launched in 1967, which focuses on traditional English customs, values and



iconography that are primarily located in heritage and the English pastoral.<sup>44</sup> The film also references other related narrative films; the opening credits, for instance, recall those for the French film about racial violence *La Haine* (Mathieu Kassovitz, 1995), in which media footage of aggression and riots is spliced together to Bob Marley and the Wailers' 'Burnin' and Lootin'. At the end of *This is England*, Shaun stands on a beach, and in the last shot looks to the camera, referencing the iconic last scene from *The 400 Blows*, another film about troubled youth. These references all contribute to the film's overall thematic interest in how the media diffuse history and shape contemporary identities, a concern which is symptomatic of the multiple, often conflicting histories that were captured by 1980s media and which are now readily available on diverse platforms. *This is England* demonstrates that presenting a clear, cohesive narrative about Britain's past on film becomes more difficult all the time.

### **The 1980s after *This is England*: Control, Cass and Hunger**

Despite *This is England*'s self-conscious approach to historical inquiry, many academics and critics accused it of condensing history and identity into oversimplified, coherent structures. As I noted briefly above, Snelson and Sutton do this, writing, "Meadows transposes the 'waves' of skinhead culture that emerged, fused and clashed from the 1960s to the 1980s to a single summer in the north Midlands in 1983" (119). This reading may, in part, have been influenced by the title; in a discussion on the film in an episode of the BBC's *Newsnight*, journalist Peter Whittle argues that "You have the title '*This is England*', which invites a suggestion, and through the film we've also got this archive of the Falklands war, [...] and it seems to me that the message was that 'This is all of us, this is England, this is the culture and it's disgusting'" (BlueCrayon77). The title's references and implied irony were evidently lost on Whittle, who took its meaning at face value. Although few critics' reactions to the film were as negative as Whittle's, most did not factor in its historical and cultural referents when assessing its mode of representation. Despite his largely positive review, for instance,

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<sup>44</sup> For an in-depth discussion on the politics of this magazine, see Hewison, *Culture and Consensus* 165.



*The Guardian*'s Peter Bradshaw writes that "Meadows boldly attempts to reclaim the skinhead from the traditional neo-Nazi image. [...] As to whether we should buy its implied leniency about skinhead culture: that is another question" (Bradshaw, 'This is England'). Bradshaw's assertions that the film "attempts to reclaim the skinhead" and implies "leniency" toward the subculture make clear that he sees it as expressing a fixed, personal historical argument in favour of skinhead subculture rather than negotiating conflicting historical perspectives.

As discussed previously, this is a difficulty for some postmodern representations of the recent past more generally, as they often rely on referentiality to produce meaning. I have already noted that Dika outlines this difficulty with reference to *American Graffiti*, set in 1962, which she argues Jameson misread as blankly nostalgic because he did not consider it in the context of the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy and the atrocities of the Vietnam War, both of which would have provided the historical lens through which its 1973 audiences would have read it. She suggests that this "conflict between memory and history" (91) – or, in other words, the conflict between the rose-tinted memories of 1962 displayed in the film and the "culturally specific awareness that this era never quite existed as presented nor would we want to return to it" (94) – produces a set of meanings not located in the film text and gives the film a "structure of irony" (91). While Dika argues that the closing credits, which reveal the characters' futures, are the only textual hint to this "structure of irony" in *American Graffiti*, the media footage in *This is England* directly invokes a "culturally specific awareness" of the actual complexities of the 1980s at odds with the stylistic nostalgia for early 1980s subcultures displayed in parts of the film.

Despite this and despite the film's overall critical acclaim, the perspective advanced by Bradshaw and others that it portrayed skinhead subculture through rose-tinted glasses reflected the wider context in which *This is England* was released and the broader function it served: as well as being an art-house film, it was also marketed and consumed as a nostalgic product. Released in a culture abounding with eighties retro in fashion and post-punk and new wave revivals in music, this was arguably inevitable. The marketing campaign highlighted the film's retro appeal; the official soundtrack, for

instance, included most of the songs from the film interspersed with segments of dialogue, but notably, after the soundtrack's opening track, '54-46 Was My Number', the second and third tracks are two mainstream pop hits that are featured only marginally in the film: 1982's 'Come On Eileen' by Dexys Midnight Runners and 1981's 'Tainted Love' by Soft Cell. Both play as incidental diegetic background noise in early scenes, marking the era. Their prominence on the soundtrack, despite their marginality in the film text and generic inconsistency with the otherwise subcultural Ska and Oi! music, evidences a desire to extend the soundtrack's appeal beyond fans of the film and of 1980s subcultural music to consumers of mainstream eighties revivalism. The primary UK poster, now iconic, of Woody's gang lined up along a fence, recalls the poster for the cult classic *Quadrophenia* (Franc Roddam, 1979), likening it to another popular retro film that portrays a subculture romantically (Figure 21). Whether these marketing materials influenced viewers' readings is difficult to ascertain, but even a brief peruse of user reviews on the *Internet Movie Database (IMDb)* indicates that it often induced nostalgic pleasure, with one reviewer noting that "as a child of the 80s, I literally sat in the cinema beaming" (Alaoui).

The success of *This is England* sparked a wave of late seventies- and eighties-set film marketing campaigns that attempted to capitalise from its success by drawing connections to it. This is evident in everything from the poster and publicity photos for the crime and football hooligan films *Clubbed*, *The Firm* and *Awaydays*, which aesthetically mirror those for *This is England* (Figure 22), to critical quotes on DVD covers, such as the quote from *Loaded* that features on the UK *Awaydays* cover: "A full on, football-flavoured *This is England*" (*Awaydays*). It would be simplistic to suggest that *This is England* was the sole or even primary influence on the Eighties Cycle – *Awaydays*, for instance, was in production for ten years prior to its release in 2009 ('Pat Holden') – but these advertised connections to it make obvious the extent to which it bolstered interest in eighties nostalgia and retro. Furthermore, and more significantly, it appears that the film may have influenced a surge in filmic depictions of actual events and people from the late 1970s and 1980s. Many of these depict historical events through archival media and mediated iconography, thus reflecting the blend of "image



**Figure 21:** *This is England*'s poster (above) strongly resembles *Quadrophenia*'s (below). (*This is England* publicity poster, *Quadrophenia* publicity poster)



**Figure 22:** Publicity photos for *Clubbed* (top), *The Firm* (middle) and *Awaydays* (bottom) resemble the posters. (*Clubbed* publicity photo, *The Firm* publicity photo, *Awaydays* publicity photo)

and reality” that Jeremy Black claims characterised British culture from the 1970s onward and that marks *This is England*'s 1980s universe.

However, the tension in *This is England* between style and historical interrogation is generally eased in subsequent historical productions, which tend either to highlight style while sidestepping historical analysis or to probe history directly while rejecting stylistic signifiers of the era that might prompt nostalgia. I will discuss three examples here – first, the rock biopic *Control*; second, the football hooligan biopic *Cass*; and third, Steve McQueen's film about the 1981 Northern Irish hunger strike *Hunger* – to examine these divergent trends. *Control* expands on the subcultural history of late 1970s and early 1980s Britain, but instead of calling attention to its own

retrospectivity, it replicates Joy Division's stylistic codes, thus maintaining consistency with the band's contemporaneous media representations. This implies a more direct relationship between image and historical reality, rendering history simpler, not more complex. History is reflected, not refracted, in the borrowed media images and iconography. A similar effect is achieved in *Cass*, albeit in a different way; here, it is *This is England's* archival style that is mimicked without the historical interrogation, and it is fused with the football hooliganism genre. In his art film *Hunger*, Steve McQueen seeks to achieve the opposite effect: he eschews pleasurable imagery, thus preventing viewers from feeling nostalgic for the era, and uses archival radio to emphasise the inability of media to express the multiple narratives of the 1981 Irish hunger strike that are formed from individual experiences.

#### History as Style: *Control*

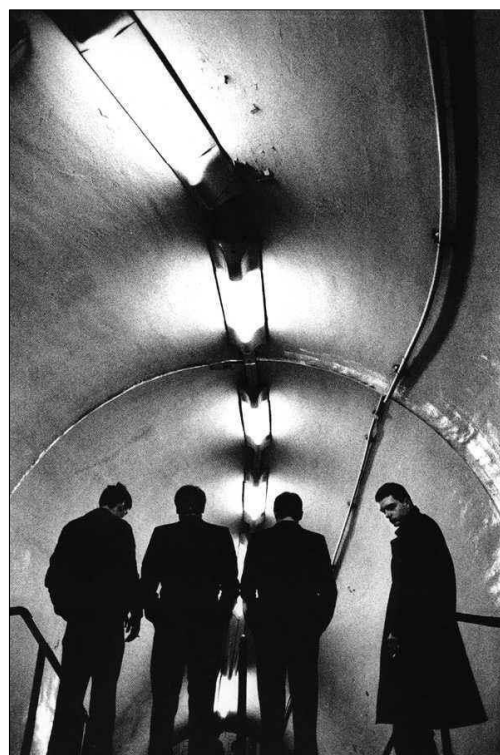
Anton Corbijn's 2007 film *Control* depicts the short career of the celebrated Manchester post-punk band Joy Division, focusing on the trials of its epileptic frontman Ian Curtis (Sam Riley), who committed suicide on the eve of the band's first American tour in 1980. Although mostly set in the late 1970s, its topic belongs to the 'long eighties' as outlined in the introduction, recalling popular culture commonly associated with the decade: in this case, post-punk and Joy Division's 1980s reincarnation, New Order. Joy Division's sonic and visual aesthetic was unique, maintained consistently across a variety of media and heavily mythologised. Their mythology was linked closely to that of Manchester, which Noel McLaughlin calls "the most mythologized popular musical city in the United Kingdom" outside London (102). Eventually nicknamed 'Madchester', the city produced several high-profile bands from the late 1970s through the 1990s. Joy Division helped to generate this mythology, recording their first album with the legendary Manchester label Factory Records in 1979 and pioneering post-punk, a more experimental and introverted response to punk that would become popular through the 1980s.

Joy Division's sombre sound seemed to reflect the city's (and in general, the North's) depressed atmosphere; the music was dark, minimalist and droning and Curtis' brooding, pensive lyrics stood in sharp contrast to the ordinarily anarchic lyrics of punk.

Their iconography also departed from the bold and transgressive fashions sported by preceding punk and glam rock artists; Joy Division instead opted for bland button-up shirts and trousers, evoking what Simon Reynolds calls an “aura of modernist severity” (‘Joy Division’ 363). Ian Curtis, who struggled privately with depression and epilepsy, was publicly romanticised before his death as a modern prophet and after his death as a tragic cultural hero. *Control*’s director Anton Corbijn was partially responsible for forging the band’s identity; he photographed them as a young rock photographer and his images are some of the most famous (Figure 23). His high-contrast style reflected their modernist sound and look, invoking expressionist European cinemas of the modernist period, and it was resurrected in 1988 when Corbijn directed the music video for the re-release of Joy Division’s single, ‘Atmosphere’, eight years after Curtis’ death. In the video, monks in black and white robes carry oversized images of Ian Curtis across the screen, synthesising the myth of Curtis as a tragic hero with the band’s modernist discourse and introducing the mythology to a new generation of viewers.

*Control* was not the first 2000s British period drama to portray Curtis and the band; *24 Hour Party People*, Michael Winterbottom’s biopic about Factory Records founder Tony Wilson (Steve Coogan), did so five years before it. As detailed in Chapter

**Figure 23:** Anton Corbijn’s photography helped to forge the band’s stylistic identity. (Ligabue)



1, the few eighties period dramas released in the earlier half of the decade tend to align with other so-called ‘New Britain’ films from the late 1990s and early 2000s, expressing optimism for the creative energy of ‘Cool Britannia’. *Party People* does not fall firmly into this category, but several critics have noted that its upbeat tone celebrates Britain’s new forward-thinking and cool identity. Simon Reynolds, for instance, calls it a “post-*Trainspotting*” film that is “relentlessly lively” (‘Joy Division’ 260). Joe Barton correctly notes that its progressive perspective “acquiesces to the neo-liberal forces that Wilson originally attempted to resist” (Barton). However, *Party People* is too complex to be labelled a mere product for cultural tourism. Indeed, its self-conscious, mix-and-match style treats its subjects with irreverence and invites viewers to rethink what they have assumed to be true about Manchester’s music scene. Self-reflexive in its renegotiation of rock mythologies, it explores how myths and legends have formed and blurs the distinction between myth and truth. In depictions of Ian Curtis (Sean Harris) and Joy Division it retains critical distance, reflecting on the particular cultural processes that led Joy Division to be mythologised as the voice of the North and Curtis to be lionised as a tragic poet and martyr.

Winterbottom’s thought-provoking representation of the rise and fall of Factory Records was possible in 2002 because its subject matter was not expected to be of widespread global interest. But when *Control* was released in 2007, the appeal of a film about Joy Division had significantly increased. Along with other eighties revivals, post-punk was substantially revived from 2002 onward not just in Britain but also internationally, evidenced by the emergence of American bands like The Killers, The Strokes and Interpol. This in turn sparked a renewed interest in original post-punk bands like Joy Division, encouraged by the emergence of YouTube in 2005 that enabled access to performance footage and music videos. This meant that now not only would original Joy Division fans be interested in the subject matter but a younger demographic of retro fans could also be targeted. Unlike *24 Hour Party People*, which was conceived by Winterbottom alongside producer Andrew Eaton and was “based around their passion for rock music” (Hunt 24), *Control* was developed by producer Orian Williams, who then approached Anton Corbijn to direct (Dawson, ‘Anton Corbijn’). The decision to ask Corbijn, who played such a crucial role in influencing cultural memories of the

group, makes it clear that the film was imagined as a *contribution* to the Joy Division mythology rather than a new perspective on it. This also makes *Control* unique in the context of the Eighties Cycle: if *This is England* was the first of the cycle to engage with the 1980s as a historical period, but helped to spark an eighties pop cultural revival, then *Control* was the first to invoke a 1980s historical subject specifically for its revivalist appeal.

Accordingly, Corbijn mimics Joy Division's stylistic identity and depicts Curtis consistently with his public persona. *Control* has been praised for its artistic stylisation; John Orr, for instance, identifies influences from Ingmar Bergman, Robert Bresson and 1960s British New Wave filmmakers (15-9). However, unlike auteur-oriented directors like Bergman, Corbijn is not concerned with developing a unique visual style with which to express his own personal perspective of the past, but instead with replicating the style familiar to audiences. *Control* is shot in black and white; in September 2005, Corbijn told *Screen International* that it would be shot this way because "most people's memories of that era are in black and white. Joy Division specifically seems like a black-and-white band" (Mitchell 12). Corbijn reveals himself here to be intent on upholding rather than critiquing the cultural memories of the band that he helped to create, and his film's static and slow tracking shots and expressionistic visual imagery mirror his stark, modernist black and white photographs. While the high-contrast monochrome helps to evoke the bleakness of post-industrial decay and the drabness of the terraced homes that line Curtis' street, the aesthetic is one of picturesque bleakness rather than a true evocation of destitution. It is destitution captured through the lens of nostalgic gloss, both beautiful in its modernist starkness and 'cool' in its recollection of Joy Division's monochrome iconography (Figure 24).

As Corbijn's aesthetic aids in replicating Joy Division's mythology, Matt Greenhalgh's screenplay invokes Curtis' cultural status as a modern poet and prophet. In several instances, Sam Riley narrates the action using Curtis' lyrics, and at one point he quotes Wordsworth from memory while staring longingly out of a window. The spoken lyrics are used throughout the film to comment on pivotal events in Curtis' life, reducing their significance to his personal trials. Simon Reynolds considers this to be



**Figure 24:** Manchester's post-industrial decay is filmed with a picturesque bleakness that recalls Joy Division's iconography. (*Control* publicity photo)

the film's failing, arguing that Joy Division's music is explained from a "reductive perspective: biography", when in fact Curtis' lyrics were "existential rather than autobiographical" (Reynolds, 'Joy Division' 362-3). Reynolds interprets this decision, however, as a failing of the film medium, writing that "a full-length movie can't rely on the power of pure imagery the way a video can. Corbijn was always going to have to try to 'explain' Joy Division" (Reynolds, 'Joy Division' 362). Yet, Corbijn's video for 'Atmosphere' explained Joy Division in much the same way, sanctifying Curtis and redefining the song as his elegy, and Reynolds himself notes that Curtis' identity as an enigmatic seer developed even before his death. The film's explanation for Joy Division's music is not a failing of the film medium at all, but a conscious decision to sustain the already extant legend of Curtis as tortured poetic genius.

Like *This is England*, *Control* intertwines history with stylistic nostalgia. Its late 1970s universe is not entirely imagined because it is based on real people and actual events. Yet, it is simultaneously a nostalgic product, replicating the imagistic universe with which viewers are already familiar from photographs, music videos and so forth. The film's marketing materials make evident the extent to which Joy Division nostalgia



is a selling feature; nearly every poster worldwide, for instance, used the same black-and-white image of Sam Riley as Curtis staring off pensively with his grey overcoat upturned and a cigarette hanging loosely from his mouth, which summoned iconic photographs of the real Curtis (Figure 25). Interestingly, the only element of the campaign that was not consistent with Joy Division discourse was the use of pink text; however, in combination with monochrome, pink is associated with punk bands like The Clash and with late seventies and eighties fashion more generally, thus widening the film's retro appeal by targeting those who might not recognise Joy Division iconography and enhancing its value as a nostalgic product. Emphasis on the film's nostalgic appeal is not altogether different from the *This is England* marketing campaign discussed above, evidencing the blurring of lines between history and style, and by extension between historical examination and the nostalgia industry. Yet, the two films' crucial differences lie in their approaches to style: while Meadows highlights conflicting ways that a single style can be interpreted, Corbijn draws a natural link



**Figure 25:** *Control*'s posters (right) recall iconic photographs of Ian Curtis (left). (Photograph of Ian Curtis by Kevin Cummins, *Control* publicity poster)

between Curtis and his band's aesthetic, as if the style inherently reflected his identity rather than having been developed through media repetition. As such, *Control* lays bare the increasing extent to which media images have become primary markers of historical truth, distilling Ian Curtis' and his band's 'truths' in their stylistic iconography.

#### History and Genre: *Cass*

*Control* mimics commonly recognised stylistic codes from the late 1970s and 1980s to denote historical authenticity. However, as Grainge argues in reference to *Schindler's List*, as outlined in Chapter 3, some historical productions mimic codes that have come to be associated with a historical period *in retrospect* (*Memory and Popular Film* 6). Jon S. Baird's low-budget football hooligan biopic *Cass* is interesting to consider from this perspective. Based on the life of Cass Pennant, a former football hooligan of Jamaican descent who became leader of West Ham United's Inter City Firm, the film follows Cass (Nonso Anozie) from his childhood as the adopted son of a white elderly couple living in an all-white London neighbourhood to his acceptance into a West Ham United football hooligan firm. After being imprisoned for football-related violence, rising to become leader of the newly formed Inter City Firm and eventually recovering from a shooting, Cass decides to reject football hooliganism for his wife and family. Baird, already familiar to football hooligan film audiences through his own short film *It's a Casual Life* (2003) and his position as associate producer of *Green Street*, mimics the hooligan genre again here, appealing to 'lad' audiences. Simultaneously, however, he thematically explores race and cultural relations in London in the 1980s, drawing stylistic links between his own film and *This is England*, most notably in the use of archival footage. *Cass* consequently fuses the appeal of football hooligan films with the oppositional multiculturalism popularised by *This is England*, but this fusion causes tension between simultaneously examining questions of cultural relations and appealing to the largely white, male, populist audiences for which football hooliganism films are produced. As such, many of the historical signposts that make up *This is England's* 'multicultural' and 'oppositional' style, so to speak, are carried forward to *Cass* in lieu of the potentially alienating questions raised in Meadows' film.

*Cass* follows the general structure of a football hooligan film, reminding less of historically based biopics than of previous films like *The Football Factory* and *Green Street*. The story begins with a male protagonist's desire to join a football firm, progresses with his ascent through the firm and ends with his rejection of it. This is similar to the narrative structure of other football hooliganism films like *The Firm*, and casting Tamer Hassan in one of the lead roles links *Cass* to other Love films, appealing to Love's typical 'lad' fan-base. Furthermore, the film's 'laddish' tone, ultra-masculine perspective and emphasis on what Nicola Rehling calls the "buzz" of football hooliganism align it with football hooligan films which, as Rehling explains, distil in this "buzz" "an assertion of male agency, primal aggression, and the pleasures of an intense sense of belonging" (165). Generally speaking, then, *Cass* appeals more to audiences of football hooliganism films than to audiences of period films or even 'indie' films like *This is England*. It is obvious from the film's promotional material that it was keen to target 'lad' audiences; the DVD cover boasts four-star reviews from men's magazines like *Nuts* and *Maxim* and features a quote from *IGN Movies* that reads, "The best football hooligan movie for 20 years" (*Cass*).

Yet, the DVD cover also includes a quote from another 'lad' magazine, *Loaded*, that was featured on the poster and reads, "*The Football Factory* meets *This is England*" (*Cass*). Taking its quote from *Loaded*, the DVD evades *This is England*'s artier associations, implicitly categorising it as another 'lad' film, and celebrates *Cass*'s similarity to it. Still, the quote's claim is not incorrect: *Cass* is obviously influenced by *This is England*. Alongside *Sus* – which, as I will elaborate on below, also borrows a key element from *This is England* – *Cass* is one of only two productions released during the Eighties Cycle that features a non-white protagonist. Despite several films and shows that touch upon racism in the late 1970s and 1980s (including *Ashes to Ashes* and *The Line of Beauty*), the issue is otherwise tackled through secondary characters in white male protagonist-led features. This distances it from other typical white-dominant football hooligan films, and like *Sus*, it furthers the debate around 1980s race relations that was raised in *This is England*. As such, *Cass* calls upon stylistic motifs in *This is England* and occasionally even recalls specific sequences. In one scene near the beginning, for example, a young Cass meets with racist bullies as he crosses through an

overpass, recalling a scene near the beginning of *This is England* when Shaun is bullied in an underpass, as well as the racial abuse to which he and his friends later subject others as they pass through it (Figure 26). Stylistically, the film's soundtrack fuses early 1980s punk bands like The Jam with 2 Tone bands like The Beat, lending it a similarly 'multicultural sound', and most notably, it draws heavily from archival footage, with multiple montages that depict cultural tensions, as well as footage of Margaret Thatcher.



**Figure 26:** A scene in which Cass must pass by bullies in an overpass (below) stylistically recalls a similar scene in an underpass in *This is England* (above). (*This is England*, *Cass*)

This fusion of the football hooligan genre with Meadows' mediated approach to examining Britain's recent cultural history creates tension between the historical questions inevitably raised by the subject matter and archive footage and the film's need to appeal to a populist male audience. This tension is evident in an exchange between Cass and his prison cellmate, Delroy (Gary Lawrence):

Delroy: Where was your family from?

Cass: They're from somewhere in London. Not quite sure exactly where, though.

Delroy: No, mate, your *real* family.

Cass: They are my real family. The only ones that ever wanted me.

Delroy: What, you've never tried to find the others?

Cass: I ain't interested, mate. What good would that do me?

Delroy: Listen, don't take this the wrong way, right, but I think that's where your real problem is.

Cass: Well, don't take this the wrong way either, mate, but fuck off.

Delroy: [*Laughs*] Look, if you dunno who your father was and you dunno who your grandfather was, how the fuck you supposed to know where your roots are? Who *you* are?

Cass: Who the fuck are you, Mother Teresa? What the fuck would a petty criminal like you know about stuff like that, anyway? If you had any brains you certainly wouldn't be in here.

Delroy: You might be right there, you know, mate. But the one thing about being in here, it gives you plenty of time to think. (*Cass*)

Delroy raises issues concerning cultural hybridity and identity, aligning *Cass* with *This is England* (Combo, for instance, asks Milky at one point whether he considers himself to be English or Jamaican). However, this theoretical exchange has the potential to disaffect some of the film's targeted viewers, so the possible resultant tension is avoided by depicting Cass as flippant when confronted with Delroy's questions and evidently lacking in knowledge, comparing Delroy to Mother Teresa rather than to a more

relevant figure like, say, postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha.<sup>45</sup> This allows the film to touch upon the subject of cultural hybridity without seeming condescending and consequently estranging certain members of its audience.

*Cass* also diverts attention from more multifaceted historical questions raised by the presence of archival footage. If, as I have suggested is largely the case in *This is England*, archival materials can act as signposts for individual viewers' collective memories, refracting, so to speak, the infinite narratives that are inherently contained in them, it is also possible to limit interpretations of archival images. *Cass* stylistically mimics *This is England*'s use of archival materials but simplifies their meaning. This is evident in a scene in which Cass recounts for the viewer what it is like to be in prison. In voiceover, he narrates, "No matter what anyone tries to tell you, prison is a shithole. [...] Piss in a bucket, shit in a bucket and clean your teeth in a bucket. Let's just say it ain't a four-star treatment" (*Cass*). Simultaneously, 2 Tone band The Beat's "Jackpot" plays in the background and a montage of archival 1980s prison footage is displayed. The Beat's Ska revival sound coupled with archival material stylistically recalls *This is England*. However, Cass' explanatory monologue condenses the meaning of the montage to the immediate narrative function it serves: it depicts what life is like in prison for Cass. As Cass narrates "Piss in a bucket, shit in a bucket and clean your teeth in a bucket", the montage presents clips of prisoners carrying buckets and cleaning their teeth in a bucket. Sequences like this appear elsewhere in *Cass*, and always to similar ends, even when the footage is drawing thematic instead of narrative connections. For example, one scene features clips of Margaret Thatcher discussing Britain's need to combat football hooliganism intercut with shots of Cass preparing the firm for a fight. Although this montage serves a more thematic purpose than the last, expressing the divide between the authorities and the working-class football hooligans, it *tells* the viewer what to think rather than encouraging open interpretations of the footage. Crucially, this idea does not require archival media and could be easily articulated

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<sup>45</sup> Bhabha is known for theorising cultural hybridity. See 'Culture's In-Between' 58.

otherwise, suggesting that the main purpose of the footage is to remind viewers of *This is England*.

The archival media in *Cass* consequently signals a different kind of stylistic reproduction from *Control*. The film does not mimic a visual aesthetic that was established in the 1980s, but rather one that was created in a popular film retrospectively set in the eighties. On one hand, *Cass*' visual style reveals the unusual junction at which *This is England* was situated, appealing to some audiences as a historically critical work by an established auteur but simultaneously to others as a violent, raw film centring on a group of mostly white working-class men. On the other hand, and more significantly here, it reveals that because of *This is England*'s wide popularity, its formal aesthetic became an accepted visual code for conveying 1980s history. The code is visible elsewhere, too; the opening credits for *Sus*, for instance, recall those for *This is England* (which, as I have mentioned above, themselves invoke the credits for *La Haine*) by featuring a montage of footage of racial violence that is set to 2 Tone band The Specials' 1979 song 'It's Up to You'. The aesthetic of combining Ska and its derivatives with violent archival footage is also used in montages from *The Iron Lady*. Like *Control*'s historical strategy, this one establishes coherent and simple relationships between mediated images and knowable histories. Such strategies are common because they enable historical productions to benefit from the eighties revivalism discussed in Chapter 2 without risking alienating audiences with self-reflexive historical inquiry.

#### Rejecting nostalgic pleasure: *Hunger*

Even when productions direct viewers' interpretations of invoked historical media, the act of invoking them still invites viewers to reflect on their own memories of (or, for younger viewers, encounters with) the era. This is especially true of archival media segments; while narrativising them may assist in widening appeal and ensuring nostalgic pleasure, the segments still contain echoes of their past connotations for viewers. As Hayden White rightly points out, the "electronics revolution" has meant that mediated events in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, although not immune to narrativisation, are inherently resistant to it ('The Modernist Event' 23) because they are

recorded as they occur and can be observed as raw footage by viewers. Although the footage of Margaret Thatcher in *Cass* is subservient to the narrative, it will still summon memories for viewers, whether of the original broadcast or of seeing it (or similar footage) reproduced elsewhere. It stands to reason that the more politically charged the subject of the footage, the more likely it is to recall individual memories and the more likely these memories are to clash with the film or programme's narrative. Such will likely be the case for archival media regarding the so-called 'Troubles' conflict in Northern Ireland between Catholic republicans and Protestant unionists. The conflict, which began in the late 1960s but came to a head with violent clashes between the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the British government throughout the 1970s and 1980s, was one of the most significant on-going political issues in the UK in the 1980s and was highly publicised.<sup>46</sup>

Apart from *Ashes to Ashes*, which touches on conflicts with the IRA in the same way that it condenses other 1970s and 80s historical issues, the Troubles feature in only two Eighties Cycle productions: Kari Skogland's UK/Canada co-production *Fifty Dead Men Walking* and Steve McQueen's *Hunger*. It is possible that general avoidance of the subject is related to concerns over complaints of bias. In his article on *Bloody Sunday* (Paul Greengrass, 2002) and *Sunday* (Charles McDougal, 2002), two television films about the so-called 'Bloody Sunday' massacre of civil rights protesters by British Army soldiers in 1972, Richard Kelly notes that while people are ordinarily not bothered about "chapter and verse" in historical films, such is not the case for representations of the Northern Irish Troubles (76). In the case of filmic depictions of the Bloody Sunday event, for instance, Kelly argues that this means "[coming] under fire from those members of the British and Irish media who scorn and revile the republican movement" (76). In *Fifty Dead Men Walking*, a crime drama loosely based on former IRA agent Martin McGartland's (Jim Sturgess) experiences as a spy for British security forces, Skogland attempts to ease this tension by following a figure with sympathies to both

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<sup>46</sup> For in-depth discussions on conflicts in Northern Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s, see Paul Dixon's and Eamonn O'Kane's *Northern Ireland Since 1969* and Jonathan Tonge's *Northern Ireland*.



sides, as well as by structuring it as a generic crime film and avoiding too much historical analysis.

Steve McQueen, on the other hand, chooses to confront the tension between republicans and unionists in his first feature film, *Hunger*, which depicts the Irish republican prisoners' hunger strike in HM Prison Maze in 1981. Led by Bobby Sands (Michael Fassbender), the strike was the culmination of the five-year-long blanket protest in Maze prison against the British government's withdrawal of Special Category Status for political prisoners. Like *This is England*, *Hunger* stresses contradictory historical narratives; however, McQueen rejects Meadows' emphasis on the stylistic pleasures commonly associated with the era, thus rendering nostalgia impossible. Before directing *Hunger*, McQueen was an artist, known primarily for producing video art and short films, whose work was mostly displayed in galleries. He explains that telling this story as a feature film was partly inspired by his wish to "re-examine" a generally ignored period of recent British history, noting that the event was "one that was swept under the carpet for 27 years, even on its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. There was hardly anything in the newspapers [...] [and I] wanted to make a film that was essential. Why make a film [...] if it isn't *necessary*?" McQueen also, in this interview, implies a connection to *This is England* when he argues that the hunger strike is "the most important piece of history in the last 27 years. More important than the Falklands War and more important than the miners' strike, because it's something that is still continuing in one way, shape, form or another" (Cinematographos). This reference to the Falklands crisis suggests that McQueen may have been influenced by *This is England* to make a similar but, in his view, more important film. Regardless, it is evident that McQueen's intent had nothing to do with personal nostalgia. Crucially, unlike Meadows, he was influenced *only* by mediated memories rather than by a combination of mediation and personal experience: he explains in the aforementioned interview that as a black Londoner, his only memories of the strike were from seeing it broadcasted on TV.

*Hunger* resists nostalgic immersion, forcing viewers to retain a distanced, critical perspective. The film's narrative structure, for instance, is unusual. It is

comprised of three acts: the first establishes events leading up to the hunger strike, such as the prisoners smearing excrement on the prison walls in protest, and has next to no dialogue; the second act involves a 24-minute-long discussion on Sands' plans to instigate a hunger strike between Sands and his priest (Liam Cunningham), 17 minutes of which occurs in a single take; and the final act depicts Sands' hunger strike and eventual death. McQueen has commented that he envisaged the first act as visceral, the second as intellectual, and the third expressing the exhaustion of physicality and intellect that comes with death (Cinematographos). This separation of elements prevents viewers from becoming absorbed in the narrative. In addition, the film does not use a music soundtrack or even a score, and because very little occurs outside the prison, nearly all the costumes are uniforms: those for prison guards, prisoners, priests, health care workers and patients. In its general absence of colour or pleasing images, *Hunger* is decidedly uncomfortable to watch and listen to and offers no stylistic cues to mark the period. In fact, the first and third acts are exceedingly difficult to watch, as close-ups often linger on physical wounds, excrement, and the physical effects of starvation.

However, despite the film's resistance to nostalgia-inciting stylisation, McQueen does make use of archival media: Margaret Thatcher's recorded voice is heard twice. The first recording comes from a speech on the hunger strike and the prisoners' demand for political status that Thatcher gave in Belfast in March of 1981, in which she claimed that there is "no such thing as political murder, political bombing or political violence. There is only criminal murder, criminal bombing and criminal violence" (Thatcher, 'Speech in Belfast'). The second is from another speech she gave in Belfast, this time in May of the same year, in which she remarked that "faced with the failure of their discredited cause", the "men of violence" now seek to "work on the most basic of human emotions—pity—as a means of creating tension and stoking the fires of bitterness and hatred" (Thatcher, 'Speech at Thormont'). Like in *This is England*, the shots that accompany these clips depict seemingly unrelated images: during the first, the prison's outer wall and the branches of a tree at nightfall, and during the second, a tracking shot of a hallway on which prisoners have poured their urine. Yet, unlike in *This is England*, these sequences do not eventually reveal the source of the sound, which remains entirely severed from the diegesis. This evokes absolute separation

between the government's historical narrative of the hunger strike and that of the prisoners. It also highlights Margaret Thatcher's status as an absent presence, physically absent but constantly present in media, exposing the broader disconnect between mediated representations of the 1980s and actual lived experiences. By extension, the inclusion of Thatcher's voice without narrativisation encourages viewers to make their own meanings from the borrowed media segments, thus drawing out the multiple historical narratives contained within them.

It can be argued that Steve McQueen's strategy of highlighting the conflicting historical narratives inherent in media without providing nostalgic gratification solves the tension in *This is England* between historical criticality and nostalgic appeal. However, if challenging historical perspectives is the objective, then it must also be acknowledged that *Hunger* is an art film that targets a very narrow audience. There is something to be said for *This is England*'s widely-accessible style, which enabled it to reach diverse audiences. Still, *Hunger* is unique in its departure from other post-*This is England* 80s historical dramas, which generally avoid historical inquiry to widen their popular appeal. At any rate, all three films discussed here – *Control*, *Cass* and *Hunger* – share in common with *This is England* an emphasis on *mediated* histories, whether of a mythologised band like Joy Division, of football hooliganism and the Thatcher government's response to it, or of the 'Troubles' conflict in Northern Ireland. To what extent this is due to *This is England*'s influence is difficult to say; *Cass*' aesthetic is so similar that some degree of mimicry is almost certain, while Steve McQueen's comments noted above suggest that he may have been responding to it. Regardless, all three reveal eighties revivalism's impact on historical knowledge and represent divergent responses to it.

### **The Lady's Not for Returning: Three Margaret Thatcher Biopics**

Present in many of the discussions thus far but never the focus has been the figure of Margaret Thatcher herself. In fact, many productions in the Eighties Cycle, whether historical dramas or not, depict her as an absent presence. As well as in *This is England*, *Hunger*, *Cass* and *Sus*, archival footage of her is used in other productions; for instance, she can be seen speaking on the television in an opening scene in *The Business*. Even

when archival segments are not used, she is mentioned in dialogue in nearly every production across the cycle and her influence is implied in many of its predominant themes and subjects, such as materialistic excess and unemployment. These recurrences are so frequent that they give credence to Louisa Hadley's and Elizabeth Ho's assertion that Margaret Thatcher functions "as a symbolic 'wound' in the contemporary imagination" (2), a trauma with which the nation copes through repetition. Yet, because this is nearly always the repetition of an absence – an image on the television, a recorded voice or simply a spoken name – it exposes the extent to which she is remembered not as an actual person but as a metaphor for extreme and sometimes traumatic cultural changes for which she was only partially responsible.

It also suggests that her physical absence might itself have been traumatic; despite her sustained influence on Britain's changing social landscape, she remained an ethereal figure for most British people, extant only on television and in radio. This is certainly implied in *The Line of Beauty*, where Thatcher's actual materialisation is depicted as a momentous event that occurs at the series' climax at the end of the second episode. Thatcher (Kika Markham) attends a party hosted by the Feddens, the family with whom protagonist Nick (Dan Stevens) is boarding, and when she arrives, she is first followed from behind by a tracking shot, so that only her hair is seen and her voice is heard as she is introduced to party guests. This builds tension toward the moment when, as she meets Nick, the sequence cross-cuts to reveal her face. A similar build-up of tension occurs in the ensuing scene, when a slow motion tracking close-up follows Nick as he approaches her and asks her to dance. The two are then shown dancing, again in slow motion, as others look on incredulously (Figure 27). Emphasised in this entire scene is the shock that her materiality – enhanced by her dancing – would have represented for British people at the time and continues to represent for contemporary viewers watching the programme ('To Whom').

This scene from *The Line of Beauty* reveals another significant attribute of Thatcher's persona as it exists in collective British memory; it shows how wholly she is defined by her iconography. Alongside building tension, the tracking shot that follows Thatcher from behind highlights Kika Markham's impersonation of her voice, thus self-



**Figure 27:** Nick (Dan Stevens) and Margaret Thatcher (Kika Marham) dance in slow motion as others look on in surprise. ('To Whom Do You Beautifully Belong')

consciously nudging the series' knowing British audience. In an article in *The Independent* on Thatcher as a recurrent source of inspiration for comedians and screenwriters, columnist John Walsh points out that "Mrs T was a walking anthology of style statements and vivid personal attributes – the royal-blue skirt suit, the ironclad coiffure, the determined walk, the pussy-bow blouses, the patent court shoes, the sharp nose and blazing blue eyes", and argues that it is "hard to think of any British PM of the 20th century, barring Winston Churchill, who has inspired so much iconography" (Walsh). It is probably safe to suggest that Thatcher has even surpassed Churchill in this regard due to constant recycling of 1980s media, and her instantly recognisable clothing style, hair and affected speaking voice are so iconic that they have been the subject of parody, most notably in the satirical puppet television show *Spitting Image* (ITV, 1984-96) (Figure 28). Thatcher's finite and distinct iconography is at odds with the infinite meanings ascribed to it; thus, the moment in *The Line of Beauty* where Thatcher's voice is first heard will conjure individual viewers' opposing critical perspectives on Thatcher, as well as their personal memories of footage of her (whether these are first-hand memories from the 1980s or they are memories of seeing footage replayed in subsequent decades) and of previous imitations of her, like the infamous puppet version of her in *Spitting Image*.



**Figure 28:** Margaret Thatcher's iconography has been parodied multiple times, most famously in the television show *Spitting Image*. (*Spitting Image* publicity photo)

The wealth of incompatible meanings contained in Margaret Thatcher's iconography, alongside the potential impact of depicting her in a resurrected, material form (and, consequently, the pressure to 'get her right', so to speak) have likely been primary reasons why Thatcher has not often been directly portrayed, despite her presence across the cycle. Aside from *The Line of Beauty*, only three post-2005 productions do so: the two one-off BBC television films, *Margaret Thatcher: The Long Walk to Finchley* and Margaret and Phyllida Lloyd's theatrically released biopic, *The Iron Lady* (2011). Contributing to the above issues, there is the added knowledge that representing Margaret Thatcher onscreen has raised these issues in the past. Such was the case for screenwriter Ian Curteis' BBC teleplay *The Falklands Play* (2002); the BBC originally commissioned Curteis to write it in 1983, a year after the Falklands crisis, but subsequently pushed its broadcast date back to 1987 and then eventually shelved it altogether. Curteis accused the BBC of abandoning it because the play was too sympathetic to Margaret Thatcher and was not consistent with the corporation's left-wing stance. Although the BBC denied the accusation, suggesting that it was a lack of quality that led to the play's abandonment, the incident highlighted the problem of

representing a figure that carries such opposing meanings for audiences.<sup>47</sup> Tellingly, the BBC did eventually produce the play, both for radio and television, on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the crisis in 2002, bookending the television broadcast with a documentary on the incident, ‘The Falklands Row’, and a studio debate discussing the implications of shelving it (Kibble-White). Evidently, even in 2002, the question of how best to represent the crisis, and by extension Margaret Thatcher herself, was still deemed worthy of critical debate.

*The Long Walk to Finchley and Margaret*

Past incidents had exposed the inevitable difficulties in representing Thatcher onscreen. However, in the midst of a cultural craze for eighties revivalism and an ongoing cycle of eighties period dramas, as well as the success of *This is England*, which drew Thatcher back to the surface of collective consciousness, at least one biopic about her was probably inevitable. By 2008, not only was public interest in the subject rife, but the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Thatcher’s election as Prime Minister was looming. Perhaps in anticipation of this anniversary, the BBC ran a series of programmes called the ‘Thatcher Years Season’, which included new documentaries such as *The Making of the Iron Lady* (2008) and *Portillo on Thatcher* (2008). *Margaret Thatcher: The Long Walk to Finchley*, written by Tony Saint and directed by Niall McCormick, was produced to coincide with this season. The mildly comical biopic, which stars Andrea Riseborough in the lead role, follows a young, cunning Margaret Roberts in her steadfast determination to be elected as a Member of Parliament, finally being elected as a representative for Finchley. The BBC followed this television film a year later with *Margaret*, another one-off production written by Richard Cottan and directed by James Kent, which was darker in tone and starred Lindsay Duncan as Thatcher during her final days as Prime Minister, when she was ousted by her own cabinet members. Whatever the BBC’s reasons for commissioning these two biopics, the films’ producers were

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<sup>47</sup> For a detailed account of this incident, see Reeves, ‘Tumbledown (Charles Wood) and The Falklands Play (Ian Curteis): The Falklands Faction’.

inevitably forced to contend with polarised opinions on Thatcher as well as the BBC's own past regarding *The Falklands Play*.

The two productions do this in very different ways, although interestingly to similar ends, as I will elaborate on below. *The Long Walk to Finchley*, which is essentially a comedy, was interpreted by some as an attempt to repair the BBC's reputation for anti-Thatcherite bias. In her review for *The Independent*, for instance, Hermione Eyre writes that it is "all very confusing, this new BBC tendency to give its old enemies sympathetic biopics" (Eyre). This is probably because of the production's light tone and cheerful narrative that drives energetically toward its conclusion. However, the film is not entirely sympathetic toward Thatcher. It ironically pokes fun at her self-absorption; for instance, when Denis Thatcher (Rory Kinnear) comes to visit Margaret after the birth of their twins Carol (Julia Joyce) and Mark (Michael Selwood), she expresses joy not in having children but rather in the convenience of having two at once: "This is perfect, Dennis: twins, one of each sex. It's a complete family all done in one go and we won't have to do it again. [...] Now I'll be able to sit my finals with a clear run and, once we've got a nanny sorted, start looking for a job straight away" (*Margaret Thatcher*). The phrase 'a complete family all done in one go' suggests that she considers having children to be a box one must tick to achieve individual success.

*The Long Walk to Finchley* also addresses liberal viewers by mocking Thatcher's naïve disinterest in feminism and willingness to use men's sexist behaviour to advance her own career. In one scene, she points to the need to get votes from working men's clubs, and when a co-worker implies that the only way a woman can enter those clubs is as a barmaid, the sequence cuts to a shot of her pouring beer. As the men make sexist remarks, Denis, who has accompanied her, comes to her defence, to which she responds, "Denis, don't fuss" (*Margaret Thatcher*). Similarly, in a later scene, Thatcher, who has until this point been a brunette, dyes her hair blonde, dresses in blue and softens her voice as a means of convincing the Conservative Party to put her forth as a candidate. The scene playfully implies that Thatcher's well-known iconography was deliberately crafted to manipulate men into succumbing to her desires



(Figure 29). This, in turn, highlights the irony of her eventual position as the first female Prime Minister.

When the film's playful, tongue-in-cheek tone is accounted for, its forward-driving narrative takes on new meaning. Hermione Eyre denounces it for encouraging viewers to "punch the air" to celebrate Thatcher's victories until "half of them remember their political affiliation and punch themselves in the face" (Eyre), implying that viewers are meant to identify with Thatcher. However, given the film's ironic tone, its excessive optimism and cheerfulness can be seen as deriding Thatcher's individualistic drive. Therefore, instead of attempting to reconcile with a previous enemy, it is far more likely that the BBC is actually using comedy as a means of creating ambivalence and sidestepping a distinct position on Thatcher. The film's light-hearted tone and narrative alignment with Thatcher's cause can appeal to Thatcher supporters, while simultaneously its excess and tongue-in-cheek humour appeal to her opponents. This ambivalence is aided by the film's subtitle, "How Margaret might have done it" (*Margaret Thatcher*); as well as being funny, it calls attention to the film's



**Figure 29:** *The Long Walk to Finchley* plays on Thatcher's well-known iconography, suggesting that it has been crafted to sexually arouse and manipulate her male colleagues. (*Margaret Thatcher: The Long Walk to Finchley*)

status as a fictional reimagining rather than a historical account, consequently avoiding questions of bias.

Interestingly, however, this ambivalence does not appear to have fully succeeded, as the film was actually better received by right-leaning newspapers than left-leaning ones. In the Conservative-supporting paper *The Telegraph*, for instance, Simon Heffer calls the film a “pleasant surprise” for “we Thatcherites”. Heffer comments that while he is unsure that “the Tory party was quite so crusty and bigoted in the 1950s as was made out here”, he finds it “satisfying that both the script and Riseborough got rather nearer the truth of her” (Heffer). However, in the left-leaning paper *The Guardian*, for example, the response from Sam Wollaston is less positive. Wollaston is evidently more attuned to the film’s tongue-in-cheek tone, opening his review by citing one of its jokes. However, he suggests that the production relies on cheap “gags” and claims that it can only be enjoyed if viewers can “forgive the flippancy with which the rise of the woman who was to fire a nuke through society is treated” (Wollaston). Wollaston’s review and Eyre’s aforementioned review in the liberal paper *The Independent* suggest that many of Thatcher’s opponents read it as too light a treatment. These differing responses might be attributed to audience expectation: because Thatcher has so often been satirised and criticised in the media, left-leaning viewers have likely come to expect it, making *The Long Walk to Finchley*’s ambivalence seem ‘flippant’, while for right-leaning viewers, the film’s ambivalence probably marks a welcome change. Whatever the reason, these responses reveal the difficulty in representing Margaret Thatcher onscreen; even a production that clearly *aimed* to resolve the tension between perspectives was ultimately unable to do so.

The BBC’s follow-up film, *Margaret*, depicts Thatcher’s downfall. It was produced by the same company, Great Meadow Productions, but is markedly darker, more serious and more conspiratorial than its predecessor. Yet, its approach to representing Thatcher is not entirely different, as it also sidesteps questions of perspective by using genre codes to help it feel less like a true story and by rejecting historical accuracy. Here, however, the genre is not comedy but political thriller, and historical truth is not evaded by self-consciously depicting Thatcher mythically but

instead by rejecting her iconography almost altogether and rendering Duncan's Thatcher perhaps the least recognisable of any so far. Formally, the film generically recalls other recent BBC political thrillers, such as the successful *State of Play* (David Yates, 2003). In the opening sequence, for example, ominous and rhythmic music accompanies disorienting and shadowed tracking shots as a woman's voice claims, "Prime Minister, you look to die for", to which Thatcher responds, "To die for? Is that good?" (*Margaret*). The sinister tone achieved by this combination of music, cinematography and dialogue is maintained throughout the production. Narratively, it depicts an internal political conspiracy devised by what are portrayed as exceptionally shady and manipulative cabinet members, heightening the suspense. Where *The Long Walk to Finchley* uses optimism and irony to enable viewers to identify with Thatcher while simultaneously allowing space for mockery, *Margaret* diverts attention from politically divisive opinions on Thatcher by focusing on internal divisions in her cabinet and by establishing itself as a thrilling drama rather than as a critical analysis of history.

Also crucial is the film's unusually unrecognisable depiction of Thatcher. Lindsay Duncan is styled to loosely resemble Thatcher near the end of her time as Prime Minister and she does lightly mimic Thatcher's lilt, but these details are so subtle that they elude instant recognisability. In two of the film's most widely used publicity photos, one of which appears on the cover of the DVD release (Figure 30), Duncan's hair and clothing are hard to distinguish, rendering it difficult to definitively identify her as Margaret Thatcher. In his review for *The Telegraph*, Michael Deacon raises this point, noting that he "didn't think [Duncan's] Thatcher was terribly much like the real thing", but notes that when he asked Duncan about this in an interview, she responded that she was not trying to do an "impression" of Thatcher because it would mean "death to the viewer's imagination" (Deacon). This point is interesting because by 'the real thing', Deacon is probably not referring to how she *truly* was, if such a thing were ever knowable, but instead to recordings of Thatcher from the television, from radio and from photographs. It is this mediated iconography that both the film's producers and Duncan largely ignore, instead opting for a portrayal that will encourage 'imagination'. Duncan's Thatcher is in some ways consistent with the Thatcher that has been mythologised elsewhere: she is driven, claiming at one point that "you must fight again



**Figure 3013:** Publicity photos for *Margaret* lack blatant identifiers of Margaret Thatcher, leaving it unclear whether or not it actually is meant to be her. (*Margaret* publicity photo, *Margaret*)

and again against your smallness”, and is generally unwilling to entertain opposing perspectives, encouraging her downfall. However, in other ways Duncan’s portrayal contradicts Thatcher mythology. She is vulnerable, insecure and, most notably, relatable. Consequently, where *The Long Walk to Finchley* playfully calls attention to its viewers’ familiarity with the iconography and mythology surrounding the figure it represents, *Margaret* disregards this familiarity entirely, denying its viewers the satisfaction of seeing Thatcher replicated onscreen and encouraging them to accept the film’s imagined version of her. This allows the film to take liberties with Thatcher without having to answer to its own accuracy.

Like *The Long Walk to Finchley*, *Margaret*’s strategy for depicting Thatcher helps it to appeal to both her supporters and her opponents. The conspiracy and deception depicted within the Conservative Party, as well as the emphasis on Thatcher’s unbending nature, can appeal to opponents, while its status as a political thriller, which distances it from any indictment of the Conservative Party as a whole, and its humanisation of Thatcher lend it appeal for supporters. Interestingly, while it did not receive the critical attention of *Long Walk*, which was nominated for five BAFTAs, it equally was not met with the same hostility from left-wing critics, mostly receiving neutral reviews all around. This suggests that perhaps the film’s strategy of portraying

Margaret Thatcher without angering viewers was more successful than *Long Walk*'s strategy. Still, as has become evident, their strategies are not so vastly opposed.

Ultimately, both films get around the difficult issue of representing Margaret Thatcher by presenting very self-consciously *imagined* versions of her, whether this is a version that is knowingly playful and draws excessively from mythology, or whether it blatantly rejects mythology and iconography in favour of an entirely new Thatcher.

### *The Iron Lady*

The BBC's television biopics offer a good point of comparison when considering the 2011 feature film *The Iron Lady*, which was written by Abi Morgan, directed by Phyllida Lloyd and stars American actress Meryl Streep as Thatcher. First, however, it is important to distinguish their targeted audiences. The BBC biopics are low-budget single dramas produced for British television broadcast, while *The Iron Lady* is a larger-budget UK/ France co-production with an iconic American star set for a wide international theatrical release.<sup>48</sup> As such, *The Long Walk to Finchley* and *Margaret*, which were initially produced for BBC Four and BBC Two respectively, were chiefly aimed at domestic viewers able to access these channels. These viewers could be assumed to have at least a vague familiarity with the subject matter and, for the most part, to have preconceived opinions on Margaret Thatcher. By contrast, *The Iron Lady* was imagined from the beginning as an internationally marketable British biopic similar to *The Queen* (Stephen Frears, 2006). Producer Damien Jones has claimed in *Variety* that his primary motivation for producing it was not politics, but rather his belief that she "fitted the template of a marketable British star" (Dawtre). Casting Streep in the title role assisted this, reflecting what Andrew Higson describes as the English film industry's "strategy to mine English settings, characters and cultural texts, but to market them internationally by employing American and other Hollywood stars to put on English accents and add a level of box office appeal that can't always be achieved by

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<sup>48</sup> The budget for *The Iron Lady* was \$20 million USD, according to *Variety* (Dawtre). The actual budgets for *The Long Walk to Finchley* and *Margaret* are unknown, but according to the BBC's commissioning website, the average budget for single drama programmes is £375 000 to £500 000 GBP ('Tariff Ranges').

English actors” (*Film England* 26). Given that *The Iron Lady* was made to appeal to a broad, international audience, producers could not assume the same degree of familiarity with and polarised feelings toward Thatcher for all viewers. She would therefore need to be cast ambiguously and universalised to ensure relatability.

At the same time, *British* viewers were still bound to account for a large share of the audience, as it was a British film about a British political figure. The film’s Thatcher would need to appeal to them, too; more so than a portrayal of her in a single BBC drama, as *The Iron Lady* would need to recoup the substantial money invested in producing it. In light of this, *The Iron Lady*’s method for depicting Thatcher is simultaneously more and less accurate than *Long Walk*’s and *Margaret*’s; stylistically, it aims for greater accuracy, but in its depiction of Thatcher’s persona it is even less objective than either of the television dramas. It imagines Thatcher as an old woman suffering from dementia and struggling to let go of the dead Denis Thatcher (Jim Broadbent), and depicts her rise to power through a series of flashbacks that lay emphasis on her perspectives and biases. Like in *Long Walk* and *Margaret*, this strategy attempts to appease opposing perspectives on Thatcher; the film’s remarkably accurate reconstruction of the collectively remembered, mediated Margaret Thatcher acts as a distraction, while the film sidesteps a political stance by attributing its viewpoint to its own fictional version of Thatcher. This also universalises her, emphasising her internal difficulties over her public policies, and thus widens appeal for international audiences.

Stylistically, Lloyd’s feature takes advantage of its \$20 million USD budget to carefully replicate Thatcher’s iconography, highlighting American star Meryl Streep’s transformation into Margaret Thatcher in advertisements. The film’s makeup artist Mark Coulier, who won an Oscar and a BAFTA for his work, has commented that he “looked at hundreds and hundreds of photographs [...], trying to work out what were the best features to pick to fit onto Meryl Streep” (Hanel). Costume designer Consolata Boyle carefully studied the transformations of Thatcher’s style over the years, commenting that she considered Thatcher’s attire to be an essential “part of the telling of Margaret’s story” (‘Colours, Costume’). Streep herself carefully mimicked Thatcher’s intonation, pronunciation and mannerisms. Director Phyllida Lloyd has

claimed that when she first heard Streep's imitation, she became aware of "the enormous force that was about to be unleashed" ('From Script to Screen'), suggesting that she was less concerned with Streep's ability to bring uniqueness to the role than with her ability to mimic Thatcher's familiar mannerisms and intonations. In fact, the film's entire aesthetic is heavily indebted to previous media representations; as well as famous outfits, it captures other details known to the public through media, including a statuette resting on her table depicting Falklands soldiers which was featured in a 1987 BBC television interview with Russell Harty, 'My Favourite Things' ('Favourite Things') (Figure 31). This careful attention to detail is consistent throughout, developing a textual universe that is consistent, if not with Thatcher's actual lived reality, then certainly with her mediated simulacrum.

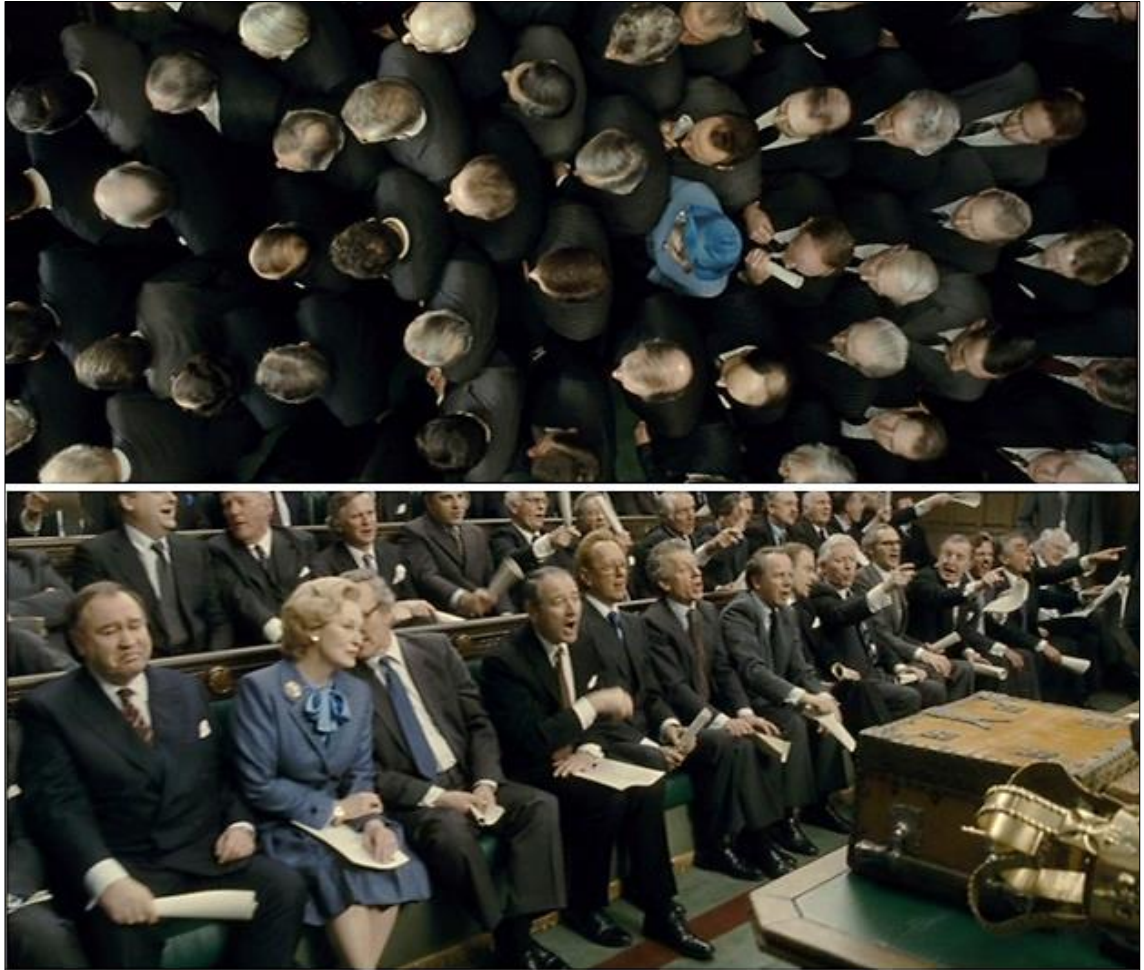


**Figure 31:** *The Iron Lady* visually references previous mediations of Margaret Thatcher. For instance, a statuette that she named as one of her 'favourite things' in a televised interview (above) is included in the film's set design (below). ('Favourite Things', *The Iron Lady*)

This highly precise stylistic reconstruction of Thatcher differs from the strategies in both *Long Walk* and *Margaret*. As detailed above, *Margaret* avoids recalling Thatcher overtly, while *Long Walk* highlights the artificiality of her public image by invoking it ironically. Both of these strategies reveal Margaret Thatcher's overwhelming familiarity amongst British audiences, as they are not required to *explain* her and can jump straight to complicating her iconography. Yet, they also betray the extent to which it is *necessary* to go beyond mimicry for British audiences in order to say anything of worth, as mere mimicry recalls the endless impersonations of her that have littered the British media, including parodies like that in *Spitting Image*. Yet, in *The Iron Lady* mimicry is an essential component. This is likely because the film's non-British audiences are not assumed to have the requisite knowledge to pick up on the nuances in *Long Walk*'s tongue-in-cheek approach or to grasp the uniqueness of *Margaret*'s imaginative interpretation; as an international production, *The Iron Lady* must achieve accuracy on elements of Thatcher's persona that are more universally familiar. The film's stylistic verisimilitude, then, is both inevitable and problematic: inevitable because the film has to resonate with a wide audience, but problematic because Thatcher's iconography comes with pre-set meanings for British viewers that range from outright villainy to heroism and have been the constant subject of caricature.

It appears as if the film's producers attempted to resolve this problem of stylistic accuracy for British viewers by using an approach to historical representation that is extremely subjective and at times even expressionistic. As the aging Thatcher struggles to come to terms with her husband's death, she is reminded of incidents during her rise to power and time as Prime Minister in a disjointed but vaguely chronological order, and these are displayed for the viewer in short episodes. Instead of aiming for historical accuracy, the film depicts these incidents through the perspective of the film's imagined version of Margaret Thatcher. When, for instance, Thatcher is first elected to parliament, one shot depicts her from above as she walks down a corridor in parliament surrounded by a crowd of men in suits, while several other sequences throughout the film depict her as the sole woman in the House of Commons (Figure 32). These images are not historically accurate, as there were already 25 female MPs in parliament when Thatcher was elected in 1959 (Pearce). Instead, they express her feeling of being vastly





**Figure 32:** Shots in *The Iron Lady* depict Margaret Thatcher (Meryl Streep) as the only woman in the House of Commons. (*The Iron Lady*)

outnumbered and emphasise the difficulties she faced in being taken seriously as a politician. Sometimes, the character blocking moves beyond historical inaccuracy into the realm of expressionism, as is evident in a montage that depicts Thatcher’s battle with both her cabinet members and the public over the introduction of the unpopular 1989 Poll Tax. Thatcher is depicted gliding down the corridor as MPs shout criticisms around her, evoking her obliviousness to other perspectives. Both Phyllida Lloyd and screenwriter Abi Morgan defend the film’s subjectivity. Lloyd describes the film as an “act of imagination”, while Morgan explains that every biopic is a “work of fiction”, and that she found, in reading various political biographies on Thatcher, that everyone “has mythologised and everyone has taken their own perspective” (‘From Script to Screen’). Thus, Morgan claims that she made a conscious decision to remain true to the

character she had created over and above extant descriptions of Thatcher's character. Lloyd's and Morgan's emphases on the inevitable fictitiousness of any biopic reveal that the film's producers thought very carefully about how to contend with divisive opinions on Thatcher. In the absence of easily discernible truths that could resonate with a wide audience, the film willingly opted for overt fiction. This would spare *The Iron Lady* from British accusations of political bias.

The film's combination of verisimilitude and subjectivity serves a secondary purpose for international audiences less familiar with her policies, allowing Thatcher to be sold as a revolutionary feminist figure. One scene aptly highlights the oscillation between these two functions; as Thatcher celebrates the country's victory in the Falklands crisis, her victorious House of Commons speech is followed by a swell of triumphant music, the cheers of Conservative MPs and a shot of Labour Party leader Michael Foot (Michael Pennington) looking defeated. British audience reaction is neutralised here by the fact that the celebratory tone will resonate with those who supported Thatcher and/or the Falklands War, while its obvious subjectivity will ward it from criticism from opponents of Thatcher and the war. Crucially, portraying the incident from Thatcher's perspective distances the producers from sharing the film's point of view. Yet at the same time, it enables viewers who are less familiar with the history of the Falklands crisis or with her political policies to root for her *as a woman* struggling to compete for equality amongst men. Thatcher's ascent as a female politician is arguably her most universally accessible quality for viewers unfamiliar with her policies or ideologies, and it is carefully highlighted throughout the film. Of course, portraying Thatcher as a feminist is a tenuous route, as she regularly came under criticism for disregarding the feminist movement and for championing notions of traditional feminine domesticity. But by presenting her story from the perspective of subjective memory, the film can paint her as a feminist for international audiences and simultaneously avoid questions of her validity as a figurehead for women's equality from British viewers.

The tension between the film's international appeal as a story about a female underdog in a man's world and Margaret Thatcher's divisive reputation in Britain was

evidently known to the film's producers early on. Pathé's UK managing director Cameron McCracken is quoted in *Variety* as claiming that the team went to careful measures to advertise that the film is directed and written by women, stars an influential actress and is about a significant female historical figure, even going so far as to invite a number of significant British female commentators to Lloyd's house to enjoy a pie baked by Streep from a Julia Child recipe and to discuss the film. McCracken describes this move as an attempt to "engage with female journalists as the very first audience, to explore the issues with them before they had even had the benefit of seeing our marketing campaign" (Dawtre). This planned discussion, clearly devised to sway female commentators before they could formulate their own opinions, indicates the difficult terrain that producers were forced to tread. *The Long Walk to Finchley* is free to highlight and gently mock Thatcher as an ironic figurehead for women's equality due to her complete disregard for feminism because its audience is assumed to be aware of this. *The Iron Lady* is not afforded this privilege, as Thatcher's ascent as a female politician forms the crux of its global appeal. The public relations team clearly feared that British female critics' and commentators' historical knowledge might impact on their reviews and ultimately jeopardise the film's international reputation.

Trailers were also given differing tones for domestic and international audiences. The American marketing campaign emphasises her status as an important female figure; an official American trailer opens with the young Margaret proclaiming "I will never be one of those women who stays silent on the arm of her husband" and, using an optimistic soundtrack and title cards that call her "an outsider who fought her way in" and "a rebel who never backed down", the trailer cheerfully celebrates her ascent to power, concluding with Streep voicing the line, "Gentlemen, shall we join the ladies?" (VISO Trailers). This angle is de-emphasised in the UK trailer; despite a title card that reads, "One woman defied convention and set out to change the world", it uses a combination of upbeat and sinister music and includes some of the film's darker scenes. It also concludes with Thatcher asking the men to "join the ladies", but here the comment is accompanied by foreboding music (Film4video). These conflicting messages make it difficult to discern *any* perspective in the UK trailer, thus maintaining the required ambivalence to appeal to viewers regardless of their political beliefs.

Despite attempts to sway perspectives on it before it reached audiences, *The Iron Lady*'s box office performance and critical reception were uneven. The film was reasonably profitable, grossing almost \$115 million US dollars worldwide ('The Iron Lady'). But while Meryl Streep was praised and won multiple awards for her performance, the film's personal and subjective approach was criticised by critics in both left-leaning and right-leaning British newspapers and by many American critics as well. For instance, the left-leaning *Guardian*'s Peter Bradshaw complains that "this is a defanged, declawed, depoliticised Margaret Thatcher, whom we are invited to admire on the feeble grounds that she is tougher and gutsier than the men" (Bradshaw), while the right-leaning *Telegraph*'s Jenny McCartney notes that it "seems a curious decision to view such an undeniably powerful life through the prism of impotence" (McCartney). Although Bradshaw's comment implies that he would have preferred a more critical depiction and McCartney's suggests she would have enjoyed a more lauding one, both of these comments locate the film's weakness in its politically sidestepping ambivalence. Although they do not imply the same bias as British reviews, many American reviews form similar assessments. In *The Washington Post*, Ann Hornaday suggests that the film is simultaneously too "triumphalist and insulting", writing that it "[reduces] Thatcher's remarkable life to a series of psycho-biographical touchpoints and superficial montages" and concluding that Streep's performance "renders everything else just featureless ice" (Hornaday).

These critical responses do suggest that at the very least the film's verisimilitude, if not its historical subjectivity, impressed audiences. But some responses from British critics suggest that its self-conscious bias was not enough to curb the effects of achieving such a high degree of stylistic accuracy. More than one British critic fixates on the unusual accuracy with which Streep replicates Thatcher as she has been seen and heard in media; Anthony Quinn comments in *The Independent* that Streep gives a "performance of uncanny exactitude" that is "so spot-on it's eerie" (Quinn), while Peter Bradshaw writes that Thatcher's "transformation into biopic drag queen is now complete" (Bradshaw). These comments laud Streep for her mimicry, but also highlight its uncanny effect, quite possibly because what Streep is mimicking means far more for British viewers than what they are asked to take from it. Thatcher's

iconography, so heavily recycled on TV, on radio, in film and now also on the internet, carries an array of conflicting meanings that are inevitably called forth in the face of such striking verisimilitude. While producers obviously sought to avoid contending with political meaning by telling Thatcher's story from her own perspective, the stylistic accuracy encourages political meaning contained in the images to spring to life. As such, *The Iron Lady* exemplifies the difficulty in producing a biopic about a heavily mediated but divisive figure. While Thatcher's signifying elements – namely, her voice, appearance and clothing style – are collectively familiar, their implied meanings have proven largely irreconcilable.

### **Conclusion: Discordant Audiences, Diverse Histories**

The historical dramas discussed in this chapter differ in subject matter, tone and style, but they are all commonly attuned to previous iterations in media of the events and figures they portray. The way they invoke them tends to depend partly on each film's or television production's intended audience and message, and partly on the subtexts contained in the media themselves. *This is England*, which is targeted at a higher-brow audience and is intended to probe history, calls on mediations of both the Falklands crisis and of skinhead subculture to accentuate the complications and even dangers that come with organising the past into cohesive narratives. Still, its lavish subcultural costumes, 'cool' soundtrack and focus on male social bonds simultaneously popularised it amongst a wider audience and helped to instigate the subsequent cycle of eighties period dramas, resulting in similar representational strategies being used to different ends. *Control* targets the same 'indie' audiences whose interest in early-1980s subcultures and music cultures had been piqued by *This is England*. As such, it invokes Joy Division iconography recognisable from media without challenging its established meanings, instead upholding the traditional historical narrative. *Cass*, which is targeted at those viewers of *This is England* that also enjoy football hooligan films, mimics *This is England*'s cut-and-paste archival style without the same historical criticality. And *Hunger*, which is directed at a more distinctly art-house viewership than *This is England*, uses a similar strategy in a way that avoids encouraging the same nostalgic emotions as does Meadows' film.

However, *Hunger* is also symptomatic of the particular media it invokes. The histories of Joy Division and of football hooligans are not particularly contentious, and while support for the Falklands crisis was far from unanimous, discussing its history does not spark the vicious animosity that is instigated by considerations of the history of the Northern Irish ‘Troubles’. For the two films that depict the conflict in the Eighties Cycle, this meant either diverting attention from the polarised opinions that recalling it would invoke by shrouding its history in typical thriller codes, as did *Fifty Dead Men Walking*, or confronting the complications that its archival media depictions connote head-on, as did *Hunger*. A similar difficulty was faced in depicting Margaret Thatcher: not only does her mediated iconography instigate intense sentiments, but it also recalls a vast array of other media that have satirised her. For the BBC single dramas, which were produced for British viewers assumed to be quite familiar with her, this was resolved by avoiding claims to accuracy. *The Long Walk to Finchley* tells a self-consciously fictional tale that knowingly teases her associated myths and iconography to appease opponents while maintaining an upbeat tone to appeal to supporters, while *Margaret* avoids recalling Thatcher’s iconography almost at all, portraying an unrecognisable and interpretive version of her. For *The Iron Lady*, which was produced for a wide, international audience, the solution was to emphasise its own accuracy in reconstructing her mediated iconography. Simultaneously, the film avoids supporting or disavouring any of the possible meanings connoted by that iconography by depicting history through the biased perspective of its imaginary Thatcher. Whatever their tactics, the Margaret Thatcher biopics and the ‘Troubles’ films reveal how emotionally affective media from the 1980s can be for contemporary viewers. More generally, every production discussed here suggests that for contemporary Britain, 1980s history effectively *exists* in its technological mediation.

## Chapter 5

### SELF-ADAPTATION AND UNIVERSE EXPANSION: THE EIGHTIES AS TRANSMEDIAL WORLD

In 2014, it was announced that filming would begin on Shane Meadows' fourth instalment to his *This is England* saga, *This is England '90*. The news came in the wake of Meadows' four-part Channel 4 sequel to *This is England*, *This is England '86*, the critical and commercial success of which led Channel 4 to announce that it would eventually produce *This is England '90* ('This is England '90'). Subsequently, Meadows developed an initially unplanned three-part Christmas special, *This is England '88*, which was broadcast on Channel 4 in 2011. When asked why he continues to return to his *This is England* project, Meadows responded by explaining that "as an adult, you don't get summer holidays anymore. You know, when you're a kid, you get those six weeks' summer holidays that go on forever and *This is England* is probably [...] the closest thing I get – and that cast – to a six-week summer holiday" (Red Carpet News TV). Meadows does not attribute his wish to return to an interest in further exploring the socio-political landscape of 1980s England or the sociological underpinnings of 1980s subcultures. Somewhat surprisingly, given the saga's semi-autobiographical elements, he does not even attribute it to personal nostalgia for the era of his youth. Instead, Meadows describes the experience of working on the series as a 'summer holiday', implying that he sees the *This is England* serials less as contributions to an ongoing historical narrative and more as a haven, a fictional world into which he and his cast and crew can immerse themselves to escape from everyday life.

*This is England* was one of two British retro productions to be followed by a 'spin-off' in the latter half of the 2000s. The other was the BBC's popular seventies-set television series *Life on Mars*, which inspired the follow-up show *Ashes to Ashes*, set nearly a decade later in the early eighties. In Chapter 2, I suggested that while the stylistic universe of *Life on Mars* is predominantly inspired by classic 1970s cop shows, especially *The Sweeney*, *Ashes to Ashes* fuses nostalgia for its original series with stylistic eighties revivalism. I focused there on the latter of these nostalgias, discussing how the show constructs an eighties style that emphasises the era's sincerity, marked by

its primitiveness, filth and tacky excess, over and above the less sincere, sterile present. Here, I will focus on the former: namely, the show's textual and extratextual nostalgia for its original series, *Life on Mars*. Although *Ashes to Ashes* exemplifies the common fetishisation of 'ugliness' notable in several Eighties Cycle films and TV series, it also, alongside the *This is England* serials, reflects a relatively new phenomenon. This involves developing an ongoing transmedial narrative that explicitly foregrounds what has arguably always been implicit in period dramas: that their past settings are alternate universes.

In order to understand the implications of this phenomenon on representations of the past, it is first necessary to consider its connection to the 21<sup>st</sup> century proliferation of transmedia franchises. As I have previously outlined, Henry Jenkins examines the shift toward media convergence near the turn of the century wherein, as he writes, "consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content" (3). One consequence of this shift, he argues, is an increased tendency in the film, television, video game and other media industries toward what he calls transmedia storytelling which, he writes, "unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (97-8). Transmedial production has proven vital to the British media industries throughout the 2000s. One notable example is the *Harry Potter* franchise, which began as a series of British young adult novels and spiralled into a global phenomenon that included, among several other components, eight large-budget Hollywood films (Chris Columbus et al.), a series of theme parks and amusement sites, and most recently the website *Pottermore*, which offers fans insight into character histories and other peripheral information not included in the novels and films. Although largely financed by Warner Bros., the culturally British transmedia franchise greatly benefited the British film industry. Also significant and more distinctly British was the BBC's long-running *Doctor Who*, which Neil Perryman argues was transformed in the 2000s from "a niche cult, aimed at a minority of hardcore fans [...] into a flagship franchise for mainstream transmedia practices that eschew passivity for participation and static simplicity for multi-platform complexity" (22). The *Harry Potter* and *Doctor Who* franchises exemplify the extent to



which British media production shifted, in the 2000s, toward a multi-platform model for storytelling.

It is unsurprising, then, that the successes of *This is England* and *Life on Mars* should have represented opportunities for expansion, and some have noted the transmedia qualities of both the *This is England* serials and *Ashes to Ashes*. David Rolinson and Faye Woods explicitly state that *This is England* '86 and '88 “form a transmedia narrative” (186), and while *Ashes* did not cross media platforms, Matt Hills shows how even before it, *Life on Mars* was marked by the shift toward the need for a “narrative world (and brand)” that could be “quickly recognised within a multi-channel environment” (111). He points extra-textually to the *Official Companion*'s immersive and brand-extending elements and textually to the show's cinematographic likeness to video games, emphasising Sam's immersion in “a virtual hyperdiegetic space so vivid, so seemingly ‘alive’, that Sam Tyler ultimately chooses to live inside it” (112). Yet, as I have already outlined in Chapter 1, Rolinson and Woods are less concerned with the *This is England* serials' transmediality than with how they mark the domestic space as a site of memory, and Hills is primarily concerned with how the show textually expresses contemporary fantasies of interactive media by constructing a mediated world in which Sam can live and interact with media technologies. Hills' arguments are, in particular, significant, but neither his chapter nor Rolinson's and Woods' consider what the texts' transmedial identities imply for how their *representations of the past* must be read.

I will suggest in this chapter that this is crucial; both Channel 4's *This is England* serials and the BBC's *Ashes to Ashes* fundamentally change the meaning of ‘pastness’, not only from what it meant in their preceding texts, but also from what it has typically meant in readings of period film and television. We have seen, in previous chapters, that the ‘pastness’ often constructed in postmodern nostalgia films and TV series more often cites media representations of the past than it does the actual historical era in question. However, the ‘pastness’ in '86, '88 and *Ashes* has at least as much to do with transmedia storytelling as it does with references to the mediated past; in fact, the manner in which these shows adapt the original meanings of their predecessors is consistent with transmedial world-building practices in contemporary convergence

culture. The series reposition women at the centre of their narratives and highlight melodrama while de-emphasising references to the actual past. While this problematically implies that history is a 'masculine' pursuit, its purpose is to address the texts' female fan bases while shifting the focus away from historical inquiry and nostalgic media referentiality toward character expansion. Furthermore, the shows textually depart from their source material; while *This is England* and *Life on Mars* maintain a close relationship to the eras – or, at least, to the media of the eras – they represent, '86, '88 and *Ashes to Ashes* formally mimic their predecessors while focusing on the expansion of their own, fictional internal universes. In this process, the series' 'pasts' begin to resemble alternate fantasy worlds.

Because this chapter situates the series' pastness within the context of their industrial and reception frameworks, it is essential to note before proceeding that the purpose here is not to establish, through industrial and fan-based research, precisely how *Ashes to Ashes* and the *This is England* serials were produced, distributed and consumed. Although such a study would be interesting, the aim here is to focus on how general trends in transmedial storytelling, distribution and engagement affected the producers of the texts' perspectives and subsequent adaptations of their original source texts. As such, it is not consequential here to outline in vast detail how or to what extent either one can be classified as a transmedial text or how precisely fans engaged with the series. Rather, relevant here are how particular successes in transmedial storytelling in the British and global media industries inspired the producers of these spin-offs to mimic the characteristics and practices of prototypical transmedia texts; how the producers' perceptions of fan opinions played into their choices for self-adaptation; and finally, how these changes affected the shows' period settings. Industrial and fan research are not needed to address these questions; instead, the chapter uses interviews and textual analysis to ascertain the makers' perspectives and intentions and the influence of these on the texts. In so doing, I suggest that *Ashes to Ashes* and the *This is England* serials expose the need to consider how, in the age of media convergence, the recent past may be used less as a means of expressing nostalgia or contemplating history and more as a palette for developing an interactive fictional world that is distinct from reality, one which has very little to do with returning to the actual past at all.

### **Conceiving *Ashes to Ashes* and the *This is England* serials**

In her study on transmedial television practices in the UK, Elizabeth Evans argues that the British television industry was fundamentally changed over the 2000s. She notes that while British television institutions – BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Five, Sky and Virgin Media – once fully controlled what content was provided to audiences and how it was accessed, changes in digital technologies allowed audiences to begin developing their own makeshift transmedia platforms. These continue to exist on fansites and on YouTube, and “are not sanctioned by the television industry [...]. They are operated by the audience, created by a desire for alternative paths of access to television content, and utilising the audience to allow the sites to run efficiently” (45). Evans differentiates between these audience practices, which she labels “transmedia engagement”, and “transmedia distribution” (40), which she defines as the British television industry’s adoption of distribution practices to accommodate audience desires. She charts the institutions’ projects, from 2006 onward, to render their content accessible on the internet across a variety of platforms, noting, for instance, that in 2006 the BBC added to its list of public purposes “to deliver to the public the benefit of emerging communications technologies and services” and that Channel 4 has claimed to be following an audience-led approach (46-7). Evans suggests that this has led to two major shifts in the industry: it has changed the way that television is packaged, “privileging the discrete unit over the whole flow”, and who is in control of the industry, “blurring the boundaries between official and unofficial, and traditional and non-traditional sources” (56-7). This shift toward transmedial approaches in British TV industry practice is identifiable not just in the introduction of online platforms but also in strategies used for specific content. Exemplary here is the BBC’s revival of *Doctor Who*; Neil Perryman writes that the success of its multi-platform model, which included short mobile phone episodes, blogs, podcasts and two spin-offs, *Torchwood* (BBC, 2006-11) and *The Sarah Jane Adventures* (BBC, 2007-11), encouraged the BBC to adopt the practice of “[fashioning] a single world under a collective roof to create distinctive – yet linked – programming, spanning platforms, audiences and channels” as a “template for all major television commissioning decisions” (37).

*Life on Mars* was therefore conceived in an environment where multi-platform programming had proven to be successful and was now favoured. It was also developed by the same team who had previously worked on *Doctor Who*: BBC Wales, under the leadership of its then Head of Drama Julie Gardner (Lacey and McElroy 1). As mentioned previously, Matt Hills argues that *Life on Mars* relays contemporary fantasies of interactive media, sometimes recalling video games in its use of cinematography and pitting Sam in a participatory relationship with television and other media technologies. Hills also points out that although *Life on Mars* was not expanded across as many platforms as texts like *Doctor Who*, the immersive, self-reflexive approach to the show's *Official Companion* offered an alternate window into the *Life on Mars* universe. Not mentioned by Hills but also significant are three subsequent hypertextual additions to the show's canon: *The Rules of Modern Policing*, *The Future of Modern Policing* and *The Wit and Wisdom of Gene Hunt*. All three were written by Guy Adams, one of the co-writers of the *Official Companion* who was not a series writer, but the books were conceived and produced in conjunction with the shows' production company, Kudos Film and Television ('Life on Mars'). The first was adapted from a promotional pamphlet released by the BBC to coincide with the second series of *Life on Mars*, and was a guide to policing protocols written as if it were authored by Gene Hunt. *The Future of Modern Policing* adopted a similar model but was released alongside *Ashes to Ashes*' first series and explored changes in policing between 1973 and 1981, while *Wit and Wisdom* was published to coincide with the premiere of *Ashes to Ashes*' second series and was written as if authored by DC Chris Skelton (Marshall Lancaster) and edited by DS Ray Carling (Dean Andrews) ('The Rules', 'The Future', 'The Wit').

Of course, these extras would only have been viewed by a select number of fans and, in any case, supplemental books have long been a part of British TV production, as *Doctor Who* itself evidences. However, crucial here is that the choice to publish material that *appeared to originate* from the *Life on Mars* and *Ashes to Ashes* universe reveals Kudos' and, by extension, the BBC's concerns to expand on it and render it immersive, an approach not traditionally taken for period dramas. Furthermore, the fact that the books were written by a fan – Guy Adams approached Kudos after seeing the

series on TV ('Life on Mars') – reflects Evans' observation that contemporary transmedial television practices have broken down the boundaries between 'official' and 'non-official' authorities. Evans' observations draw heavily from Henry Jenkins and, more generally, the books illustrate his observation that in the convergence era, the "world is bigger than the film, bigger even than the franchise – since fan speculations and elaborations also expand the world in a variety of directions" (116). *Life on Mars* gathered quite a significant fan following over its initial run, especially for the character DCI Gene Hunt (Philip Glenister), who David Usborne called in *The Independent* a "national hero" (Usborne). In a poll of over 1600 viewers commissioned by the Hallmark Channel in 2008, Hunt was voted the UK's favourite television hero, beating out Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland) from *24* (Fox, 2001-10, 2014) and the Doctor in *Doctor Who* (in 2008, David Tennant). The show's and Hunt's popularity is notable in two highly active fan forums, *The Railway Arms* and *Life in 1973*, and although Matthew Graham claims that he and Ashley Pharoah began to avoid the fansites as *Ashes to Ashes* progressed, he asserts that they occasionally followed them during *Life on Mars* (Setchfield). Thus, although *Life on Mars* was not nearly as transmedial a text as was *Doctor Who*, by the time of *Ashes to Ashes*' first series run it was already showing distribution and engagement characteristics in common with transmedial texts: its universe had been expanded through supplemental reading and there was extensive speculation on online discussion boards.

The developments and expansions that took place before *Ashes to Ashes* undoubtedly influenced its production. Graham, Pharoah and executive producer Jane Featherstone have given differing accounts on the precise motivation for producing a spin-off. In interviews, Graham often emphasises the team's personal "frustration that we couldn't carry on with *Life on Mars*" (Brew, 'Ashes to Ashes'); because star John Simm's wife had just given birth, he turned down a third series, forcing the writers to conclude the narrative quickly and barring them from properly exploring their concept of a police officers' purgatory (Kinsella). Pharoah and Featherstone have suggested that the team were instead persuaded by the BBC to carry forward the world of *Life on Mars*, "so loath", Pharoah writes in a feature for *Radio Times*, "were they to say

goodbye to Gene Hunt and his Merry Men” (16).<sup>49</sup> It is likely that a combination of these factors motivated the production of *Ashes to Ashes*; regardless, both explanations suggest that the main reason for devising a spin-off was to expand on both the inner workings of the fantasy universe and the show’s highly popular characters. The writers and producers do not, in interviews, attribute the sequel to a wish to refigure the show’s characters in a new decade as a means of examining its historical intricacies.

When the eighties is mentioned, it is in the context of an opportunity to differentiate *Ashes to Ashes* from *Life on Mars*; Jane Featherstone, for instance, claims that the team “sat down and all realised that it could be brilliant to bring Gene into the early-Eighties – a fascinating time of cultural, musical and political transition” (‘Ashes to Ashes’). The emphasis, here, is on *Gene*; the eighties are figured as an exciting new stylistic backdrop in which to expand on the *Life on Mars* universe, as I explored in depth in Chapter 2. In its nascent stages, *Life on Mars*’ relationship to 1970s popular media was considered a key element of its audience appeal. In a discussion held in 2007 at the Cardiff School of Creative and Cultural Industries, executive producer Julie Gardner claims that BBC Wales agreed to take on the show because it could

[...] play to two very distinct audiences, the audience that want a story of the week that is rewarding, where you see how the crime story pans out, but then another audience [...] that would want to be nostalgic about the seventies, that would want to think about the world they live in, that would want to compare policing in the seventies with the present day and look at it from that point of view. (Gardner and Parker 170)

The BBC’s initial motivation for producing the show had little to do with exploring an alternate universe – Gardner asserts that “*Life on Mars* isn’t sci-fi” (Gardner and Parker 170) – or with developing popular characters that could be transferred to other texts. However, as the above comments make clear, by the time *Ashes to Ashes* was conceived, the appeal of the series’ past setting was ranked of secondary importance in relation to its potential for character and landscape expansion.

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<sup>49</sup> Featherstone expresses similar views in a BBC interview, claiming that “the BBC approached us and asked if we thought there could be a sequel or follow-up with the character of Gene Hunt” (‘Ashes to Ashes’).

It seems, from interviews with Shane Meadows, as if a similar transition occurred from *This is England* to *This is England '86* and *'88*. In Chapter 4 I argued that while Shane Meadows may have been concerned with depicting the subcultural landscape of his childhood, *This is England* engages critically and self-reflexively with the relationship between media, memory and history, exploring the difficulty in labelling and categorising Britain's recent history in the face of so many conflicting mediated narratives. However, I also noted in Chapter 4 that *This is England* was situated at a crossroad between its textual complexity and its naturally 'cool' aura. With an advertising campaign that recalled posters from the 1979 cult film about Mod subculture, *Quadrophenia* (see Chapter 4, Figure 22), an upbeat nostalgic soundtrack that featured ska, Two Tone and punk music alongside more mainstream hits like 'Come on Eileen' and 'Tainted Love', and a series of memorable characters dressed in unique retro outfits, *This is England* appealed to youth and young adult audiences, and the film was by far Meadows' most popular to date. In the introduction to their academic collection on Shane Meadows, Martin Fradley, Sarah Godfrey and Melanie Williams point out that *This is England* and its television sequels have been "notable for managing to combine critical esteem with commercial success", explaining that domestically, the film "comfortably recouped" its budget during its theatrical release and sold "an extraordinary 785,000 copies" on DVD (1). Thus, while on the one hand, *This is England* further confirmed Shane Meadows' burgeoning auteur status, winning the 2008 BAFTA for Best British Film and receiving critical praise both domestically and internationally, it also became a cult hit, inspiring generically similar youth films like Jon S. Baird's *Cass*, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Despite its cult status, *This is England* never developed as extensive a fan following as did *Life on Mars*. Furthermore, although its intertextual posters linked it not only to *Quadrophenia* but, in its emphasis on distinct, 'hip' stock characters, also to more recent youth hits like *Trainspotting* (Figure 33), neither the film itself nor its extratextual materials paid particular attention to the contemporary appetite for transmedia. This is quite possibly because of Shane Meadows' reputation as auteur; too much supplemental material might have likened *This is England* to a franchise, diminishing the film's artistic impact. David Rolinson and Faye Woods position even



**Figure 33:** By emphasising ‘hip’ stock characters, *This is England*’s publicity materials recall those of *Trainspotting*. (*Trainspotting* publicity photo)

the narrative’s move to television, which rendered it unquestionably transmedial, within the context of Meadows’ artistic influences. They argue that Meadows, who has confessed to having been inspired by the Channel 4 films of Mike Leigh, Stephen Frears and others in the 1980s, layers his text with “traces of televisual past”, thus engaging with memories of these dramas “in service of theme” (189). However, while these influences may be present in *This is England* ’86 and ’88, it would be simplistic to suggest that the decision to expand the narrative televisually was chiefly an artistic one. In fact, despite his status as film auteur, Shane Meadows’ work has flourished in a converging media landscape; Rolinson and Woods, for instance, note that before moving into television, Meadows “benefited from television’s funding and production convergence with cinema” (189), obtaining funding from both BBC Films and Film4. Furthermore, Meadows’ status as a young, ‘cool’ director – which has served to differentiate him from artier and/or more serious British auteurs – is exploited on his official website, which offers a multi-platform experience that is evidently designed for a youth and young adult audience. It provides, among other things, a wealth of supplemental visual and audio media, several *This is England* desktop wallpapers each featuring a different skinhead (Figure 34), merchandise and an active online forum for fan discussions (*ShaneMeadows.co.uk*).

Thus, although the film itself began as a more or less self-contained, modestly budgeted independent British film – not grossly unlike Meadows’ earlier productions such as *A Room for Romeo Brass* (1999) and *Dead Man’s Shoes* (2004) – it had, by the





**Figure 34:** *This is England* desktop wallpapers, each featuring a different skinhead, can be downloaded from Shane Meadows' official website. ([ShaneMeadows.co.uk](http://ShaneMeadows.co.uk))

time that *This is England '86* aired on Channel 4 in 2010, blossomed into a cultural product that was widely recognisable and which extended across a variety of media, enabling fans to engage with it by listening to the soundtrack, viewing supplemental videos, changing their desktop wallpaper, communicating online with other fans, and so forth. It was this phenomenon, rather than Meadows' wish to artistically explore the television medium's relationship to cultural history, that ultimately led him to develop the television serials; in a Q&A session with the BFI on *This is England '86*, Meadows comments on the show's origins that

[...] the film took on a life of its own, and I remember I was having a meeting in Channel 4 about the film, and they'd just had the figures back from their Freeview [...] and I think it had got nearly a million viewers, which was really high for a Freeview channel, and I started talking then and saying, 'God, you know, I'd give anything to go back there again'. (Harper et al 2010)

The film's sustained popularity, then, convinced both Meadows and Channel 4 to revive the story in television form. However, while for Channel 4 this may have constituted a reason for producing TV sequels – alongside the channel's extra £20m to allocate to television drama in light of the cancellation of *Big Brother* (Channel 4, 2000-10; Channel 5, 2011-) (Holmwood) – for Meadows it was merely an excuse. He has on several occasions described the unique bond that he formed with the *This is England* cast, a bond that was deepened when he and much of the cast attended Thomas Turgoose's mother's funeral shortly after the film's completion. He claims that the incident “left a mark” on him, and when people began asking him what happened to the

gang after the film's narrative, it "got me to thinking. When you've got such great characters, it's a shame to just cast them aside" (Gilbert, 'England Rebooted'). In another interview, Meadows notes that producing television serials appealed to him because the film format could not "accommodate [...] all the other people and the depth and breadth of their stories" (Wightman), explaining that because the film was autobiographical, many of the characters were extensively developed.

Despite obvious differences in their production contexts, then, the *This is England* serials and *Ashes to Ashes* were devised on similar grounds: to expand the universe to include fictional information not established in the original text and to revive and further explore a group of now beloved fictional characters. Meadows also evidently sought a *This is England* cast reunion, or, in his words as described above, a 'summer holiday', suggesting that he wished to immerse himself in a world that blurred the boundary between fiction and reality. Thus, while Rolinson and Woods are right to note that the serials textually engage with the relationship between cultural memory and British television, this and other forms of socio-political criticism did not figure prominently in either Meadows' or Channel 4's motivations to produce them. In this way, they departed from the film, which may have featured a fun soundtrack and memorable characters but was always, in early discussions, framed within the context of the subcultural and political histories that influenced it. The film's 2005 promotional brochure, for instance, opens by setting the scene:

1983 was a time before MTV, before Gameboy, and before 2.4 children. Unlike our current potato culture, in the early eighties there was very little to keep the disenchanted youth anesthetised indoors, so as unemployment figures rose and the YTS schemes fell, the kids refused to toe the factory line and spilled out onto the streets. The stage was set for a revolution. Rockers, New Romantics, Mods, Punks, Casuals, Smoothies, Ska kids and Skinheads stood shoulder to shoulder [...]. (Meadows, 'Oi!')

This simplistic state-of-the-nation tale betrays Meadows' personal fantasies, but it also reveals his general intent to address historical subject matter. However, his later comments on the serials suggest that even the film's central subcultural theme was considered less important in the production of the television serials; he tells *GQ Magazine* that in *This is England '86*, "it's just about the people now. The characters

have earned their right to not be part of the fashion. They're not just skinheads in a gang" (Morris). Meadows does, in several interviews, explain the 1986 World Cup's significance as a marker of memory in '86, but it is clear that in conceptions of the television serials, as in *Ashes to Ashes*, the narrative's *raison d'être* was no longer to explore Britain's recent history, but to expand Meadows' personal, imagined 1980s universe.

### **Building a Retro Fantasy World**

It is not altogether surprising that the producers of *Ashes to Ashes* and the *This is England* serials should have been less concerned with exploring the cultural and political landscapes of their inspired eras. As original texts, *Life on Mars* and *This is England* had more of a need than their sequels to justify their past settings. While, as I have argued in the context of *Submarine*, the past is increasingly being utilised as a language that requires little historical context for its invocation, that language is still indebted to a *real* past, real even if it shares little in common with actual history because it exists, as Jim Collins argues is the case for techno-sophisticated cultures, in the "array" of media knowledge available to viewers (255). Thus, the 'seventies' that *Life on Mars* invokes may not resemble the *actual* 1970s, but it is still a real 'seventies' defined through media and pop culture. Both *Life on Mars* and *This is England* are set in distinct time periods and their meaning depends on their references to that period's signifiers: in the case of *Life on Mars*, televisual and pop-cultural signifiers, and in the case of *This is England*, sociocultural and political ones.

However, as spin-offs which extend and expand already established characters and narratives, *Ashes to Ashes* and the Channel 4 serials depend less on viewers' historical knowledge to make sense. They are, instead, primarily dependent upon their audiences' prior familiarity with their preceding texts. This is true of most sequels, but it has particular implications for productions set in a historical era. As do all period fictions, *Life on Mars* and *This is England* fuse actual historical references with fictional characters and events, creating their own imagined versions of the past. In this arrangement, the actual past bears significant weight on the production's meaning, as it is only once-removed from the screen fiction's imagined universe. However, in *Ashes*,

'86 and '88, the actual past is now twice-removed, so that the invoked 'past' is the specific, already established *version* of the past from the original production more than it is any other version, whether factual or mediated. Of course, because *Ashes to Ashes* and the Channel 4 serials are set in later time periods than their forerunners, new references are used to date them; in *Ashes to Ashes* dating is achieved by the 'eighties style' discussed in Chapter 2, while in the serials it is done using new fads, such as scooters in '86, and archival segments such as the World Cup footage in '86 and an opening montage in '88 that resembles *This is England*'s opening but updates it for 1988. Yet, in the spin-offs, the historical referents act primarily as stylistic differentiators. The productions' primary reference points are the fictional pasts created in *Life on Mars* and *This is England*.

The fact that *Ashes to Ashes* and *This is England* '86 and '88 are sequels that primarily reference their preceding works has implications for the fictional world in which they are set. In *Building Imaginary Worlds*, Mark J. P. Wolf argues that imaginary worlds are often developed in sequels because the "work in which a world debuts usually must be able to stand on its own", and this means that the work's narrative usually plays an integral role, as "the reason most worlds are made is to serve and support a particular story that an author wants to tell" (249). Although most period fictions do strive for stylistic depth and accuracy to encourage audience immersion, the imagined past worlds they create have not been traditionally developed far beyond what is required for their particular narratives because building a *fantasy* world that is unknown to the viewer is not the point; it is, rather, to tell a story set in the *known* world of the past. Thus, for instance, Gene Hunt does not require extensive character development in *Life on Mars* because the show's narrative is not directly about him and because he primarily functions as a tongue-in-cheek reference to a fragment from the audience's known past: *The Sweeney*'s Jack Regan (John Thaw). However, both Wolf and Henry Jenkins argue that the development of imaginary worlds is increasingly favoured as transmediality becomes the norm; Jenkins writes that more and more, artists are creating "compelling environments that cannot be fully explored or exhausted within a single work or even a single medium" (116). Wolf argues that transmediality lends itself to world-building because it "implies a kind of independence for its object;

the more media windows we experience a world through, the less reliant that world is on the peculiarities of any one medium for its existence” (247). The emerging transmediality of the *Life on Mars* and *This is England* sagas naturally began to lend their worlds a realistic edge, creating the illusion that their characters truly exist.

As *Ashes to Ashes* and the serials increasingly cited the world from their original texts rather than history and collective memory and expanded transmedially, their settings progressively resembled alternate fantasy worlds. *Life on Mars*' setting always resembled this more than the average production set in the past; it incorporates elements of sci-fi, which is a genre with a tradition of fantasy world-building. Its central puzzle of whether Sam is “mad, in a coma or back in time” leaves open the possibility of time-travel, and the set-up renders it similar to other sci-fi stories about protagonists who travel to unknown places. The show's very title – *Life on Mars* – derives humour from its dual meaning: at once, it refers to the 1971 David Bowie song of the same name which plays on Sam's car radio as he is transported back to 1973, but also to 1973 Manchester's other-worldliness. Furthermore, as noted previously, Matt Hills rightly indicates the immersive manner in which the show is sometimes filmed, pointing to an early scene in which Sam decides to peruse the world in an attempt to prove to himself that it is merely a figment of his imagination. Hills argues that the “sweeping, spiralling camera” in this sequence “partly winks at the audience, saying ‘Look how well the production team can do period detail’, but it also indicates that Sam is immersed in a seamlessly constructed narrative world” (112). In establishing an alternate reality composed of 1970s cultural references, *Life on Mars* functions somewhat similarly to the way in which Jenkins argues does *The Matrix* (Andy and Lana Wachowski, 1999), creating a fictional world from pieces of pop-culture and mythology that have been “put together [...] in innovative ways” (125). In other words, it is a fantasy universe for postmodern audiences who consider the clever, tongue-in-cheek play of known referents to be as innovative as inventing an entirely new world. Yet, despite its sci-fi influences and formal features that emphasise other-worldliness, *Life on Mars* is never very distant from the actual 1970s because, as alluded to above, it derives much of its meaning from the audience's working knowledge of seventies references.

However, the referentiality in *Ashes to Ashes* carries over primarily as a residual formal feature. The show does include multiple pop-cultural references, especially in the first season, but they act chiefly as recollections of *Life on Mars*. For instance, *Mars* often uses low and canted camera angles in its car chase scenes, recalling similar cinematography in *The Sweeney* (Figure 35). *Ashes* employs these same cinematographic techniques – in the title sequence, ‘*Ashes to Ashes*’ appears over such a shot, emphasising its iconicity (Figure 36) – but here, the shots are meant to recall *Mars* rather than *The Sweeney*. This is obvious because *The Sweeney* does not otherwise figure in the show as a reference point; in fact, Nichola Dobson points out that *Ashes*’ particular televisual reference point is somewhat confused. She writes, “By drawing on the iconic nature of *The Sweeney*, [*Life on Mars*] engages with the audience in a knowing, postmodern way. This strand is not present in *Ashes to Ashes*, which lacks any similar reference” (40). Dobson goes on to suggest that the only 1980s UK crime show that may have influenced it is *Dempsey and Makepeace* (ITV, 1985-6), an ITV series that featured the ‘will they, won’t they’ dynamic between its two lead police officers. However, Dobson notes that “this show was never as generically significant, or innovative, as *The Sweeney*” (40). Somewhat more generically significant and noted by some critics to bear similarities to *Ashes* is the American series *Moonlighting* (ABC, 1985-9). However, *Ashes to Ashes* does not reference either this show or *Dempsey and*



**Figure 35** (left): *Life on Mars*’ canted angles (above) recall those from *The Sweeney* (below). (*Life on Mars*, *The Sweeney*)



**Figure 36** (below): *Ashes to Ashes* uses the same cinematographic techniques, but now they recall *Life on Mars*. (*Ashes to Ashes*)



*Makepeace* any more directly than in its generalised ‘will they, won’t they’ theme, and these references appear to have been an afterthought. Ashley Pharoah writes that during an afternoon discussion to see if they “could keep the Gene Genie going”, someone “mentioned *Miami Vice* (NBC, 1984-90). And someone else mentioned *Moonlighting*” (16). Evidently, then, the crime show references acted as excuses to expand on the show’s already established characters and universe. This is why *Ashes*’ crime show references are either more obscure than *The Sweeney* or not even British: they appear principally as allusions to *Mars*’ cop show referentiality and are not particularly essential to the show’s meaning.

On the other hand, *Ashes to Ashes* often makes *more sense* of its references than does *Life on Mars*. This occurs because of an essential shift in meaning from *Mars* to *Ashes*. If *Life on Mars* chiefly derives meaning from its ironic play with pop-cultural references, echoing many postmodern retro productions, *Ashes to Ashes* more closely resembles science fiction, deriving much of its meaning from explaining its own internal universe. One of *Mars*’ most memorable features is its invocation of the iconic girl from the BBC’s Test Card F, who leaps from her televisual image into Sam’s world to haunt him. The Test Card Girl’s (Rafaella Hutchinson/ Harriet Rogers) appearance is never fully explained in *Mars*, and Matt Hills reads it as an expression of the simultaneous “nostalgia and threatening uncanniness” that ‘old media’ inspires. In the show’s final shot, the Test Card Girl switches off the TV screen; Matthew Graham claims that the “last moment is really me saying, ‘Don’t worry about it. It’s just a piece of television, it’s just a story and it’s come to an end’” (Wylie). In other words, the final shot is meant to emphasise the Test Card Girl’s *inexplicability* because she merely exists as a pop-cultural reference in a work of fiction. This changes, however, in *Ashes*. The first series copies the concept of bringing a media icon to life to disturb the protagonist, invoking David Bowie’s Pierrot clown from the music video and single album cover for the show’s namesake, the 1980 song ‘Ashes to Ashes’. The clown haunts Alex throughout the series just as the Test Card Girl haunts Sam, but at the end of the first series the clown’s identity is revealed: it is Alex’s father Tim Price (Andrew Clover), who is revealed to have been responsible for both his own and Alex’s mother Caroline’s (Amelia Bullmore) deaths. In this example as in other instances of

referentiality in *Ashes*, the reference goes beyond mere tongue-in-cheek allusion, now providing a clue to how the saga's internal world functions.

This structuring is consistent with what Mark Wolf describes as world-building, as opposed to traditional storytelling. He writes that world-building “often results in data, exposition, and digressions that provide information about a world, slowing down narrative or even bringing it to a halt temporarily” (29). As *Ashes* progresses toward its conclusion, its tendencies toward world-building become more and more pronounced. *Mars* consistently foregrounds its driving narrative feature – of Sam finding his way back home – until the end of the series, but in *Ashes* this element – here, of Alex returning to her daughter Molly – becomes increasingly sidelined in favour of explanation and expansion. For instance, as is revealed in the final episode, the world is a purgatory controlled by Gene Hunt where the police officers must learn vital lessons and accept their deaths in order to pass on to heaven, and the second and especially final series focus on developing secondary characters Ray, Chris and Shaz (Montserrat Lombard) in preparation for their final cross-overs. Simultaneously, Alex's desire to escape the 1980s and return to her present-day daughter is increasingly overshadowed by her resolve to understand the world around her and by her growing acknowledgement of her romantic feelings for Gene Hunt. I will elaborate on this last point below, but here it suffices to say that Gene's true identity and his role within the world also becomes a key focus.

In so doing, Hunt's extratextual identity as a throw-back to Jack Regan, as well as his secondary function as a figurehead for outdated policing methods, are progressively ignored. Exemplary of this shift is the character trajectory for DCI Jim Keats (Daniel Mays), who is introduced in the final series as an officer assigned to assess Hunt's division as part of Operation Countryman, an actual investigation into police corruption conducted by the London Metropolitan Police between 1978 and 1982. Keats is depicted as sceptical of Hunt's antiquated procedures and initially appears to act as a facilitator for exploring the historical changes that took place in British policing in the 1980s. However, Jim is eventually revealed to be a disguised demon whose sole purpose is to bring down Gene Hunt and his purgatory.



Simultaneously, Hunt transforms from a well-intentioned but seriously archaic and rather corrupt police officer who bears comedic similarities to *The Sweeney*'s Jack Regan into a supernatural force for good – an angel, even – who guides dead police officers on their journey to heaven. The saga's link to a shared televisual and social history consequently recedes from view.

Thus, although *Ashes to Ashes* may be set in the recent past and may parodically but lovingly invoke eighties style, it is not *about* the eighties, venturing instead toward the sci-fi world-building that is characteristic of transmedia texts. The eighties, as argued in Chapter 2, stylistically differentiates *Ashes* from *Mars*, but it also distinguishes the supernatural world from the real one. A similar shift is notable from *This is England* to Channel 4's serials, albeit in a markedly different way. Obviously, the world of *This is England* is not supernatural and is never revealed to be anything more than an imagined version of the audience's historical past. However, the saga was always slightly removed from the historically real in its ambiguous geography. Its precise setting is never named and the actors speak in accents that hail from a range of English locales. The film was shot mostly in Nottingham but the scenes by the sea were shot in Thomas Turgoose's hometown of Grimsby, lending the landscape a sense of placelessness. Furthermore, as detailed in Chapter 4, its montages are highly stylised and break the fourth wall as characters walk toward the camera. These unrealistic features are not intended as fantasy but as symbolism. In the context of a narrative that draws connections between the protagonist's personal traumas and collective social traumas, and especially given the title, the geographical ambiguity allows Shaun's hometown to act as a synecdochic stand-in for all English towns and cities outside of London in the 1980s. Breaking the fourth wall, when understood within the sociological framework that inspired Meadows' understanding of subcultures, evokes what Dick Hebdige reads as transforming pervasive surveillance into "the pleasure of being watched" (*Hiding* 35).

Yet, despite the implied symbolism in *This is England*'s departures from realism, the film's lack of defined setting and stylised depictions of skinheads simultaneously produce a feeling of 'cool' other-worldliness that is enhanced by its

advertising campaign. While the slow-motion shots of the gang walking toward the camera and stylised scenes of them lined against walls and laying on public property emphasise their destabilizing power by reversing the process of surveillance, they also stylistically fetishise their subversive looks and portray them as an almost archetypal subculture (Figure 37). Put simply, the shots turn them into a ‘brand’, extratextually assisted by the posters and other publicity materials discussed above which feature them in rebellious poses and emphasise each of them as a ‘type’. The film’s ‘Anywhere, England’ quality adds to this by disassociating the gang from a particular historical place, thus implying a sort of fantasy 1980s England inhabited by fantasy skinheads.

*This is England*’s largely unintended resemblances to a fantasy world undoubtedly contributed to its wide popularity. They enable viewing pleasure for audience members unfamiliar with – or uninterested in – the film’s historical context, thus augmenting its accessibility. They also lent it to being revitalised as a television serial, extending the saga’s relevancy beyond the film narrative’s particular historical context of the Falklands crisis and the rise of neo-fascism within skinhead subculture. As a result, the ‘other-world’ component is transferred to the serials more overtly than the film’s historical and political analysis. The film’s ambiguous geography is, for one,



**Figure 37:** Carefully composed, stylistic shots like this one suggest that *This is England*’s characters are an archetypal, fantasy gang. (*This is England*)

rendered even less distinct in '86 and '88; both serials are filmed in Sheffield, incorporating an entirely new set of landscape markers and further complicating the viewer's ability to ground the saga in a particular historical place. In addition, the gang members' typicality is highlighted both textually and extra-textually. Director Tom Harper comments that in an early scene in which the gang emerge from a tour bus and first observe the venue where Lol and Woody are to be married, he deliberately lined them up along a wall in a manner that would recall the film's now epitomic poster shot (Harper, Thorne and Turgoose) (Figure 38). The shot was eventually used as a publicity photo, emphasising the *This is England* brand.

David Rolinson and Faye Woods also point out that in Channel 4's teaser trailer for '86, the gang are pictured cheerfully pogo-ing in slow-motion as Woody reintroduces them in voice-over, proclaiming, "This is us". Rolinson and Woods write that the gang is filmed in "a darkened studio, removed from their period setting and landscapes that could signify downbeat social realism" (188). They read the promotion's expression of "youth, energy and pleasure" in the context of two phenomena: that of Channel 4's "reputation for documenting the British youth experience" as well as that of eighties revivalism, arguing that the clothing styles of the



**Figure 38:** Character blocking in *This is England '86* deliberately recalls *This is England's* publicity material. (*This is England '86* publicity photo)

past help to market the serial to both “nostalgic Generation X-ers” and the younger Millennials who now consider these styles fashionable (188). These phenomena are relevant in understanding the trailer’s general vibrancy; in light of Channel 4’s recent successes with the youth-oriented shows *Shameless* (2004-13) and *Skins* (2007-13), promoters for ’86 will naturally have wished to draw comparisons with these shows, and I have certainly argued elsewhere in this thesis that the phenomenon of eighties revivalism was integral to the promotion of several productions throughout the late 2000s and early 2010s. However, in order to understand the trailer’s – as well as the other publicity materials’ – particular emphasis on *memorable character types*, especially when promoting a spin-off serial, it is necessary to acknowledge the influence of another phenomenon, one originating with the *film*: the popularity of its ever-expanding transmedial world. Henry Jenkins notes that in transmedia texts, characters are quite often cast as “broad archetypes” so that they are “immediately recognizable” (124), and it is clear that this comes into play in ’86’s textual and promotional allusions to the film’s established character types. It is also clear that the gang’s archetypality as *an entire unit* is emphasised, not only in the publicity materials but also in multiple scenes that idealise notions of gang ‘togetherness’, such as a scene in which they steal golf carts and all drive to Shaun’s home at 4 a.m. to sing to him and compel him to rejoin the gang (‘Episode Two’, ’86).

Of course, several secondary characters that remain relatively undeveloped in *This is England* are expanded into well-rounded characters in the serials and certainly cannot be labelled archetypal. Most notably, Lol (Vicky McClure), a female skinhead who plays a relatively minor role in the film as Woody’s (Joe Gilgun) girlfriend and Combo’s (Stephen Graham) love interest, is made lead protagonist in the television shows. In the film, she functions primarily as a stock ‘female skinhead’, but ’86 follows her failing relationship with Woody, leading her to take up an affair with their friend Milky (Andrew Shim), as well as her struggle to come to terms with her mother’s (Katherine Dow Blyton) decision to rekindle a relationship with her sexually abusive father (Johnny Harris). However, like in *Ashes*, character developments like this constitute “exposition” and “digressions”, as Wolf describes them, which “halt” the narrative (29). *This is England* is driven by a particular narrative – Shaun, a lonely and

impressionable young boy, finds friendship in skinhead culture but is eventually persuaded to join the National Front – but the serials digress in various directions that mainly serve character development and their narratives are loosely defined. Exposition sometimes develops characters seriously and dramatically, as in Lol's case, but in other instances develops them comically. For instance, the unnamed shoe shopkeeper from *This is England*, played by Stephen Graham's wife Hannah Walters, resurfaces in the serials as a zany wedding hall receptionist named Trudy who is unhappy in her marriage and seduces the young Gadget (Andrew Ellis). Trudy's overbearing sexuality and bizarre quirks, such as her insistence that Gadget dress like Clark Gable, render her funny and larger-than-life. In all instances, whether dramatic or comedic, the serials establish distinct, memorable characters that expand the internal dynamics of Meadows' fictional 1980s universe.

Simultaneously, this universe's relationship to actual history is diminished. *This is England '86* does use footage from news reports leading up to the 1986 World Cup in Mexico City, as well as clips from the game between England and Argentina. The footage, as well as the fiery support for England and hatred of Argentina that the characters express while watching the game, point implicitly to the ongoing social repercussions of the Falklands crisis. However, because the footage is not contextualised by political or historical analysis, its inclusion resembles its use in *Cass* as discussed in Chapter 4: it formally replicates *This is England's* archival style without repeating its meaning. This is even more overt in *This is England '88*; as previously mentioned, the serial begins with an archival montage much like *This is England's* opening segment, but afterward contains no direct references to historical events. Meadows comments that the “beautiful thing about doing '88”, which is set during Christmastime and was broadcast as a Christmas special, was that it “isn't tied to an event, it isn't tied into a moment in history, it's just those people living and that could be yesterday or it could be 1905” (Wightman). Here, Meadows directly acknowledges the irrelevancy of 1980s history to '88, instead praising it for its timelessness. This implies that the opening montage is little more than a formality that is carried forward to maintain the saga's stylistic consistency.

In general, *This is England* '88's self-conscious intertextuality draws the saga further from history and closer to fantasy than '86. It is domestic in focus – the only overt social commentary comes in the form of Shaun's and Woody's new love interests, Fay (Charlotte Tyree) and Jennifer (Stacey Sampson), whose middle-class identities prove to be points of friction – but it also alludes to Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. Lol is haunted by the ghost of her father, who she kills in self-defence at the end of '86. This reference to a 'timeless' Christmas classic, as well as the show's ambiguity as to whether Lol is hallucinating or the ghost is real, distances it significantly from history. Here the recent past, which is only identifiable in period costumes, archaic props and the archival footage in the opening montage, acts simply as a set of building blocks required to construct this now recognisable fantasy world, bearing little to no weight on the narrative's meaning.

### **Adapted Meanings: Ideology, Gender and Genre**

The adaptations of *Ashes*, '86's and '88's source material which lead them to engage less with the actual pasts in which they are set neither improve nor worsen them. Instead, they reflect a general shift, in the era of new media, toward transmedia storytelling, and it is likely that similar characteristics will become increasingly notable in period fictions. However, as *Ashes* and the serials expand and enhance their own imagined versions of the past in conjunction with personal and audience desires, providing points of interest for ever larger demographics, they introduce certain ideological complications. This final section will explore these, most notably with regard to both series' generic emphasis on melodrama and on exploring the concerns of women. While *Life on Mars* is told from DCI Sam Tyler's perspective (John Simm) and *This is England* from Shaun's (Thomas Turgoose), both spin-offs feature female protagonists. *Ashes to Ashes* maintains the same concept – of a present-day police officer travelling back in time – but substitutes Tyler for DI Alex Drake (Keeley Hawes). '86 and '88 continue to follow Shaun but diminish his screen time, instead focusing predominantly on Lol. In doing so, the spin-offs depart from their predominantly masculine-oriented precursors. However, this renders the texts conflicted; on one hand, they feminise history and appear to engage with female

audiences' desires, but on the other, they problematically attempt to 'insert' a female story into a previously masculine narrative. Furthermore, *Ashes*' co-creators appear to have resisted their series' turn toward melodrama while Meadows has justified his by intellectualising it. This exposes the complicated juncture at which the shows' transmediality places them, caught between giving fans what they want and striving to maintain an aura of 'quality' television. Ultimately, the shows reveal certain difficulties in using an *actual* era as the inspiration for an entirely imagined universe.

These difficulties are visible even outside the shows' incorporations of melodrama and emphases on women's experiences. Combo, who despite having sympathetic traits is the film's main antagonist – he draws Shaun and others into his small tribe of neo-fascists and beats Milky nearly to death – is rewritten in the serials as likeable, even noble. In '86, he discovers Lol after she has beaten her father to death in self-defence and lies for her, claiming that it was he who killed her father and consequently going to prison in her place. In '88 he becomes Lol's confidante; she visits him in prison as she struggles with depression. Information established in *This is England* is accordingly adapted. In the film, Combo reveals to Lol that since a particular night in their past she has been on his mind, to which Lol retorts that she was drunk and has fought to forget the incident. This leaves the viewer to assume that what Combo mistook for a meaningful sexual encounter was at best a drunken mistake and at worst a traumatic experience for Lol. In '88, Lol reveals that she lied to him, and that the night meant a great deal to her: "No one was ever that gentle with me" ('Episode Two', '88). This self-adaptive moment reframes Combo's previous behaviour, smoothing over inconsistencies between his filmic and televisual representation.

Rendering Combo more likeable is consistent with the serials' overall tendency to establish memorable characters that can be sustained across multiple narratives. Combo's development beyond mere antagonist provides room for growth. However this, alongside the serials' relative exclusion of historical analysis, leads Combo's previous wrongdoings and their possible repercussions to be more or less ignored. Milky bears a scar on his face but never discusses the incident, and Shaun appears to have entirely shed his associations with the National Front movement. Indeed, the

serials shed the film's concern with neo-fascism altogether, and consequently, Combo's actions are problematically both forgiven and forgotten. The serials' tendency to reprise memorable elements from the film but to de-politicise them also affects the representation of violence more generally; while the serials are unrelenting in their depictions of domestic violence and sexual abuse, violence within the community is no longer associated with wider socio-cultural trends and in a scene in '86 that depicts a fight between the gang and a gang of Casuals who have been bullying Shaun, it is rendered funny ('Episode Three').

In *Ashes to Ashes*, Gene Hunt is similarly softened. Before discussing this, however, it is necessary to consider how the transmediality of both the *Life on Mars* and *This is England* worlds facilitated and, especially in the case of *Ashes*, brought about a shift toward addressing female viewers both narratively and generically. Both *Mars* and *This is England* are predominantly male-oriented; *Mars* features only one significant female character, WPC Annie Cartwright (Liz White), and primarily focuses on the 'good cop, bad cop' relationship between Sam and Gene. More significantly, its structural, formal and narrative references to *The Sweeney* align it with the traditionally masculine cop show genre. *This is England* also focuses mainly on male relationships; this is customary in Meadows' films, which Fradley and Kingston note are preoccupied with themes of masculinity (172). Yet, despite a notably masculine address, both *Life on Mars* and *This is England* garnered significant female viewership. As an established and respected British auteur, Meadows has transcended the niche 'lad' audience to whom his films about masculinity, youth and violence might usually appeal, achieving viewership across a wide demographic spectrum. Consequently, he notes that "I'd had a lot of female actresses [...] not giving me [shit], but saying, 'When are you going to do a film about a woman?'" (Harvey). Here he makes clear that it was pressure from women that persuaded him to give prominence to a female character. Elsewhere, he describes the process by which he decided to foreground Lol: "It's been said that my work has been male-dominated – as my childhood was male-dominated – and luckily, in the wings, I had this very macho lady waiting, with a Ben Sherman on. She looked pretty tough and I thought, I can still have my man and she's a lady" (Gilbert 2010). *This is England's* transmedial expansion clearly enabled Meadows to respond to



viewers' criticisms without compromising his own thematic interests, as he might be forced to do in producing an original text about a female character.

As well as featuring a female protagonist, the television serial format also allowed Meadows to shift away from the 'lad' film genre toward domestic melodrama. Although a highly contested genre, Marcia Landy describes melodramatic narratives as those which "generate emotional intensity involving not only the figures within the melodrama but the external audience", and which are "driven by the experience of one crisis after another, crises involving severed familial ties, [...] seduction, betrayal, abandonment, extortion, murder, suicide, revenge, jealousy, incurable illness, obsession, and compulsion" (14). The genre quite often features female protagonists and in film has most commonly been associated with the women's picture. It has consequently – and, as many theorists have argued, pejoratively – been defined as a feminine genre. There have always been traces of melodrama present in Meadows' films – in fact, Martin Fradley and Sean Kingston call them "male melodramas" (172) – but in *This is England*, domestic melodrama takes a back seat to the film's focus on the repercussions of the Falklands crisis and the rise of the National Front in skinhead subculture. The serial television format, however, formally facilitates melodrama; in fact, in *Legitimizing Television*, Michael Z. Newman and Elana Levine note that serials – shows which follow an ongoing narrative over a series of weeks rather than being comprised of self-contained episodes – originated in the most melodramatic of television genres: the daytime soap opera (81).

As such, Meadows' tendency toward melodrama is given full reign in '86 and '88. The plots and subplots are primarily concerned with domestic issues: sexual abuse, the deaths of parents and sexual relationships. In '86 Lol carries on an affair with Milky while Shaun comes to terms with his mother's sexual relationship with the shopkeeper Mr. Sandhu (Kriss Dosanjh), and in '88 Shaun cheats on his girlfriend Smell (Rosamund Hanson). The serials are also driven by a series of crises: in '86 Woody is unable to commit to marrying Lol, Lol's sexually abusive father returns, raping her friend Trev (Danielle Watson) and attempting to rape her, and Lol murders her father. In '88 Lol is revealed to have given birth to Milky's child and attempts suicide. The

excessive degree of trauma experienced by the serials' characters requires suspension of disbelief, as do over-the-top characters like Trudy. Thus, the saga's transmedial shift to television draws it generically closer to melodramatic genres like soap opera. Although it is problematic to assume that these genres appeal exclusively to women, it is fair to argue that this change in genre facilitated female viewership by broadening the saga's thematic concerns beyond those of masculinity, tribalism and physical violence and by incorporating generic elements that are usually targeted to female audiences.

*Life on Mars* also gained a significant female viewership. In fact, *Mars*' female fans have, since the beginning, maintained an active presence in online discussion; the series' most popular fan forum, *The Railway Arms*, was founded and is managed by women.<sup>50</sup> Although female fans who are active online express varying reasons for following the show, one of their primary sources of pleasure is Gene Hunt. In an interview, *Railway Arms* co-manager Janet Hoggins comments, "Gene Hunt is my favourite character. Maybe he's misogynistic but he has a good heart and really cares for his team" ('Trip to Life'). Hoggins' perspective is echoed on the internet, where Gene has risen to the status of sex symbol. It is obvious from his structural function in *Mars* that the show's creators did not anticipate this. Gene's origin as an echo of *The Sweeney*'s Jack Regan meant that he was depicted as sexist and misogynistic, recalling Regan's constant womanising. His secondary position in relation to Sam Tyler reveals that, far from believing that he would be a sex symbol, the writers were concerned that viewers might find him offensive. Sam is therefore positioned centrally and acts, by explicitly disapproving of Gene's behaviour, as a buffer between 1973 and the present-day audience, ensuring that the series will never be seen to condone sexual discrimination. This in itself is problematic, of course, as it negates the persistence of sexism into the present day, and the show often emphasises Gene's underlying nobility and goodness to render his behaviour funny rather than seriously harmful. Yet, because in *Mars* Gene is a secondary character subjected to consistent criticism from the show's

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<sup>50</sup> The site was founded by Nicola Bourne, who co-manages alongside Janet Hoggins ('Trip to Life').

more enlightened hero, the series manages to maintain distance and regard him as an obsolete novelty.

However, it appears that *Life on Mars*' selective reimagining of the 'Jack Regan'-style character, humanising him in order to cushion his harsher aspects, may have actually encouraged some female viewers to find his sexist behaviour attractive. Also encouraging this was likely the dichotomy that the show creates, discussed in depth in Chapter 2, between the gritty honesty of the past and the sterile artificiality of the present. Glenda Cooper implies this in her article about the phenomenon, claiming that "the only riddle" of *Life on Mars* as far as she "and millions of British women" were concerned "was why the hell did anyone think this was Tyler's show when a brief psychological profile, cursory examination of the evidence and old-fashioned gut instinct showed that there was only one man in the frame and that was DCI Gene Hunt". Although she points out that Hunt is "Seventies man writ large and we should all be grateful that species is extinct", she argues that "women like Hunt because he isn't a bastard – or at least not to his team". Cooper continues by noting that "in a world where we analyse and over-analyse what men say and what they mean, Hunt's trenchant utterances leave no room for ambiguity [...]. He cuts through Tyler's 21st-century, politically correct pseudo-babble to expose the nonsense" (G. Cooper). Gene Hunt's "good heart", as Hoggins describes it, and what Cooper calls his ability to cut through Sam Tyler's 21<sup>st</sup>-century "nonsense", appear to have rendered his misogyny attractive. Regardless of the reason, by the time *Ashes* was released this perspective was even being voiced by star Keeley Hawes, who comments on Alex Drake's growing love for Gene: "You want a man to scoop you up, I think, as a woman. You do. All this bull about being equal and all the rest is all well and good. But, ultimately, I think it's lovely as a sort of fantasy that she's having, that Gene is somebody to look to, somebody that will look after you" ('Gene Hunt').

The perspectives expressed above do not necessarily reflect even the majority of *Ashes*' female viewers. However, they represent a very vocal standpoint on Gene Hunt, and crucial here is what Matthew Graham and Ashley Pharoah gathered from it. Graham has noted on multiple occasions that during *Mars*' initial broadcast, he and

Pharoah followed fan reactions, commenting in one interview that he even, at times, began “wading in” to discussions (Brew, ‘Matthew Graham’). Graham and Pharoah were thus obviously aware of Gene’s growing status as sex symbol, and as noted above, it was Hunt’s popularity that provoked the BBC to request a spin-off in the first place. As such, it is almost certain that fondness for the character influenced the change in dynamic in *Ashes*. Jane Featherstone comments that featuring a woman allowed them to depict a dynamic between Gene and the other protagonist that was “tumultuous, sexy, intellectual, instinctive and totally different to his relationship with Sam” (‘Ashes to Ashes’). It is therefore unsurprising that *Ashes* rejects the male-oriented ‘good cop-bad cop’ structure in favour of the more gender-neutral (or even female-oriented) ‘will they, won’t they’ structure of cop shows like *Moonlighting* and *Dempsey and Makepeace*. Referencing these 1980s shows suits the show’s updated era, but it also allows Gene’s sexuality to be explored on a romantic, rather than womanising, level. By replacing Sam with a female protagonist, *Ashes* is also able to facilitate identification amongst female viewers, and the show often explores challenges that Alex faces as a female police officer in the early 1980s. It is unlikely, without the unexpected burst of Gene Hunt fandom with the release of *Life on Mars*, that the character would have been cast as a romantic hero in the show’s spin-off. Thus, it is clear that *Mars*’ growing transmediality through discussion on internet forums, as well as fanfiction and fan videos, played at least some part in the adapted dynamics present in *Ashes*.

It can be argued that it was progressive to adapt *Life on Mars*’ and *This is England*’s previously male-dominated fictional worlds in accordance with female viewers’ wishes. This suggests a willingness to acknowledge and respond to women’s desires, something that Henry Jenkins argues is all too uncommon amongst creators of transmedia texts. He points to George Lucas, who he suggests has encouraged amateur productions inspired by the *Star Wars* series (George Lucas et al., 1977-2005) as a means of spring-boarding a filmmaking career while discouraging fanfiction. Jenkins writes that “these rules are anything but gender neutral: though the gender lines are starting to blur in recent years, the overwhelming majority of fan parody is produced by men, while ‘fan fiction’ is almost entirely produced by women” (159). Jenkins also notes that women’s fanfiction and fan videos tend to draw out the emotional lives of the

characters, something that Lucas has refused to respond to in his own work. In their focus on character development over plot, then, *Ashes* and the Channel 4 serials do more than expand an internal world while sidelining actual history; they also respond to women's desires for character expansion. Michael Z. Newman and Elana Levine argue that many contemporary 'quality' serials deny "the feminized other upon which their status depends", masculinising the genre partially by "distancing themselves from 'soapy,' feminized subjects" such as romantic and familial relationships (82). *Ashes*, '86 and '88 all fall under the category of 'quality' television, the term assigned to convergence-era shows that lay emphasis on high quality writing, strong acting and filmic production values, and yet, they often *accentuate* these feminised subjects.

However, the shows' structural adaptations raise ideological problems that affect their representations of women. In the case of *Ashes*, these problems begin with Gene's elevated importance in relation to Alex, which has clearly been done to reflect his status as cultural hero and sex symbol. The modification is notable in the series' marketing materials; promotional images for *Mars* suggest that Gene Hunt is a supporting character, second in importance to Sam, but the promotional material for *Ashes* positions him front and centre (Figure 39). Alex Drake is therefore demoted to secondary protagonist after Gene, implicitly suggesting that as a female character, Alex is incapable of carrying the series as Sam did. Alex is also depicted as less composed and responsible than Sam, often drinking too much and having one night stands. This causes a two-pronged effect: it suggests that Alex's femininity renders her prone to irresponsible decisions while simultaneously transforming Gene from the 'silly' half of the police duo, as he tends to be portrayed in *Mars*, into the more reasonable half in *Ashes*.

Drawing out Gene Hunt's more reasonable qualities, of course, is consistent with recasting him as a romantic hero. However, despite the fact that this adaptation demonstrates a willingness to cater to female fans' desires, it is also problematic given Gene's misogyny. Ruth McElroy argues that Gene Hunt fans exemplify the phenomenon of 'retrosexuality', which she describes as "a form of nostalgia that entails the playing out of fantasies of the past [...] that focus upon gendered performances



**Figure 39:** In publicity photos for *Life on Mars*, Gene Hunt (Philip Glenister) is secondary to Sam Tyler (John Simm) (above). In those for *Ashes to Ashes*, Hunt is at the centre (below). (*Life on Mars* publicity photo [2], *Ashes to Ashes* publicity photo [3])

articulated through an aesthetic sensibility characteristic of contemporary consumer culture” (122). In other words, she suggests that retrosexual women, who develop fantasies of traditional men, latch on to Gene’s archaic masculinity and express it by dressing in eighties-inspired attire while watching the show. Women’s tendency toward fancy dress, which McElroy identifies in their fan discussions on sites like *The Railway Arms*, is likely not as related to the clothing’s ideologically symbolic meaning as it is to the immersive quality of the *Life on Mars* universe. It bears resemblance to the fancy-dressing tendencies in fans of other fantasy worlds and likely has more to do with a desire to immerse oneself in the world that Alex and Gene inhabit. However, McElroy is correct to note that women’s sexual desire for Gene Hunt is problematic, and catering to it in *Ashes* complicates the expression of his misogyny. Because in *Mars* he functions chiefly as a recollection of Jack Regan and other archaically masculine characters from the 1970s, Gene’s misogynistic behaviour remains tongue-in-cheek; however, as the saga’s references to media history recede in *Ashes* and Gene develops into a romantic

hero in his own right, his sexism is rendered attractive. Furthermore, because of Alex's romantic feelings for Gene, she is usually depicted as more forgiving of misogynistic practices than Sam; although she occasionally criticises him, her scolding is more playful than Sam's genuine disgust. Thus, while the show's adjustments offer a dynamic that is more consistent with female audience desires, they also obfuscate the distance maintained in *Mars* between viewers' identification and Gene's archaic perspectives.

*This is England '86* and *'88*'s representations of women are not so overtly problematic. On one level, the serials bring significant depth to several female characters whose screen time was limited in the film; further developed, apart from Lol, are gang members Kelly (Chanel Cresswell), revealed to be Lol's sister, Shaun's girlfriend Smell and Trev, as well as Shaun's mother Cynthia (Jo Hartley) and Trudy. *'86* is also progressive in its forthright depiction of sexual violence. Revealing that Lol was sexually abused by her father Mick as a girl, the serial presents a nuanced portrait of a family dynamic wherein Lol's fearful mother is in denial of her daughter's experiences and her father repeatedly attempts to intimidate her into denying them. Furthermore, the unrelenting manner in which the serial's rape sequences are shot and edited forces viewers to confront the reality of sexual violence head-on. However, the serials' focus on character expansion and emphasis on melodrama at the expense of historical and social inquiry places their depictions of Lol and other female characters on problematic terrain. As *This is England* explores the rise of the neo-fascist National Front movement within certain subsets of skinhead culture in the context of societal factors that influenced it, including mass unemployment and the resentment felt for the Thatcher government by communities outside the south of England, it implies a degree of social concern amongst ordinary British citizens. Although the film does not endorse their views, Shaun, Combo and other politicised male characters are shown to engage critically with trends in broader society, and the film itself formally encourages its viewers to reconsider their own memories and their understanding of history.

However, the serials' simultaneous feminisation and diminished concern with socio-political history implies that these two go hand-in-hand: that social criticism is a

masculine pursuit. Neither Lol nor any of her female friends are suggested to hold political opinions; Lol appears to be solely concerned with marriage, relationships and domestic issues. Melodrama, as opposed to social commentary, is implied to be the vehicle by which a female skinhead's story can be told. In addition, only Shaun, who studies drama, and Woody, who works at a factory, show any concern with career advancement. While this might suggest oppression within a gendered society that affords men more opportunities than women, this point is not elaborated on, leaving the viewer to wonder what, if any, Lol's and other female characters' non-domestic interests might be.

The decision, then, to focus inward in *Ashes to Ashes* and in the *This is England* serials, expanding their own universes through exposition and character development while foregrounding characters and themes that will appeal to women, sometimes rests uncomfortably against meanings established in their preceding texts and problematises representation, especially of women. In addition, it would be naïve to argue that the producers' efforts to appeal to their previously marginalised female viewership were particularly linked to a feminist agenda. Matthew Graham has described his conflicted relationship to female fans' theories and aspirations for the show. In one interview, he describes them as too "torrid for my tastes", implying disapproval of their concern with sexual desire, and later in the interview confesses to writing to the fans of *The Railway Arms* on the site's fourth anniversary to tell them that

[...] it was a nine o'clock show. This is not a photo novel in Jackie magazine. It's not about the day that Gene fell in love with Alex, and Alex loved him but couldn't tell Gene, and Gene was so grumpy most of the time that really deep down he loved Alex, and he wanted to adopt Molly, and they were all going to live in a house. And a lot of people started to go down that route and I was saying guys, you know, this may still be a fantasy show but it is a grown-up show, and it's for adults, and it's on after nine o'clock. (Brew, 'Matthew Graham')

The reference to *Ashes*' scheduled broadcast time reveals Graham's determination to maintain the show's aura of 'quality' and to distance it from daytime soap operas, patronisingly implying that romantic concerns are less 'grown-up' than narrative ones. In this way, Graham's responses echo *The X-Files* (Fox, 1993-2002) creator Chris Carter's responses to supporters of a romantic relationship between protagonists Mulder



(David Duchovny) and Scully (Gillian Anderson), as discussed by Newman and Levine. They note that Carter resisted making them a couple because it would detract from the stories, which he believed to be the show's strongest elements, and Newman and Levine argue that this "sets 'stories' apart from romance, as if the latter treads too much in the soap world of meaningful glances and endless rehashing, a world opposed to one of narrative momentum" (96). Thus, while Graham and others working on the show may have conceded somewhat to female fans' wishes, this appears to have been done somewhat begrudgingly.

Although Shane Meadows' decision to foreground Lol in *This is England '86* may not have been begrudging, he also appears to have been somewhat resistant. As quoted above, he has commented that the move was influenced by criticisms that his work was too male-dominated, and that he "luckily" had "this very macho lady waiting, with a Ben Sherman on", prompting him to decide that he could "still have my man and she's a lady". Although there is some obvious humour intended in this comment, it implies an unwillingness to fully explore women's issues: Meadows was only prepared to tell a woman's story if she looked and behaved sufficiently like a man. Thus, despite shifting toward the feminine in both perspective and genre, neither *Ashes* nor the serials can be called feminist texts or even feminist ventures. Ultimately, the texts are ideologically *confused*; in the process of transmedially expanding their retro worlds and responding to audience desires, they engage with eighties tropes in ways that often conflict with their preceding texts and are sometimes problematic. However, this does not directly result from their use of eighties signifiers as a stylistic backdrop for primarily fictional universes. Instead, what renders them problematic is their departure in this regard from preceding texts that *did* engage with the historically real. As such, the spin-offs reveal certain difficulties inherent in expanding a narrative based in history into a world based in fantasy.

### **Conclusion: The Past is a Foreign World**

As has been made clear here, *Ashes to Ashes* and the Channel 4 *This is England* serials are fundamentally different from other productions in the Eighties Cycle. This is not simply because they are spin-offs, but because they responded to a broader move away,

in the convergence-era entertainment industry, from single, self-contained texts toward worlds that can be sustained across multiple narratives and media platforms. In doing so, they take their cues less from audiences' remembered social, political and televisual histories than from the fantasy pasts established in the productions that preceded them. As more productions are influenced by these cultural and industrial shifts, it becomes increasingly necessary to consider the role they play in how signifiers of the past are appropriated; otherwise, viewers run the risk of misinterpreting the fundamental function and meaning of pastness in these productions. This is the mistake that the UK Labour Party made in its now somewhat infamous reference to *Ashes to Ashes* in a 2010 campaign poster (Figure 40, above). The poster featured an image of Gene Hunt sitting on his Quattro with David Cameron's face cropped in where Philip Glenister's once was. On the side, the poster read, "Don't let him take Britain back to the 1980s". In itself, the poster reflects the *Life on Mars* universe's transmediality; Henry Jenkins writes that this phenomenon has facilitated a return to practices of sharing, adaptation and co-authorship that were abundant in folk cultures, signalling the "public re-



**Figure 40:** The Labour Party's 2010 campaign poster (above) mistakenly assumes that viewers associate *Ashes to Ashes* with the actual 1980s. The Conservative Party's response (below) recognises that viewers want to imaginarily escape to the show's world. (Labour Party 2010 campaign poster, Conservative Party 2010 campaign poster)

emergence of grassroots creativity as everyday people archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content” (140). Jenkins notes that transmedial narratives are much like folk tales in that they do not require contextualisation, as audiences are assumed to be familiar with their references, and the poster demonstrates this, not bothering to indicate its source.

However, the poster’s message also reveals confusion on the part of the Labour Party’s advertising team as to *Ashes to Ashes*’ cultural meaning. In suggesting a likeness between David Cameron and Gene Hunt and implying that Cameron will introduce social policies as conservative as those introduced in the 1980s, the poster assumes that *Ashes* is engaging with Britain’s actual past, a past that its viewers evidently do not want to relive. It confuses Gene Hunt’s post-*Ashes* meaning with his original intended meaning in *Life on Mars*, assuming that Hunt’s function is to represent an antiquated, conservative era. Ultimately, the poster is ineffective because while many of its viewers may not have wished to relive the real 1980s, many *did* wish to escape to the *fantasy world* of *Ashes to Ashes*, one which might stylistically resemble the actual 1980s but did not, in effect, signify it. It is obvious, from the Conservative Party’s response, that its advertising team better understood this. Their poster features a similar image but with a different message: “Fire up the Quattro. It’s time for change” (Figure 40, below). The poster does not repeat the Labour team’s attempt to engage with its viewers on an intellectual level; instead, by pretending to assume Gene’s identity, it offers them a fleeting opportunity to imaginarily enter his world. Recognizing the immersive appeal of Gene Hunt’s world while simultaneously acknowledging, in its tongue-in-cheek tone, that this world is a fantasy that is all in good fun, the poster proves more effective. This is because in the end, the appeal of *Ashes to Ashes* – and of the *This is England* serials – has less to do with return than with immersion. Here, the past is not merely a foreign country; it is a foreign world.

## CONCLUSION

This project has offered an important contribution to British period drama research by focusing closely and holistically on a field of productions that appropriated contemporary mediations of a particular, very recent decade – the 1980s – on a broad enough scale to constitute a cycle. The 2005-11 Eighties Cycle tells us that as technological developments have facilitated ever-widening access to media from late 20<sup>th</sup>-century decades, and as the exchange value of recent pastness has accordingly increased, these decades' signifiers have become embedded in the experience of daily life and are invoked in film and television fiction with great regularity. This study has shown that these 21<sup>st</sup>-century recent-past screen fictions engage meanings that are often formulated and always reiterated in the present, and which are primarily traded and experienced through modern media. Stylistic signifiers of the eighties appear routinely on websites, in magazines, in YouTube videos and so on. Memories of the eighties, both private and shared, can be triggered by the decade's easily accessible films and TV shows and by contemporary discussions on the news. Historical archival media are recycled in 21<sup>st</sup>-century news segments, docudramas and on YouTube with great regularity. The eighties worlds constructed most prominently in the TV drama series *Ashes to Ashes*, *This is England '86* and *This is England '88* are accessible across a variety of platforms on the small screen, the big screen and the internet.

More precisely, this project has investigated the research questions outlined in the introduction, identifying motivations for producing Eighties Cycle retrospectives and exploring the various ways that they define, invoke and qualify the eighties. Most incentives were industrial or cultural, more often than socio-political. Chapter 2 shows that as a mediated style, the eighties mode provided a point of differentiation for the genre films *The Business* and *Tuesday*, as well as a critical device to destabilise genre conventions in *The Line of Beauty* and *Awaydays*. The eighties mode also acted as a tool to communicate with its media-savvy audiences in all of those discussed, which also include *Ashes to Ashes* and *Submarine*. A further motivation, revealed in Chapter 3, was to revisit memories of childhood, adolescence and early adulthood. This has long inspired screen and other cultural depictions of the recent past; in this cycle, however, it

was also sometimes attached to a secondary interest in considering in how shifts toward widespread consumerism, globalisation and mediation affected memory (*Is Anybody There?*, the *Red Riding* trilogy and *Son of Rambow*). In Chapter 4, incentives for depicting actual 1980s events and people are shown to have in some instances been political, as in Steve McQueen's aim, in *Hunger*, to expose history and criticise its media manipulation and in Shane Meadows' object to criticise historical diffusion and mediation in *This is England*. However, Meadows also sought to celebrate the vibrancy of subcultures, a motive more closely aligned with others: to exploit eighties revivalism (*This is England*, *Control*) and the popularity of eighties screen fiction subjects (*Cass*, *The Iron Lady*), and to mark anniversaries (*The Long Walk to Finchley*, *Margaret* and *The Iron Lady*). Finally, Chapter 5 makes apparent that occasionally, incentives had less to do with summoning the past than with revitalising popular texts while exploiting the present taste for transmedia stories.

The previous chapters have also explored how contemporary retrospectives invoke and define 'the eighties', and whether they seek to recover or denounce the period. This project has found that while some suggest an underlying longing for return (*Ashes to Ashes*, *Is Anybody There?*, *Control*, to an extent *This is England*) and others look unfavourably on the period (*The Line of Beauty*, *Awaydays*, the *Red Riding* trilogy, *Hunger* and again, to an extent *This is England*), as many more are neither particularly nostalgic nor condemning. Instead, Eighties Cycle productions primarily invoke the eighties, even when nostalgic or critical, to engage systems of knowledge inscribed in media that their viewers are assumed to share and to incorporate seamlessly into their lives. In Chapter 2 I argue that eighties codes of decay and technological crudeness are sometimes deployed as signifiers of sincerity; this is true in *Ashes to Ashes*. *The Line of Beauty* and *Awaydays*, conversely, cast eighties codes malignantly. Still, they engage their audiences' prior familiarity with and perspectives on eighties style: *Ashes* plays with them, while *The Line of Beauty* and *Awaydays* rely on them to implicitly convey their messages. *The Business* and *Tuesday* do not allocate meaning to eighties styles – these are invoked for the sheer pleasure of recognising them – and in *Submarine*, they function as the components of a language to express new meaning. In Chapter 3, I suggest that semi-autobiographical and coming-of-age stories structure their private and

shared recollections of era according to collectively familiar media and media genres. *Is Anybody There?* laments their pervasiveness, implicitly longing to retrieve a time before postmodern Britain's globalised media array supposedly rendered meaningful relationships difficult. By contrast, *Starter for 10*, *Clubbed*, the *Red Riding* trilogy and *Son of Rambow* embrace this array, refracting memory through pop cultural genres, whether seamlessly as in the former two or self-consciously as in the latter two.

Like those discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, this project found that longing for return among the historical dramas examined in Chapter 4 is uncommon, although *Control*'s meticulous imitation of Joy Division's mythology and iconography elicits longing for the band's alternative vitality. A similar longing for 1980s subcultures is partly expressed in *This is England* but, as described above, it also highlights inconsistencies in the media's manipulated versions of history, as does *Hunger*. These two depict uglier 1980s histories. Yet, a wish to either salvage or censure the 1980s does not permeate other historical dramas. Historical fictions' representational agendas, overall, are instead consistent with how these histories are traded in contemporary Britain: they locate 1980s history in circulating contemporaneous and retrospective media inscriptions. Authenticity is seen to be achieved in some by accurately reconstructing them (*Control*, *Cass*, *The Iron Lady*), while critical, ironic and/or self-conscious treatments question their validity (*This is England*, *Hunger*, *The Long Walk to Finchley*, *Margaret*). Finally, in Chapter 5 I examine how the eighties are delineated when the past (whether mediated or not) recedes as a primary referent, and when the decade instead becomes the backdrop for a fantasy world. *Ashes to Ashes*' style, as examined in Chapter 2, is implicitly longing, but its nostalgia for the eighties is tempered by equal nostalgia for *Life on Mars*. *Ashes* and the *This is England* serials offer immersive experiences, but they encourage absorption in their eighties-inspired fantasy worlds rather than in the eighties. Because both series were adapted from historically focused texts in accordance with what were considered to be fan desires, their altered representations of the past at times pose ideological difficulties. Still, they indicate the extent to which mediated referents could, by the late 2000s, be severed from their period sources to be put to present uses.

After 2011, which saw the release of *The Iron Lady*, British eighties retrospectives were released more rarely. Eighties revivalism in music and fashion wore on; for instance, at the tail-end of 2011, French electronic band M83 released their highly successful and critically acclaimed eighties-inspired double album opus, *Hurry Up, We're Dreaming* (Gonzales). The album, which was lauded in a Sputnik Music review for its use of “day-glo synths, the cavalcade of gated drums and chintzy keyboards, the near-slavish devotion to ‘80s pop tropes” (K.), debuted at number fifteen on the American Billboard 200 (‘Hurry Up’), was nominated for the 2013 Grammy for Best Alternative Music Album and was mined for multiple advertisements and trailers, most notably Red Bull’s 2012 campaign, suggesting that eighties music references were still captivating audiences. Furthermore, in 2014, *Vogue* reported on its blog yet another eighties “streetwear revival”, featuring “slouchy pixie boots, panelled leggings and Disco-ready ra-ra skirts” (Hobbs). Yet, British films and television series were set in the eighties less frequently from 2012 onward. In 2012, more British films were set in the 1970s and 90s than in the 80s: only *Tuesday* director Sacha Bennett’s *Outside Bet* (2012) was distinctly set in the eighties, while both *Good Vibrations* (Lisa Barros D’Sa and Glenn Leyburn, 2012) and *Berberian Sound Studio* (Peter Strickland, 2012) were set in the seventies and *Spike Island* (Mat Whitecross, 2012) and *Shadow Dancer* (James Marsh, 2012) excavated the nineties.

There were likely multiple contributing factors in this relative dwindling of eighties retrospectives. To a fair extent, it is probable that the cycle simply ran its course. After several years of sustaining an active presence in British film and TV, eighties settings were likely thought by producers to be less exciting for viewers. Original ways of depicting the eighties were quite possibly considered exhausted, and new British film and TV cycles were gaining traction.<sup>51</sup> The fallout of *The Iron Lady*’s release may also have contributed: when Margaret Thatcher, often thought of as the decade’s implicit figurehead, was placed at the centre of a medium-budget international co-production with a Hollywood star and when that film received a mixed response and

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<sup>51</sup> These included, among others, a cycle of films aimed at the over-60s demographic such as *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (John Madden, 2012) and *Quartet* (Dustin Hoffman, 2012).

was politically contentious, there may have seemed little point in returning to subtler treatments. A third possible contributing factor is socio-cultural, as certain events triggered shifts in broader perspectives on the 1980s and its relationship to contemporary Britain. In the aftermath of the 2007-8 financial crisis, many in Europe began to protest austerity measures enacted from 2010 onward. This culminated in the 2011 Occupy movement: thousands protested social and economic inequalities imposed by the global financial system by occupying symbolic sites around the world, including St Paul's Cathedral in London. At the other end of the political spectrum and also reflecting wider European trends, the far-right Eurosceptic UK Independence Party (UKIP) began, for the first time since its inception in 1993, to gain greater electoral support. These developments all garnered widespread attention in British media; depictions of increasing polarisation between left-wing protesters and growing far-right groups may have triggered memories of similar mediations in the 1980s. Furthermore, the financial crisis' origins in 1980s free-market policies were sometimes emphasised in news segments and TV documentaries such as the BBC's *The Party's Over: How the West Went Bust* (2011). This changing atmosphere may have made the tendency in several Eighties Cycle productions to playfully invoke and/or ironise the decade's popular media and iconography appear less engaging and perhaps, to some, even trivial.

Then, amid the above developments, Margaret Thatcher died on April 8, 2013. Her photograph appeared on every British newspaper's front-page spread the following day, with headlines from left-leaning tabloids like the *Daily Mirror* calling her 'The woman who divided a nation' and from right-leaning ones like the *Daily Mail* dubbing her 'The woman who saved Britain' (Figure 41). Politically charged headlines like these rekindled old feuds that had been expressed in 1980s British media,<sup>52</sup> fuelling a broader rejuvenation of impassioned perspectives on Thatcher. Large-scale celebrations of her death – eventually nicknamed in the media 'Thatcher death parties' – were organised across Britain, eliciting highly publicised media images of people carrying copies of the *Socialist Worker* that read 'Rejoice! Rejoice!' and signs bearing phrases like 'Ding, Dong, the Witch is Dead'. Simultaneously, the government carried out a ceremonial

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<sup>52</sup> See, for instance, Harris' book-length analysis of the media's coverage of the Falklands crisis.



funeral that had been in discussion since 2009 and which was later reported to have cost taxpayers £3.6 million, £3.1 million of which had been spent on policing and security in anticipation of the range of perspectives expected to be expressed at it ('No 10'). As predicted, masses of both supporters and protesters attended the funeral.

In the midst of this, the media became particularly preoccupied with the fact that many on both sides, but especially on the protesting side, were remarkably young: too young to remember Thatcher's time as Prime Minister and, in some instances, too young to have even been alive during it. In the week following Thatcher's death, *BBC News* posed questions regarding this to various guests almost daily: why were these young people so involved in the 'death parties' and protests and what were the implications of having such strident opinions on a figure they could not remember? Evidently, some in older generations had underestimated the power, in an age of heavy mediation, of prosthetic memories: even for those too young to have formulated direct memories of Thatcher, media such as her most famous speeches or popular satires of her like that in *Spitting Image* continued to be in such regular circulation that young British people had grown up familiar with mediated systems of knowledge that encompassed her. Several years of films and television series revisiting the eighties had likely reawakened this knowledge and, perhaps, inspired those less familiar to learn more. Those surprised by the reactions of young people had also clearly not considered how Thatcher's constant reiteration in media had helped to preserve her status as a symbol of global capitalism. The changes for which she was generally held responsible had never really fallen out of public knowledge in the first place; rather, sentiments regarding them had been buried for a while. Now, amid a global financial crisis, they were being dredged up.

It was in this climate that Matthew Warchus' 2014 film *Pride* was released, on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1984-5 miners' strike. The first highly visible British film to be set in the 1980s since *The Iron Lady*, it tells the true story of a lesbian and gay activist group from London who established a support campaign for the striking miners and who, upon encountering reluctance from the National Union of Mineworkers to accept their money, donated it directly to a small mining village in Wales. The film



**Figure 41:** On April 8, 2013, the right-leaning tabloid *The Daily Mail*'s front page read, 'The woman who saved Britain', while the left-leaning tabloid *The Daily Mirror*'s read, 'The woman who divided a nation'. (*The Daily Mail* front page, 8 Apr. 2013, *The Daily Mirror* front page, 8 Apr. 2013)

received wide critical acclaim and might be seen to have renewed audiences' taste for eighties settings. However, *Pride* is notably different in both subject and tone from any production in the cycle discussed here. In his review for *Radio Times*, Damon Wise notes in passing that it taps "the formula that worked so well for *The Full Monty* and *Billy Elliot*" (Wise). It is unsurprising that these comparisons were drawn, as the film's uplifting and forward-driving narrative is very structurally similar to these and other 'New Britain' films, and it uses one-liners, montages and simplistically drawn characters to ensure that the story remains fun does not become too heavy or complicated.

Of course, *Pride* does not simply repeat the formula in optimistic 'New Britain' films, as Wise implies. As outlined in Chapter 1, theorists have shown how *The Full Monty* and *Billy Elliot* celebrate protagonists who learn to adapt to social change, rejecting the old-fashioned socialism of the traditional working classes and embracing the entrepreneurial and individualist benefits afforded by 'New Britain'. *Pride* is

different; despite depicting the traditional working classes as homophobic, it does not support individualism or entrepreneurialism. Instead, as a true ensemble film it resists supporting the interests of any of its protagonists over the group's, instead emphasising socialist solidarity, and it makes no concessions in its open alignment with the miners' and gay activists' causes. In fact, in its challenging subject matter and aim to give voice to underrepresented minority groups (LGBT groups as well as the Welsh mining communities), it is actually more similar to certain socially critical and anti-Thatcherite films from the 1980s. Indeed, one might say that *Pride* combines the socialist, oppositional spirit of a 1980s film like *Comrades* (Bill Douglas, 1986), which in depicting the Tolpuddle Martyrs story also mines Britain's socialist history to political ends, with both the optimism of films like *The Full Monty* and the bitter-sweet, life-affirming tone typical of popular British comedy-dramas like *About a Boy* (Chris and Paul Weitz, 2002) and *Love Actually* (Richard Curtis, 2003). Despite certain choices that were likely to appeal to fans of Eighties Cycle productions, like using archival footage in the opening sequence or casting *This is England* star Joe Gilgun, this strategy distinguishes it from the films and series discussed in the previous chapters. Indeed, *Pride*'s objective is different: its true story of political activism is meant to inspire pride and solidarity, appealing to audiences who are becoming less interested in looking back to the eighties and more so in looking forward from the 1980s.

This study's findings remain relevant, however, to other recent British period screen fictions. Whether set in the eighties, a slightly earlier decade like the fifties, sixties or seventies, or even now the nineties, portrayals of Britain's post-war past are rife. Despite domestic and international viewers' continued interest in stories set in Britain before the Second World War, evidenced, for instance, in the massive popularity of ITV's *Downton Abbey* (2010-), the international acclaim of recent post-war period films like *An Education* (Lone Scherfig, 2009), *Nowhere Boy* (Sam Taylor-Johnson, 2009), *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (Tomas Alfredson, 2011), *The Theory of Everything* (James Marsh, 2014) and *'71* (Yann Demange, 2014) reveals that Britain's media industry is also significantly profiting from recent-past screen fictions. Furthermore, British productions across wider genres continue to mine the recent past for settings; the horror film *When the Lights Went Out*, for instance, uses the rolling blackouts imposed

during the so-called 'Three-Day Week' of 1974 as the basis for a poltergeist story. And even productions set in remoter eras are betraying the influence of postmodern retro. The BBC's *Peaky Blinders* (2013-) is set in Birmingham directly after the First World War (which, incidentally, overlaps with *Downton*'s 1910s-20s setting), but it develops a cool, retro and sometimes post-World War Two aesthetic that is notable, for instance, in its soundtrack use of blues-inspired tracks by alternative musicians like Nick Cave and The White Stripes. Films and series like these are indicative of a 21<sup>st</sup> century British world that is global, connected and steeped in the recycled remnants of its mediated past.

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## APPENDIX: PUBLICATION

### **Known Pleasures: Nostalgia and Joy Division Mythology in *24 Hour Party People* and *Control***

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In his book *Retromania*, post-punk historian Simon Reynolds laments what he regards as the death of originality in twenty-first century pop music. He writes that instead of “being about itself, the 2000s has been about every other previous decade happening all at once: a simultaneity of pop time that abolishes history while nibbling away at the present's own sense of itself” (Reynolds 2011, x-xi). Contemporary music trends are “retromanic”, he suggests, in their tendency to reference past styles rather than inventing their own, and he attributes the retro-steeped contemporary music scene to a decade of easy accessibility to popular music pasts via platforms like YouTube and iTunes. Reynolds' ironically nostalgic perspective reflects a widespread nostalgia, visible across contemporary media, for the genuineness that is thought to have characterised pre-Thatcher and Thatcher era music scenes, fashions and movements in Britain. It is a perspective that underlies certain post-2005 British films that revisit music and subcultural movements from those eras. These, which include *This is England*, *Control* and *Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll*, are part of a wider cycle of British film and television productions set in the late seventies and eighties, beginning in 2005 with Nick Love's *The Business* and including popular films like *Starter for 10* (Tom Vaughan 2006), *Son of Rambow* and *Killing Bono*, that have tended to emphasise the era's authenticity and nostalgic value.

The recent phenomenon of idolising the pre-Thatcher and Thatcher periods marks a shift from previously irreverent attitudes, and this chapter will examine that shift by discussing two films released five years apart: Michael Winterbottom's biopic about Factory Records founder Tony Wilson *24 Hour Party People* and Anton

Corbijn's Ian Curtis biopic *Control*. Both depict the short career of the celebrated Manchester post-punk band Joy Division and the trials of its epileptic frontman Ian Curtis, who committed suicide on the eve of the band's first American tour. Yet, the films' historical perspectives differ significantly; whereas *24 Hour Party People* resists nostalgia and interrogates the process by which rock mythologies develop, *Control* recovers many of the myths overturned in *Party People*. This change of approach coincided with a widespread increase in post-punk nostalgia, and it is clear that *Control*'s meticulously authentic reconstruction of Joy Division's aesthetic was meant to appeal to a nostalgic market. Indeed, while advertisements for *24 Hour Party People* had suggested to audiences that it would be a *new* kind of film, playful in its approach to history, those for *Control* branded its style as decidedly *old*. Examining the styles of and reactions to these two productions reveals how filmic representations of rock mythologies can renegotiate them, but also how cinema often services cultural nostalgia by reaffirming them.

### **From 'New Britain' optimism to post-punk nostalgia**

The film and television cycle described above is not the first to revisit the pre-Thatcher and Thatcher eras onscreen. The first popular British film to be retrospectively set in the 1980s was actually *Trainspotting*, made nearly ten years prior to *The Business*, and was followed by a few films set in the seventies and eighties such as *Velvet Goldmine* and *Billy Elliot*. These films are generally (and rightly) read in the context of late 1990s "New Britain" optimism, fuelled by the Blair government's attempts to shed Britain's international reputation as stuffy and conservative by re-branding it as a forward-thinking and free market society. This led to the development of labels like "Cool Britannia" and "New Britain" that redefined Britain, as Claire Monk writes, "in terms of youth, modernity, creativity, energy, optimism, and entrepreneurialism" (Monk 2000, 34). It also led to increased support in the development of cultural industries – like the film industry – that could promote these labels, including the inception in 2000 of the UK Film Council to promote British film production. Period films like *Trainspotting* and *Billy Elliot* reflect this optimism; their period settings tend to be more or less unconcerned with authenticity and are generally quite fluid. Furthermore, importance is

quite often placed on the transition to the present rather than on the past itself; for instance, Monk argues that although *Trainspotting* represents disenfranchised youth, the film's narrative of self-improvement reconciles subcultural dissent with Britain's newfound entrepreneurial spirit (Monk 2000, 285), while Mike Wayne argues that *Billy Elliot's* retro setting champions consumer culture's triumph over traditional class culture by drawing attention to cultural transformations (Wayne 2006, 287).

Thus, although they are set in the past, films like *Trainspotting* are not nostalgic. The more recent cycle of British films set in the late 70s and 80s, by contrast, has demonstrated a shift wherein the era itself has been foregrounded and lovingly recreated with an apparent authenticity that is more or less absent from earlier films. This has been at least partially influenced by nostalgic appropriations of the late seventies and especially the eighties that began to appear in fashion and media in the early 2000s, visible in everything from the BBC's pop culture mini-series *I Love the '70s* (2000) and *I Love the '80s* to recycled fashion trends and eighties band reunions. Post-punk in particular saw a substantial revival from 2002 onward not only in Britain but also internationally, evidenced by the emergence of American bands like The Killers, The Strokes and Interpol. This in turn sparked a renewed interest in original post-punk bands like Joy Division, encouraged by the emergence of YouTube in 2005 that resulted in a sudden influx of easily accessible performance footage and music videos. Simon Reynolds' assessment of the decade's "retromania" is excessive, ignoring questions of postmodernism and the self-conscious and often complex ways in which contemporary musicians as well as other artists, like filmmakers, have invoked these past styles. Yet, it is undeniable that the 2000s – especially the latter half – have been characterised by a tendency to look back rather than forward, and post-punk has especially been recovered for nostalgic consumption.

### **Manchester and Joy Division's 'aura of modernist severity'**

Before discussing Winterbottom's and Corbijn's films, it is necessary to establish precisely what has been recovered; both films draw heavily on culturally familiar mythologies of post-punk and especially of Joy Division. Joy Division's mythology is closely linked to that of their hometown, which Noel McLaughlin calls the UK's "most

mythologized popular musical city” outside London (McLaughlin 2012, 102). Like most of England’s northern cities, Manchester was hit hard by the effects of deindustrialisation throughout the 1970s and 80s, but the city was in part rejuvenated by an increasingly thriving music scene which produced several high-profile bands from the late 70s through the 90s including The Smiths, New Order, The Stone Roses and Oasis. Central to the music scene’s development was the focus of Winterbottom’s film, Tony Wilson, who is remembered for co-founding Factory Records, the label responsible for New Order and the Happy Mondays, and for founding the nightclub The Hacienda, which contributed to the global rise of rave culture. He is also known for signing Joy Division, whose 1979 album *Unknown Pleasures* was the first LP to be recorded with Factory. It is impossible to tell Tony Wilson’s story without exploring Joy Division, just as it is impossible to tell Joy Division’s tale without mention of their connection to Manchester’s music mythology.

Joy Division is considered a pioneer of post-punk, the experimental and introverted response to punk bands like The Sex Pistols and The Clash. The group’s dark, minimalist sound and pensive lyrics stood in stark contrast to punk and reflected the depressed atmosphere of the deindustrialised north. In his essay “Joy Division: Two Movies”, Simon Reynolds writes that frontman Ian Curtis “was worshipped at the time as a seer plugged into the currents of dread pervading post-punk Britain” (Reynolds 2009, 359). The group’s iconography also marked a departure from previous music movements; in the wake of the bold and transgressive fashions sported by preceding punk and glam rock artists, Joy Division opted for bland button-up shirts and trousers. McLaughlin notes that the “‘seriousness’ of Joy Division’s dress [...] subtly invoked the European, urban working-class of the inter-war years” (McLaughlin 2012, 110). The band’s entire iconography – including their name, taken from the term for prostitution divisions at Nazi concentration camps – evoked what Simon Reynolds calls an “aura of modernist severity” (Reynolds 2009, 363) that was accentuated by Curtis’ eventual suicide, transforming him into a heroic martyr.

Partially responsible for Joy Division’s aura was photographer Anton Corbijn, who before directing *Control* was known for his portraits of bands like Depeche Mode



and U2, and whose first British project was photographing Joy Division in a monochrome, high-contrast style that echoed the group's modernist aura by recalling early 20<sup>th</sup> century European cinemas like German Expressionism. Because Corbijn's images aesthetically reflected the band's solemn sound and look, they soon became a defining feature of Joy Division's popular identity. McLaughlin explains that the photos' "'noir' image became a trademark one of the band, establishing literally and metaphorically their urban, 'underground' credentials" (McLaughlin 2012, 104). Eight years after Curtis' death, Corbijn again cast his influence on the Joy Division aesthetic, directing the music video for the 1988 re-release of the band's single 'Atmosphere'. Again highly stylised and expressionist, the black and white video depicts cloaked monks that carry large photographs of Curtis across the frame, reinforcing already established elements of Joy Division's persona – Corbijn's visual style, the band's foreboding aura and Curtis' status as a martyr – for a new generation of listeners.

### **Deconstructing Joy Division: *24 Hour Party People***

Michael Winterbottom's *24 Hour Party People* engages with these myths as it charts the band's development. The film is not strictly about Joy Division; it follows Tony Wilson (Steve Coogan) from his work as a presenter on the Granada music show *So It Goes* (1976-7) to the closure of the Hacienda in 1997. However, the band features prominently in Winterbottom's self-conscious, mix-and-match ode to Manchester's early music scene. *Party People* combines actual stock footage, improvised scenes shot on DV and to-screen narration, and often comments on the inaccuracy of its own claims, making no attempt to hide anachronisms. This style has often been suggested to reflect both the ethos of Factory Records and of punk in general; Colin Kennedy writes in *Empire*, for instance, that DV's "don't-give-a-shit" quality makes it the perfect technology for punk (Kennedy 2002, 83). Like *Trainspotting* and *Billy Elliot*, many have read *Party People*'s upbeat and optimistic tone as cultural tourism that celebrates Britain's new identity as forward-thinking and cool. John Orr makes reference to its "gross laddishness" (Orr 2008, 16) while Reynolds calls it a "post-*Trainspotting*" film that is "relentlessly lively, as if convinced that the youth market will not stand for stillness or sombreness" (Reynolds 2009, 260). However, the film's self-criticality calls

its seeming optimism for creative entrepreneurialism into question, a tension identified by Joe Barton, who argues that while the film embraces Factory's "oppositional ingenuity", its celebration of Manchester still contributes to the "on-going culture-led regeneration of Manchester which ultimately acquiesces to the neo-liberal forces that Wilson originally attempted to resist" (Barton 2012, *Frames Cinema Journal*).

The tension Barton notes is partly due to the fact that *Party People* was released in 2002, somewhat after the initial optimism for "New Britain" had died down but before a genuinely nostalgic perspective of the era had set in. While the film features several cameos of people involved in the Manchester music scene and a roll call of British comedy talent that might be read as shameless cultural tourism, and while the film's punk aesthetic can be interpreted as a celebration of the ethos that inspired it, *24 Hour Party People* is still too distinct to be interpreted as touristic or nostalgic. The film both refrains from providing an easy bridge for an outsider into the world of late 1970s Manchester and resists indulging its assumed insider audience in nostalgia. In a scene near the end, for instance, Wilson identifies to the audience each cameo appearance featured throughout the film. For an outsider, this highlights the viewer's failure to recognise the cameos or their significance to Factory Records, while for an insider, it negates whatever nostalgic pride the viewer might have felt in being able to identify the cameos unaided. Like much of the film, the scene is challenging for both outsider and insider audiences. *24 Hour Party People*, then, stands apart from slightly earlier films like *Trainspotting* that projected a "cool" image of Britain for the rest of the world, as it makes very few attempts to appeal to a global audience.

Still, Winterbottom's film reflects the ideologies of a forward-thinking culture, promoting newness and originality and challenging its audience to rethink nostalgic impulses. Self-reflexive in its renegotiation of rock mythologies, the film explores how myths and legends have formed and blurs the distinction between myth and truth. In depictions of Ian Curtis and Joy Division it retains a critical distance, asking audiences to reflect on the representational style. This is evident in Winterbottom's decision to film certain sequences featuring Joy Division in black and white. Because the monochrome is sporadic – most of the film is in colour – it calls attention to its own

status as a defining element of the band's persona and reminds the audience that it is mere affectation. It is introduced when the band first performs live; here, black and white alternates with colour as Curtis repeats the lyrics "I feel it closing in" from the song 'Digital' (Joy Division 1978), giving the impression that the black and white is metaphorically "closing in" on Curtis. As the film progresses the monochrome recurs more frequently, suggesting an increasingly solidified mythological discourse. One montage explicitly comments on the culturally held definitions of Joy Division's monochrome trademark, intercutting between black and white shots of the band and archival colour footage of events during 1979's so-called "Winter of Discontent": a National Front demonstration, the Transport and General Workers' Union strike and the consequent petrol shortage, and waste collectors' and nurses' strikes. Narrated by Wilson as headline news, the montage invokes cultural myths that connect Joy Division's music and monochrome style to the socially and economically depressed North of England. By stating this connection so blatantly, however, the sequence also hints at the inevitable simplification of meaning that this mythologising process involves.

In his critique of *24 Hour Party People* and *Control*, Simon Reynolds argues that *Party People* fails to provide audiences with a nuanced representation of Ian Curtis, writing that "you get no real sense of this complicated, troubled figure" (Reynolds 2009, 359). However, what Reynolds interprets as a failure to accurately represent Curtis is actually the film's refusal to represent him as someone familiar with the mythology, like Reynolds, might expect. Winterbottom is more interested in exploring how Curtis has been "explained" than in explaining him. Thus the film's representations of Curtis fluctuate between irreverence and overt reverence, highlighting inconsistencies between the actual Curtis and the mythical one. This is exemplified in an exchange between Wilson and Curtis in Wilson's car: Curtis complains that he hates David Bowie for living into his thirties after claiming one should die at twenty-five, and reacts defensively when Wilson mentions Yeats, retorting that he has "never heard of him". Curtis appears less like a tragic poet than an immature, disgruntled youth. At the end of this colour sequence, the film stock switches to black and white as Curtis turns to look

out the car window in a close-up that resembles portraits of him, suggesting inconsistency between how he behaves and how he is commonly represented.

The film retains its critical distance in depicting Curtis' death, simultaneously emphasising the immediacy with which he is interpreted as martyr and self-consciously confronting the myth. Wilson receives the news that Curtis has committed suicide while interviewing a town crier in Chester, and his response is to request that the town crier announce Curtis' death. This formal announcement, which the audience subsequently sees broadcasting on Wilson's television, establishes Curtis' death as a culturally significant event, but the town crier, complete with handbell and period costume, keeps viewers at an ironic distance. The scene then cuts to Wilson in the present day, sitting in the editing room for the film, who asserts to the audience, "If you listen to Ian's music and you know that he killed himself then you probably imagine some very dark, depressive figure, a prophet of urban decay and alienation" (Winterbottom 2002). He explains that he, however, has many good memories of Curtis, and a colour sequence follows of Joy Division playfully performing 'Louie Louie' (Berry 1955). The myth that a more learned fan might take for granted is here explicitly stated only to be overturned by a sequence that challenges it, the colour footage emphasising the band's more playful side as a detail that is generally omitted from the mythology. By the time *Party People* reaches Curtis' funeral, his persona has so entirely been called into question that when Wilson contributes to the legend by describing him as "the musical equivalent of Che Guevara", it cannot be taken seriously. After the funeral scene, a title card featuring Curtis' name and years of birth and death appears over a clip of Anton Corbijn's music video for 'Atmosphere', breaking the dramatic flow of the diegesis. Because of Curtis' conflicted portrayal, the inclusion of this clip seems less commemorative than reflective, provoking the audience to consider the video's contribution to the Ian Curtis, and indeed the Joy Division, canon.

### **Reconstructing Joy Division: *Control***

It might be said that Winterbottom's thought-provoking representation of the rise and fall of Factory Records was appropriate in 2002 because the subject matter was not expected to be of widespread global interest. But when Anton Corbijn's *Control* was

released in 2007, the widespread appeal of a film about Joy Division had significantly increased. As such, *Control*, which follows Ian Curtis' (Sam Riley) life from Joy Division's formation in 1976 to his death in 1980, was made on the assumption that it could appeal to a global audience and a demographically broader one as well; the advent of post-punk revivalism meant that now not only would original Joy Division fans be interested in the subject matter but a younger demographic of retro fans could also be targeted. Unlike *24 Hour Party People*, which was conceived by Winterbottom alongside producer Andrew Eaton and was "based around their passion for rock music" (Hunt 2001, 24), *Control* was developed by producer Orian Williams, who then approached Anton Corbijn to direct (Dawson 2010). The decision to ask Corbijn, who played such a crucial role in influencing cultural memories of the group, makes it clear that the film was imagined as a *contribution* to the Joy Division mythology rather than a new perspective on it. In September 2005, Corbijn told *Screen International* that the film would be shot in black and white because "most people's memories of that era are in black and white. Joy Division specifically seems like a black-and-white band" (Mitchell 2005, 12). While Winterbottom addresses Joy Division's cultural status as "a black-and-white band" at a critical remove, Corbijn reveals himself here to be intent on upholding rather than critiquing cultural memory.

This is less in keeping with the anarchic Factory Records ethos, but it results in a film that is far more accessible than *24 Hour Party People* to a universally nostalgic audience, canonising Joy Division while avoiding more challenging questions on myth formation and on the legitimacy of authenticity. Unlike *24 Hour Party People*'s cut-and-paste visual style, *Control*'s aesthetic is consistent throughout, mainly comprising static and slow tracking shots and expressionistic visual imagery. Many critics have likened the style to European art movements of the 1950s and 1960s; John Orr, for instance, notes the influences of Ingmar Bergman, Robert Bresson and British New Wave filmmakers (Orr 2008). Of course, these influences are visible in the film primarily because they inspired Corbijn's stark, modernist photographs of the band. One shot particularly reminiscent of a still photograph is seen when the band drive to a gig in London and Curtis is pictured looking out of the car window with the setting sun piercing the frame behind him. It closely resembles the car window shot in *24 Hour*

*Party People*, but here the shot is consistent with the material that comes before it. Thus, while the switch to black and white in *24 Hour Party People* signals a tension between the mythic image of Curtis and his actual persona, the two remain synonymous throughout *Control*.

The film's poetic cinematography is often accompanied by the use of Curtis' lyrics as non-diegetic narration. Sam Riley speaks the lyrics rather than singing them, emphasising the significance of the lyrics over the music and likening them to poetry. Alongside the cinematography, this device stresses Curtis' status as a poet. This is further highlighted by a sequence in which Curtis quotes Wordsworth from memory while staring longingly out of a window. In light of Sean Harris' Curtis in *24 Hour Party People*, who has never heard of Yeats, the inclusion of this particular scene is significant, a seemingly deliberate recovery of Curtis' identity as poetic genius that was called into question in *Party People*. The spoken lyrics are used throughout the film to comment on pivotal events in Curtis' life, reducing their significance to his personal trials. Simon Reynolds considers this to be the film's failing, arguing that Joy Division's music is explained from a "reductive perspective: biography", when in fact Curtis' lyrics were "existential rather than autobiographical" (Reynolds 2009, 362-3). Reynolds interprets this decision, however, as a failing of the film medium, writing that "a full-length movie can't rely on the power of pure imagery the way a video can. Corbijn was always going to have to try to 'explain' Joy Division" (Reynolds 2009, 362). Yet, Corbijn's video for 'Atmosphere' explained Joy Division in much the same way, sanctifying Curtis and redefining the song as his elegy, and Reynolds himself notes that Curtis' identity as an enigmatic seer developed even before his death. The film's explanation for Joy Division's music is not a failing of the film medium at all, but a conscious decision to sustain the already extant legend of Curtis as tortured poetic genius.

While Curtis is portrayed as a tragic hero, other factors that influenced Joy Division's success are nearly absent. Other band members' contributions and the efforts of those like Tony Wilson are mostly ignored, as are environmental influences. The other members of Joy Division, Bernard Sumner (James Anthony Pearson), Peter Hook

(Joe Anderson) and Stephen Morris (Harry Treadaway), are depicted as comparatively naïve and simple when set against the more profound Curtis. In an interview sequence, Morris responds that the most beautiful thing he has ever seen is a drum kit, Sumner responds to the question of believing in love by saying he believes in “pure sex” and Hook responds to the same question by stating that “if somebody kicked my car, I’d be as upset as if they kicked my girlfriend”. These vapid responses are juxtaposed with Curtis’ thoughtful response to the question of whether or not Joy Division’s music is beautiful: “Some of it, yeah, but some of it’s not meant to be beautiful”. A similar approach is taken in representing Tony Wilson (Craig Parkinson). If in *24 Hour Party People* Tony Wilson is ironic, clever and intuitive, in *Control*, he is not afforded the same credit. In *Party People*’s depiction of the Factory legend of Wilson signing a contract for Joy Division in blood, Wilson suggests the idea, ironically remarking that “in the words of the great prophet, ‘I dares do owt’”. In *Control*’s interpretation of the same legend, Wilson is portrayed as desperate for Joy Division’s talent, taking the signing seriously while the others laugh, and as the subject of mockery, falling over at the end of the sequence. Attributing little intellectual credit to Wilson, or indeed to Joy Division’s other musicians, sharpens the focus on Curtis as sole creative genius and makes him more a tragic martyr than if he had merely played a contributing role.

While Curtis is represented as the heart and soul of Joy Division, Manchester is noticeably absent from the film. Outdoor scenes occur mostly near Curtis’ home in Macclesfield or in other cities and towns to which he travels, while those sequences based on gigs and events known to have occurred in Manchester offer little indication of their location. In one sequence, Tony Wilson attempts to convince Joy Division to sign with Factory by saying that “we both fly the flag for the republic of Manchester”, to which Curtis points out that he is a royalist, making clear that the film has little interest in connecting the Joy Division sound, or indeed the band’s success, to the fledgling music scene in deindustrialised Manchester. It is entirely attributed in the film, then, to Curtis’ genius. Furthermore, while the high-contrast monochrome helps to evoke the bleakness of industrial decay and the drabness of the terraced homes that line Curtis’ street, the aesthetic is one of picturesque bleakness rather than a true evocation of destitution. It is destitution captured through the lens of nostalgic gloss, both beautiful

in its modernist starkness and “cool” in its recollection of Joy Division’s monochrome iconography.

Despite the film’s mythic qualities, Corbijn aims primarily for realism. The actors who play Joy Division perform the songs themselves, with Sam Riley’s voice replacing Curtis’, and indeed, of the twelve Joy Division songs that appear throughout the film, only three are original tracks. Noel McLaughlin expresses his surprise that these live performances were so well-received, writing that “generally fans are resistant to imitations of originals” (McLaughlin 2012, 108). Yet, although they are imitations, what makes them appealing is the suspension of disbelief they enable viewers, who can accept the actors as the real musicians performing live. This is aided by the scenes’ remarkable likeness to actual footage available to view on YouTube. The live performances reflect the film’s general objective to avoid acknowledgement of its own status as representation. This in turn naturalises the myth the film represents; the black and white feels correct and accurate, as does Ian Curtis’ identity as martyr and tragic hero. When Debbie Curtis (Samantha Morton) discovers Ian’s body in the film’s final scene, the soundtrack seamlessly plays ‘Atmosphere’. Whereas the inclusion of the music video clip in *Party People* highlights how the song has been canonised as Curtis’ elegy, in *Control* this connotation is naturalised by cuing an emotional response that is consistent with the song’s already canonised meaning.

### **“Shadowplay”: Rebranding Joy Division**

*Control*, then, rebuilds the myth that was deconstructed five years prior, restoring its credibility for consumption in a cultural climate immersed in eighties nostalgia and post-punk revivalism. In this light, the two films’ marketing campaigns are interesting to compare. The British campaign for *24 Hour Party People* was ironically obtuse and self-reflexive, so much so that it was redesigned for the film’s American release. The UK poster for *Party People* features a series of three images in succession: one of Danny Cunningham as Happy Mondays frontman Shaun Ryder, one of Sean Harris as Ian Curtis and one of Steve Coogan as Tony Wilson. The image of Shaun Ryder is tinted pink and titled “poet”; the image of Ian Curtis is monochrome and titled “genius”; the image of Tony Wilson is in colour and titled “twat”. Shaun Ryder and Ian Curtis are



labelled according to their mythic identities, but labelling Tony Wilson as a “twat” playfully pokes fun at these myths. The poster makes little attempt to establish itself as film promotion; there are no credits and the title appears in a miniscule font in the bottom corner, discouraging wide audience appeal and relying on the viewer’s prior knowledge of Factory mythology to make sense of it. The UK trailer is also self-reflexive; Steve Coogan narrates it, explaining that it is the trailer for the film and listing conventions as they appear: “Name of the film company, director’s credit, the bloke who plays me, title graphic: *24 Hour Party People*, release date, silly bit at the end, website and credit block that nobody ever reads”. By drawing attention to itself as a commodity, the trailer is able to advertise the film as a product that will appeal to Factory fans while simultaneously ridiculing film marketing.

In this way, *Party People*’s promotional materials work somewhat similarly to *Trainspotting*’s as discussed by Karen Lury. Lury argues that *Trainspotting*’s excessive marketing campaign, which involved branding each of its characters and releasing an overabundance of posters and t-shirts in conjunction with the film’s release, “was made to appeal to the youth of a global, hybrid culture, where the ambivalent play, negotiation and celebration of the commodity was unavoidable in the making and understanding of identity” (Lury 2000, 107). *24 Hour Party People*’s campaign functions similarly, playfully exploiting its status as a potential nostalgic product. However, *Trainspotting*’s campaign was made to appeal to *global* youth and ironises global consumer culture, making it easily accessible to a wide audience. *24 Hour Party People*’s campaign addresses a niche group and is therefore more challenging than *Trainspotting*’s campaign. It assumes familiarity with its references and addresses its target audience with the same challenging irony found in the film itself, refusing to appeal to nostalgia and instead poking fun at the mythologies with which they are assumed to be familiar. The US campaign features a more conventional poster and trailer in a clear attempt to widen appeal, but its failure to reflect the tone of the film evidences *Party People*’s innate lack of appeal to a global, mainstream audience.

The *Control* marketing campaign, on the other hand, followed a similar format worldwide. While the layout varies, nearly every poster for *Control* uses the same black

and white image of Sam Riley as Curtis, staring off pensively with his grey overcoat upturned and a cigarette hanging loosely from his mouth. The image replicates iconic photographs of the real Curtis, who was often pictured smoking in a grey overcoat. Unlike the UK poster for *24 Hour Party People*, which pokes fun at nostalgic impulses, the British and international posters for *Control* appeal to those same impulses by remaining consistent with Joy Division discourse. The UK trailer is similarly consistent, stressing Joy Division's canonical status by announcing in intertitles that "This is the sound of passion, of beauty that changed the face of music". Both trailer and posters for the UK and US campaigns include critical quotes such as "Superb", "Extraordinary" and "The coolest British movie of 2007", giving the impression of a film that, like the band and iconography that inspired it, is both artistic and "cool". Interestingly, the only element of the campaign which is not consistent with Joy Division discourse is the pink text used in the posters, which is not commonly associated with the band. However, pink is, in combination with monochrome, associated with punk bands like The Clash and with late seventies and eighties fashion more generally. The pink therefore widens the film's retro appeal, targeting those who may not recognise Joy Division iconography. These promotional materials for *Control* emphasised the film's value as a nostalgic product by replicating Joy Division and eighties iconography, in contrast with *Party People*'s deliberate disavowal of product marketing.

### **Manufactured nostalgias: Responding to *24 Hour Party People* and *Control***

It is clear, then, that *Control* was marketed to appeal to a less regionally or demographically specific and more nostalgically-inclined audience than was *24 Hour Party People*. The question of reception remains, however: did responses to *Control* suggest a more nostalgic engagement with post-punk mythology than those to *24 Hour Party People*? Analysis of critical reviews and user reviews on *The Internet Movie Database (IMDb)* suggest that this was, more or less, the case. Both were critical successes upon their release, but what is praised in *24 Hour Party People* differs from what is praised in *Control*. Critical reviews of *Party People* tend to emphasise the film's originality and vibrancy, simultaneously hailing it as a departure from typical nostalgic rock biopics. Roger Ebert, for instance, argues that the film "works so well because it

evokes genuine, not manufactured, nostalgia” (Ebert 2002). Upon its release, then, *Party People* was often praised for its newness, for confounding the expectations of a typical rock biopic and avoiding “manufactured” nostalgia. *IMDb* user reviews posted in the first year after the film’s release suggest that its general audience similarly embraced its irreverence. Reviewers tend to celebrate the film’s inaccuracies as tributes to Factory’s anarchic attitude – one writes, “Does it tell the truth? Who cares?” (phiggins 2002) – and the distortion of myth and truth is generally regarded as one of the film’s strongest points. This is not to say that nostalgia is absent from user reviews; several echo one user’s claim that “if you loved these bands, these people, the scenes, Factory, the Hacienda and even Tony Wilson, then this is a must-see for you” (zirk 2002). But as the preceding quote exemplifies, expressions of nostalgia are usually phrased in the film’s playful style, suggesting that audiences did not take their own nostalgia very seriously.

*Control* provoked a more reverently nostalgic reaction from both critics and general viewers on *IMDb*. Several critical reviews of *Control* feature hyperbolic descriptions of Curtis’ and Joy Division’s talent and legendary status, with Anthony Quinn writing that “I was 15, and I’d never seen anything quite like Joy Division. I still haven’t” (Quinn 2007). The film is often hailed for its nostalgic recreation of the past, and for accurately representing Joy Division as they exist in rock mythology. In *The Guardian* Peter Bradshaw writes, “It all looked so vividly real to my fortysomething eye that, frankly, I thought I’d died and gone to Q-magazine-reading 50-quid bloke heaven” (Bradshaw 2007). *IMDb* reviews posted in the first two years after its release suggest a similarly reverential reaction among general audiences. One reviewer writes, for instance, that Curtis’ suicide “not only ended his promising young life but also the dreams of a generation” (Schumann 2007). Interestingly, while in 2002 *Party People* was praised for blurring the distinction between myth and reality, in 2007 several *IMDb* users praise *Control*’s discursive consistency. For instance, one user writes,

No, the film does not show the laughs and good times the band had, but this is in keeping with all of Joy Division's work. [...] Almost everything they issued was in stark black and white; their imagery was overwhelmingly bleak and funereal; [...] this film simply continues that project. (Gormley00 2007)

Implicit in this argument is the assumption that certain viewers will react critically to the film's sombre tone after having seen *Party People*, but justifies it on the basis of its mythic accuracy, on its success in continuing Joy Division's "project".

Yet, *Control* was also often judged to do the opposite, to resist romanticising Ian Curtis. Several critics and general viewers praise the film for emphasising what Steve Ramos calls Curtis' "average-Joe moments" rather than depicting him as a typical rock star (Ramos 2007). This propensity to interpret *Control* as a realistic representation of Ian Curtis may be elucidated by Damon Wise's verdict on the film in *Empire*: "A film [...] that says more about the fragility of the soul than any montage of ticket sales and "sold out" signs could ever muster" (Wise 2007, 51). What audiences interpreted as a resistance to mythologise Curtis might actually have been the film's lack of expected rock biopic conventions. However, these are conventions of rock biopics and not of Joy Division mythology, which was deliberately unglamorous and decidedly ordinary. What these responses actually suggest is the film's success in encouraging viewers to regard the legend as truth, to accept it as the appropriate mode of representation rather than to question its semantic system, as does *Party People*.

What is also interesting about *IMDb* user responses to *24 Hour Party People* in relation to those to *Control* is the general consensus on the films' appeal, which despite their equally positive ratings, differs substantially. While a select few users suggest that *Party People*'s eclectic style and humorous tone will appeal to audiences unfamiliar with its subject matter, an overwhelming majority of reviewers argue that the film will not appeal to an outsider audience. *Control*, by contrast, is almost unanimously agreed to have universal appeal, with one user recommending it "not only to all music-lovers over the world but also to those who like to be moved by true feelings and inner conflicts" (sebbe-9 2007). The film's emphasis on universality and on mythology over regional and cultural specificity evidently succeeded in widening the appeal of what had been considered a distinctive subject matter in 2002. It is also clear, from the above user's comment as well as in other reviews, that in 2007 a film about Joy Division was thought to appeal to a wider audience of "music-lovers over the world", suggesting a broader interest in post-punk as a genre.

### **“Remember when we were young”? Post-punk for a post-post-punk generation**

Despite being released only five years apart, *24 Hour Party People* and *Control* were produced, marketed and viewed in differing cultural climates. *Party People* was released in the wake of New Britain optimism, when the initial hype and enthusiasm of “Cool Britannia” had died down and there were signs of an increasingly nostalgic climate, but when enthusiasm for Britain’s present and future had not altogether been replaced by what Reynolds calls the “retromania” of the 2000s. The stylistic and marketing decisions for *Party People* suggest that it was targeted at a small audience assumed to delight in a film that would “[piss] all over the floor with the facts” (TCh) and ironically renegotiate Manchester history and mythology. However, by the time of *Control*’s release in 2007, nostalgic practices were visible everywhere: in heavily retro-influenced fashions, in an increasing number of stylistically nostalgic films set in Britain’s recent past, and in revivals of past music genres like post-punk that all triggered renewed interest in now “retro” bands like Joy Division. The style and marketing for *Control* suggest that the film had aspirations to appeal to this wider and more nostalgic demographic, some of whom might remember Joy Division and some of whom might not, but most of whom would expect an authentic and reverent representation.

In an article on *Control*, *This is England* and the documentary *Joe Strummer: The Future is Unwritten*, Mark Sinker suggests that the nostalgia in *Control* is rooted in a longing for the vitality of music movements before they were seemingly absorbed by globalised consumer culture. These films evoke, for Sinker, “nostalgia for a time when the collective energy of pop wasn’t quite yet commodified, before all was simply gathered up before it begins and fed back at us, any potential movement on our part circumscribed” (Sinker 2007-8, 28). However, the nostalgia Sinker describes was actually more frequently expressed in *IMDb* responses to *24 Hour Party People* than it was in responses to *Control*. One reviewer, for instance, writes that the contemporary music industry “seems to be mainly consumed with the capital gain derived from manufactured acts. This film is here to remind us of a time and a place when music meant something more” (domenicarose 2003). This might be because nostalgia for non-commercialised music genres requires at least some knowledge, if not memory, of their

subversive meaning, and might more typically have been felt by *Party People*'s niche audience of Factory fans.

The nostalgia expressed in *Control*, I would argue, is less historically specific. Unlike *Party People*, it did not incite very much nostalgia among viewers for post-punk's dissidence. It was instead enjoyed for being both unequivocally timely, preserving Joy Division iconography in a nostalgic bubble, and timeless, locating the music's significance in Curtis' 'genius' rather than in its cultural specificity and subversive influence. So while the film might have provoked occasional reactions, amongst some Factory fans, of longing for what they considered to be less commodified music genres, *Control* was not ultimately produced for them. The film succeeded precisely because it is *not* for original post-punk fans, but rather for a post-post-punk generation whose interest in the subject relates more to its retro value than to involvement in any specific cultural history. In the service of nostalgia for an idealised era, the film lauds Joy Division not for being fresh and new, but for being old.

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- Billy Elliot*. Dir. Stephen Daldry. Perf. Jamie Bell, Jean Heywood, Gary Lewis, Julie Walters. Working Title, 2000. Film.
- Bloody Sunday*. Dir. Paul Greengrass. Perf. James Nesbitt, Allan Gildea, Gerard Crossan, Mary Moulds. Bórd Scannán na hÉireann, 2002. Film.
- The Boat that Rocked*. Dir. Richard Curtis. Perf. Philip Seymour Hoffman, Bill Nighy, Rhys Ifans, Nick Frost, Kenneth Branagh. Working Title, 2009. Film.
- Boogie Nights*. Dir. Paul Thomas Anderson. Perf. Luis Guzmán, Burt Reynolds, Julianne Moore. New Line Cinema, 1997. Film.
- Brassed Off*. Dir. Mark Herman. Perf. Pete Postlethwaite, Tara Fitzgerald, Ewan McGregor, Stephen Tompkinson. Channel Four Films, 1996. Film.
- Bread*. Cr. Carla Lane. British Broadcasting Corporation. 1986-91. Television.
- Bridget Jones' Diary*. Dir. Sharon Maguire. Perf. Renée Zellweger, Colin Firth, Hugh Grant. Working Title Films, 2001. Film.
- The Business*. Dir. Nick Love. Perf. Danny Dyer, Tamer Hassan, Geoff Bell, Georgina Chapman. Vertigo Films, 2005. Film.
- Cass*. Dir. Jon S. Baird. Perf. Nonso Anozie, Gavin Brocker, Leo Gregory, Natalie Press. Cass Films, 2008. Film.
- The Cement Garden*. Dir. Andrew Birkin. Perf. Charlotte Gainsbourg, Andrew Robertson, Alice Coulthard. Laurentic Film Productions, 1993. Film.
- Chariots of Fire*. Dir. Hugh Hudson. Perf. Nicholas Farrell, Nigel Havers, Ian Charleson, Ben Cross. Twentieth Century-Fox, 1981. Film.
- A Child's Christmases in Wales*. Dir. Christine Gernon. Writ. Mark Watson. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 2009. Television single drama.
- Chinatown*. Dir. Roman Polanski. Perf. Jack Nicholson, Faye Dunaway, John Huston. Paramount Pictures, 1974. Film.
- Clubbed*. Dir. Neil Thompson. Perf. Mel Raido, Colin Salmon, Shaun Parkes, Scot Williams, Maxine Peake. Formosa Films, 2008. Film.
- Comrades*. Dir. Bill Douglas. Perf. Keith Allen, Dave Atkins, Stephen Bateman. Skreba Films, 1986. Film.
- Control*. Dir. Anton Corbijn. Perf. Sam Riley, Samantha Morton, Craig Parkinson. 3 Dogs and a Pony, 2007. Film.

- The Criminal*. Dir. Joseph Losey. Perf. Stanley Baker, Sam Wanamaker, Grégoire Aslan, Margit Saad. Merton Park Studios, 1960. Film.
- Dance with a Stranger*. Dir. Mike Newell. Perf. Miranda Richardson, Rupert Everett, Ian Holm. First Film Company, 1985. Film.
- Dances with Wolves*. Dir. Kevin Costner. Perf. Kevin Costner, Mary McDonnell, Graham Greene. Majestic Films International, 1990. Film.
- Dead Man's Shoes*. Dir. Shane Meadows. Perf. Paddy Considine, Gary Stretch, Toby Kebbell. Warp Films, 2004. Film.
- Dempsey and Makepeace*. Cr. Tony Wharmby. Independent Television. UK. 1985-6. Television.
- Dirty Dancing*. Dir. Emile Ardolino. Perf. Patrick Swayze, Jennifer Grey, Jerry Orbach. Great American Films, 1987. Film.
- Distant Voices, Still Lives*. Dir. Terence Davies. Perf. Freda Dowie, Pete Postlethwaite, Angela Walsh, Dean Williams. British Film Institute, 1988. Film.
- Dixon of Dock Green*. Cr. Ted Willis. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 1955-76. Television.
- Doctor Who*. Cr. Sydney Newman. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 1963-89. Television.
- Doctor Who*. Dir. Geoffrey Sax. Writ. Matthew Jacobs. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 1996. Television single drama.
- Doctor Who*. Prod. Russell T. Davies and Julie Gardner. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 2005-present. Television.
- Donnie Darko*. Dir. Richard Kelly. Perf. Jake Gyllenhaal, Jena Malone, Mary McDonnell. Adam Fields Productions, 2001. Film.
- Downton Abbey*. Cr. Julian Fellowes. Independent Television. 2010-present. Television.
- The Dukes of Hazzard*. Dir. Jay Chandrasekhar. Perf. Johnny Knoxville, Seann William Scott, Jessica Simpson. Warner Bros., 2005. Film.
- Eagle vs Shark*. Dir. Taika Waititi. Perf. Loren Taylor, Jemaine Clement, Joel Tobeck. New Zealand Film Commission, 2007. Film.
- East is East*. Dir. Damien O'Donnell. Perf. Om Puri, Linda Bassett, Jordan Routledge, Archie Panjabi. Assassin Films, 1999. Film.



- An Education*. Dir. Lone Scherfig. Perf. Carey Mulligan, Peter Sarsgaard, Alfred Molina. Finola Dwyer Productions, 2009. Film.
- The English Patient*. Dir. Anthony Minghella. Ralph Fiennes, Juliette Binoche, Willem Dafoe, Kristin Scott Thomas. Tiger Moth Productions, 1996. Film.
- An Englishman in New York*. Dir. Richard Laxton. Perf. John Hurt, Denis O'Hare, Jonathan Tucker, Cynthia Nixon. Leopard Drama, 2009. Film.
- The Falklands Play*. Dir. Michael Samuels. Writ. Ian Curteis. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 2002. Television.
- Favourite Things*. Prod. Michael Kerr. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 1985-7. Television.
- Fifty Dead Men Walking*. Dir. Kari Skogland. Perf. Jim Sturgess, Ben Kingsley, Kevin Zegers, Natalie Press. Future Films, 2008. Film.
- The Firm*. Dir. Nick Love. Perf. Paul Anderson, Calum MacNab, Daniel Mays, Doug Allen. Vertigo Films, 2009. Film.
- First Blood*. Dir. Ted Kotcheff. Perf. Sylvester Stallone, Richard Crenna, Brian Dennehy. Anabasis N.V., 1982. Film.
- The Football Factory*. Dir. Nick Love. Perf. Danny Dyer, Frank Harper, Tamer Hassan. Vertigo Films, 2004. Film.
- Footloose*. Dir. Craig Brewer. Perf. Kenny Wormald, Julianne Hough, Dennis Quaid, Andie MacDowell. Paramount Pictures, 2011. Film.
- Four Weddings and a Funeral*. Dir. Richard Curtis. Perf. Hugh Grant, Andie MacDowell, James Fleet. Working Title Films, 1994. Film.
- Freaks and Geeks*. Cr. Paul Feig. National Broadcasting Company. USA. 1999-2000. Television.
- The Full Monty*. Dir. Peter Cattaneo. Perf. Robert Carlyle, Mark Addy, William Snape. Redwave Films, 1997. Film.
- Get Carter*. Dir. Mike Hodges. Perf. Michael Caine, Ian Hendry, Britt Ekland. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer British Studios, 1971. Film.
- Ghost World*. Dir. Terry Zwigoff. Perf. Thora Birch, Scarlett Johansson, Steve Buscemi. Mr. Mudd, 2001. Film.

- Good Vibrations*. Dir. Lisa Barros D'Sa and Glenn Leyburn. Perf. Jodie Whittaker, Richard Dormer, Liam Cunningham. Revolution Films, 2012. Film.
- Goodbye Charlie Bright*. Dir. Nick Love. Perf. Paul Nicholls, Roland Manookian, Phil Daniels. Bonaparte Films, 2001. Film.
- Goodfellas*. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Perf. Robert De Niro, Ray Liotta, Joe Pesci. Warner Bros., 1990. Film.
- The Graduate*. Dir. Mike Nichols. Perf. Dustin Hoffman, Anne Bancroft, Katharine Ross. Lawrence Turman, 1967. Film.
- Grease*. Dir. Randal Kleiser. Perf. John Travolta, Olivia Newton-John, Stockard Channing. Paramount Pictures, 1978. Film.
- Green Street*. Dir. Lexi Alexander. Perf. Elijah Wood, Charlie Hunnam, Claire Forlani. Baker Street, 2005. Film.
- Grosse Pointe Blank*. Dir. George Armitage. Perf. John Cusack, Minnie Driver, Alan Arkin, Dan Aykroyd. Hollywood Pictures, 1997. Film.
- La haine*. Dir. Mathieu Kassovitz. Perf. Vincent Cassel, Hubert Koundé, Saïd Taghmaoui. Les Productions Lazennec, 1995. Film.
- A Handful of Dust*. Dir. Charles Sturridge. Perf. James Wilby, Kristin Scott Thomas, Rupert Graves. Compact Yellowbill, 1988. Film.
- Harold and Maude*. Dir. Hal Ashby. Perf. Ruth Gordon, Bud Cort, Vivian Pickles. Mildred Lewis and Colin Higgins Productions, 1971. Film.
- Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Dir. Chris Columbus. Perf. Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson. Warner Bros. and Heyday Films, 2001. Film.
- Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. Dir. Chris Columbus. Perf. Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson. Warner Bros. and Heyday Films, 2002. Film.
- Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Dir. Alfonso Cuarón. Perf. Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson. Warner Bros. and Heyday Films, 2004. Film.
- Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Dir. Mike Newell. Perf. Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson. Warner Bros. and Heyday Films, 2005. Film.
- Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Dir. David Yates. Perf. Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson. Warner Bros. and Heyday Films, 2007. Film.

- Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. Dir. David Yates. Perf. Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson. Warner Bros. and Heyday Films, 2009. Film.
- Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1*. Dir. David Yates. Perf. Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson. Warner Bros. and Heyday Films, 2010. Film.
- Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2*. Dir. David Yates. Perf. Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson. Warner Bros. and Heyday Films, 2011. Film.
- Hell is a City*. Dir. Val Guest. Perf. Stanley Baker, John Crawford, Donald Pleasence. Hammer Film Productions, 1960. Film.
- Hideous Kinky*. Dir. Gillies MacKinnon. Perf. Kate Winslet, Bella Riza, Saïd Taghmaoui. Greenpoint Films, 1999. Film.
- High Fidelity*. Dir. Stephen Frears. Perf. John Cusack, Iben Hjejle, Todd Louiso, Jack Black. Working Title, 2000. Film.
- The History Boys*. Dir. Nicholas Hytner. Perf. Richard Griffiths, Frances de la Tour, Clive Merrison. National Theatre, 2006. Film.
- Hunger*. Dir. Steve McQueen. Perf. Michael Fassbender, Brian Milligan, Liam Cunningham. Film4 Productions, 2008. Film.
- I Love the '80s*. Prod. Rebecca Papworth. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 2001. Television.
- The Informers*. Dir. Gregor Jordan. Perf. Billy Bob Thornton, Kim Basinger, Winona Ryder, Mickey Rourke. Senator Entertainment, 2008. Film.
- The Iron Lady*. Dir. Phyllida Lloyd. Perf. Meryl Streep, Jim Broadbent, Olivia Colman. Pathé, 2011. Film.
- Is Anybody There?*. Dir. John Crowley. Perf. Michael Caine, Bill Milner, Anne-Marie Duff, David Morrissey. Heyday Films, 2008. Film.
- It's a Casual Life*. Dir. Jon S Baird. Perf. Richard Driscoll, Terry Kiely, Mark Brighton. Logie Pictures, 2008. Short film.
- Joe Strummer: The Future is Unwritten*. Dir. Julien Temple. Parallel Film Productions, 2007. Documentary film.
- Juno*. Dir. Jason Reitman. Perf. Ellen Page, Michael Cera, Jennifer Garner. Mandate Pictures, 2007. Film.

- Killing Bono*. Dir. Nick Hamm. Perf. Ben Barnes, Robert Sheehan, Krysten Ritter. Northern Ireland Screen, 2011. Film.
- Knight Rider*. Cr. Glen A. Larson. National Broadcasting Company. US. 1982-6. Television.
- The Last King of Scotland*. Dir. Kevin Macdonald. Perf. James McAvoy, Forest Whitaker, Gillian Anderson. DNA Films, 2006. Film.
- Legally Blonde*. Dir. Robert Luketic. Perf. Reese Witherspoon, Luke Wilson, Selma Blair. Marc Platt Productions, 2001. Film.
- Let the Right One In*. Dir. Tomas Alfredson. Perf. Kåre Hedebrant, Lina Leandersson, Per Ragnar. EFTI, 2008. Film.
- Life on Mars*. Cr. Matthew Graham, Tony Jordan, Ashley Pharoah. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 2006-7. Television.
- The Line of Beauty*. Dir. Saul Dibb. Writ. Andrew Davies and Alan Hollinghurst. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 2006. Television mini-series.
- The Long Day Closes*. Dir. Terence Davies. Perf. Marjorie Yates, Leigh McCormack, Anthony Watson. British Film Institute, 1992. Film.
- The Making of the Iron Lady*. Prod. Michael Cockerell. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 2008. Television documentary.
- Margaret*. Dir. James Kent. Writ. Richard Cottan. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 2009. Television single drama.
- Margaret Thatcher: The Long Walk to Finchley*. Dir. Niall MacCormick. Writ. Tony Saint. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 2008. Television single drama.
- The Matrix*. Dir. Andy and Lana Wachowski. Perf. Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne, Carrie-Anne Moss. Silver Pictures, 1999. Film.
- Maurice*. Dir. James Ivory. Perf. James Wilby, Hugh Grant, Rupert Graves, Denholm Elliott. Merchant Ivory Productions, 1987. Film.
- Mean Streets*. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Perf. Robert De Niro, Harvey Keitel, David Proval. Taplin-Perry-Scorsese Productions, 1973. Film.
- Miami Vice*. Cr. Anthony Yerkovich. National Broadcasting Company. USA. 1984-90. Television.

- Miami Vice*. Dir. Michael Mann. Perf. Colin Farrell, Jamie Foxx, Li Gong. Universal Pictures, 2006. Film.
- Micro Men*. Dir. Saul Metzstein. Writ. Tony Saint. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 2009. Television single drama.
- Minder*. Cr. Leon Griffiths. Independent Television. UK. 1979-94. Television.
- Moonlighting*. Cr. Glenn Gordon Caron. American Broadcasting Company. USA. 1985-9. Television.
- My Beautiful Laundrette*. Dir. Stephen Frears. Perf. Saeed Jaffrey, Roshan Seth, Daniel Day-Lewis. Working Title, 1985. Film.
- The Naked Civil Servant*. Dir. Jack Gold. Writ. Quentin Crisp and Philip Mackie. Independent Television. UK. 1975. Television single drama.
- Never Let Me Go*. Dir. Mark Romanek. Perf. Carey Mulligan, Keira Knightley, Andrew Garfield. DNA Films, 2010. Film.
- Notting Hill*. Dir. Roger Michell. Perf. Hugh Grant, Julia Roberts, Richard McCabe. Working Title, 1999. Film.
- Nowhere Boy*. Dir. Sam Taylor-Johnson. Perf. Aaron Johnson, Kristin Scott Thomas, Anne-Marie Duff. Ecosse Films, 2009. Film.
- The Other Boleyn Girl*. Dir. Justin Chadwick. Perf. Natalie Portman, Scarlett Johansson, Eric Bana. Scott Rudin Productions, 2008. Film.
- Outlaw*. Dir. Nick Love. Perf. Sean Bean, Danny Dyer, Bob Hoskins, Rupert Friend. Vertigo Films, 2007. Film.
- Outside Bet*. Dir. Sacha Bennett. Perf. Bob Hoskins, Phil Davis, Jenny Agutter, Kate Magowan. Gateway Films, 2012. Film.
- The Outsiders*. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Perf. C. Thomas Howell, Matt Dillon, Ralph Macchio, Patrick Swayze. Zoetrope Studios, 1983. Film.
- The Party's Over: How the West Went Bust*. Prod. John Thynne. Pres. Robert Peston. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 2011. Television documentary mini-series.
- Peaky Blinders*. Cr. Steven Knight. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 2013-present. Television.

- The Playboys*. Dir. Gillies MacKinnon. Perf. Albert Finney, Aidan Quinn, Robin Wright. Green Umbrella, 1992. Film.
- The Ploughman's Lunch*. Dir. Richard Eyre. Perf. Jonathan Pryce, Tim Curry, Rosemary Harris. Goldcrest Films, 1983. Film.
- Portillo on Thatcher*. Pres. Michael Portillo. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 2008. Television documentary.
- Pride*. Dir. Matthew Warchus. Perf. Bill Nighy, Imelda Staunton, Dominic West, Paddy Considine. BBC Films, 2014. Film.
- Pride and Prejudice*. Dir. Simon Langton. Writ. Andrew Davies. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 1995. Television mini-series.
- Quadrophenia*. Dir. Franc Roddam. Perf. Phil Daniels, Leslie Ash, Philip Davis. The Who Films, 1979. Film.
- Quartet*. Dir. Dustin Hoffman. Perf. Maggie Smith, Billy Connolly, Pauline Collins, Tom Courtenay. Headline Pictures, 2012. Film.
- The Queen*. Dir. Stephen Frears. Perf. Helen Mirren, Michael Sheen, James Cromwell. Scott Rudin Productions, 2006. Film.
- Radio On*. Dir. Christopher Petit. Perf. David Beames, Lisa Kreuzer, Sandy Ratcliff. British Film Institute/ Road Movies Filmproduktion, 1979. Film.
- Red Riding: In the Year of Our Lord 1974*. Dir. Julian Jarrold. Writ. Tony Grisoni. Channel Four Film. UK. 2009. Television single drama within trilogy.
- Red Riding: In the Year of Our Lord 1980*. Dir. James Marsh. Writ. Tony Grisoni. Channel Four Film. UK. 2009. Television single drama within trilogy.
- Red Riding: In the Year of Our Lord 1983*. Dir. Anand Tucker. Writ. Tony Grisoni. Channel Four Film. UK. 2009. Television single drama within trilogy.
- Revenge of the Nerds*. Dir. Jeff Kanew. Perf. Robert Carradine, Anthony Edwards, Timothy Busfield. Interscope Communications, 1984. Film.
- A Room for Romeo Brass*. Dir. Shane Meadows. Perf. Andrew Shim, Ben Marshall, Paddy Considine. Big Arty Productions, 1999. Film.
- A Room with a View*. Dir. James Ivory. Perf. Helena Bonham Carter, Julian Sands, Maggie Smith, Denholm Elliott. Merchant Ivory Productions, 1985. Film.

- The Sarah Jane Adventures*. Cr. Russell T. Davies. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 2007-11. Television.
- Scandal*. Dir. Michael Caton-Jones. Perf. John Hurt, Joanne Whalley, Ian McKellen, Bridget Fonda. British Screen Productions, 1989. Film.
- Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll*. Dir. Mat Whitecross. Perf. Andy Serkis, Tom Hughes, Clifford Samuel. Lipsync Productions, 2010. Film.
- Shadow Dancer*. Dir. James Marsh. Perf. Clive Owen, Andrea Riseborough, Gillian Anderson. Element Pictures, 2012. Film.
- Shameless*. Cr. Paul Abbott. Channel 4. UK. 2004-13. Television.
- Sid and Nancy*. Dir. Alex Cox. Perf. Gary Oldman, Chloe Webb, David Hayman. Initial Pictures, 1986. Film.
- Singin' in the Rain*. Dir. Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly. Perf. Gene Kelly, Donald O'Connor, Debbie Reynolds. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1952. Film.
- Skins*. Cr. Jamie Brittain and Bryan Elsley. Channel 4. UK. 2007-13. Television.
- Sleepless in Seattle*. Dir. Nora Ephron. Perf. Tom Hanks, Meg Ryan, Ross Malinger. TriStar Pictures, 1993. Film.
- Small Faces*. Dir. Gillies MacKinnon. Perf. Iain Robertson, Joe McFadden, Steven Duffy. Billy MacKinnon, 1995. Film.
- Snatch*. Dir. Guy Ritchie. Perf. Jason Statham, Brad Pitt, Benicio Del Toro. SKA Films, 2000. Film.
- Somers Town*. Dir. Shane Meadows. Perf. Thomas Turgoose, Ireneusz Czop, Piotr Jagiello. Big Arty Productions, 2008. Film.
- Son of Rambow*. Dir. Garth Jennings. Perf. Bill Milner, Will Poulter, Jessica Stevenson. Hammer & Tongs, 2007. Film.
- Spike Island*. Dir. Mat Whitecross. Perf. Elliott Tittensor, Nico Mirallegro, Jordan Murphy. Bankside Films, 2012.
- Spitting Image*. Cr. Peter Fluck and Roger Law. Independent Television. UK. 1984-96. Television.
- Stand By Me*. Dir. Rob Reiner. Perf. Wil Wheaton, River Phoenix, Corey Feldman, Jerry O'Connell. Act III, 1986. Film.

- Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace*. Dir. George Lucas. Perf. Ewan McGregor, Liam Neeson, Natalie Portman. Lucasfilm, 1999. Film.
- Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones*. Dir. George Lucas. Perf. Hayden Christensen, Natalie Portman, Ewan McGregor. Lucasfilm, 2002. Film.
- Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*. Dir. George Lucas. Perf. Hayden Christensen, Natalie Portman, Ewan McGregor. Lucasfilm, 2005. Film.
- Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope*. Dir. George Lucas. Perf. Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher. Lucasfilm, 1977. Film.
- Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back*. Dir. Irvin Kershner. Perf. Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher. Lucasfilm, 1980. Film.
- Star Wars Episode VI: Return of the Jedi*. Dir. Richard Marquand. Perf. Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher. Lucasfilm, 1983. Film.
- Starter for 10*. Dir. Tom Vaughan. Perf. James McAvoy, Rebecca Hall, Alice Eve. Neal Street Productions, 2006. Film.
- State of Play*. Dir. David Yates. Writ. Paul Abbott. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 2003. Television mini-series.
- Submarine*. Dir. Richard Ayoade. Perf. Craig Roberts, Yasmin Paige, Noah Taylor, Sally Hawkins, Paddy Considine. Warp Films, 2010. Film.
- Sunday*. Dir. Charles McDougal. Writ. Jimmy McGovern. Channel 4. UK. 2002. Television single drama.
- Sus*. Dir. Robert Heath. Perf. Clint Dyer, Ralph Brown, Rafe Spall. Thin Film Productions, 2010. Film.
- The Sweeney*. Cr. Ian Kennedy Martin. Independent Television. UK. 1975-8. Television.
- That '70s Show*. Cr. Mark Brazill, Bonnie Turner and Terry Turner. Fox Network. USA. 1998-2006. Television.
- That '80s Show*. Cr. Mark Brazill, Bonnie Turner and Terry Turner. Fox Network. USA. 2002. Television.
- The Third Man*. Dir. Carol Reed. Perf. Orson Welles, Joseph Cotton, Alida Valli. London Film Productions, 1949. Film.
- This is England*. Dir. Humphrey Jennings. Crown Film Unit, 1941. Documentary film.



- This is England*. Dir. Shane Meadows. Perf. Thomas Turgoose, Stephen Graham, Jo Hartley, Joe Gilgun. Warp Films, 2006. Film.
- This is England '86*. Dir. Tom Harper and Shane Meadows. Writ. Shane Meadows and Jack Thorne. Channel 4. UK. 2010. Television mini-series.
- This is England '88*. Dir. Shane Meadows. Writ. Shane Meadows and Jack Thorne. Channel 4. UK. 2011. Television mini-series.
- The Theory of Everything*. Dir. James Marsh. Perf. Eddie Redmayne, Felicity Jones, Emily Watson. Working Title, 2014. Film.
- Those Glory Glory Days*. Dir. Philip Saville. Writ. Julie Welch. Channel 4. UK. 1983. Television single drama.
- Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*. Dir. Tomas Alfredson. Perf. Gary Oldman, Colin Firth, Tom Hardy, John Hurt. StudioCanal, 2011. Film.
- Tout va bien*. Dir. Jean-Luc Godard. Perf. Yves Montand, Jane Fonda. Anouchka Films, 1972. Film.
- Torchwood*. Cr. Russell T. Davies. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 2006-11. Television.
- Trainspotting*. Dir. Danny Boyle. Perf. Ewan McGregor, Ewen Bremner, Jonny Lee Miller, Kelly Macdonald. Channel Four Films, 1996.
- Tuesday*. Dir. Sacha Bennett. Perf. Philip Glenister, Kevin R. McNally, Ashley Walters, Kate Magowan, John Simm. Japan Films, 2008. Film.
- TwentyFourSeven*. Dir. Shane Meadows. Perf. Danny Nussbaum, Toby, Bob Hoskins. Scala Films, 1997.
- U2: Rattle and Hum*. Dir. Phil Joanou. Midnight Films, 1988. Documentary film.
- University Challenge*. Prod. Irene Daniels (2007-present). Granada Television, for Independent Television (1962-87) and British Broadcasting Corporation (1994-present). UK. 1962-87, 1994-present. Television.
- Up 'n' Under*. Dir. John Godber. Perf. Gary Olsen, Neil Morrissey, Samantha Janus. Ballpark Productions, 1998. Film.
- Velvet Goldmine*. Dir. Todd Haynes. Perf. Ewan McGregor, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, Christian Bale. Channel Four Films, 1998. Film.

*Vera Drake*. Dir. Mike Leigh. Perf. Imelda Staunton, Jim Broadbent, Heather Craney.  
Les Films Alain Sarde, 2004. Film.

*The Virgin Suicides*. Dir. Sofia Coppola. Perf. Kirsten Dunst, Josh Hartnett, James  
Woods, Kathleen Turner. American Zoetrope, 1999. Film.

*The Wedding Singer*. Dir. Frank Coraci. Perf. Adam Sandler, Drew Barrymore,  
Christine Taylor. New Line Cinema, 1998. Film.

*When the Lights Went Out*. Dir. Pat Holden. Perf. Kate Ashfield, Nicky Bell, Alan  
Brent. Kintop Pictures, 2012. Film.

*The World of Apu*. Dir. Satyajit Ray. Perf. Soumitra Chatterjee, Sharmila Tagore, Alok  
Chakravarty. Satyajit Ray Productions, 1959. Film.

*The X-Files*. Cr. Chris Carter. Fox Network. USA. 1993-2002. Television.

*Yes, Minister/ Yes, Prime Minister*. Prod. Stuart Allen, Sydney Lotterby and Peter  
Whitmore. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 1980-8. Television.

*The Young Ones*. Prod. Paul Jackson. British Broadcasting Corporation. UK. 1982-4.  
Television.

*Zazie dans le metro*. Dir. Louis Malle. Perf. Catherine Demongeot, Philippe Noiret,  
Hubert Deschamps. Nouvelles Éditions de Films, 1960. Film.