Down and Out in Birmingham and Leeds: Thinking the Lumpenproletariat in the Films of Penny Woolcock

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Abstract:
Portrayals of working-class people have long been part of British culture, be it in art, literature, music, theatre, photography, film or television. Perhaps the most notable shift in terms of how the working class are depicted in British film and television in recent years has been the increasing attention paid to what is variously known as the 'impoverished underclass', the 'undeserving poor', the 'social residuum' or the 'lumpenproletariat'. Drawing on the current resurgence of working-class studies in the social sciences and humanities, this article rethinks these social categories in and through several films of Penny Woolcock that focus on 'estates culture' in the inner cities of Birmingham and Leeds. In so doing, this article suggests that, whilst filmed over twenty-odd years ago, Woolcock's *Macbeth* and *Tina Trilogy* remain timely and apposite filmic representations in terms of thinking the idea of the lumpenproletariat in contemporary Britain.

Keywords: Penny Woolcock, working class, Marx, lumpenproletariat, *Macbeth*, sink estate, Birmingham, Leeds, juvenile delinquency, *Tina Trilogy*, chav mums.

Introduction

> Fear of the mob is a superstitious fear. It is based on the idea that there is some mysterious, fundamental difference between rich and poor, as though they were two different races, like Negroes [*sic*] and white men. But in reality there is no such difference. The mass of the rich and the poor are differentiated by their incomes and nothing else … Everyone who has mixed on equal terms with the poor knows this quite well. But the trouble is that intelligent, cultivated people, the very people who might be expected to have liberal opinions, never do mix with the poor. For what do the majority of educated people know about poverty?
>
> – George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London*

It requires little perspicacity to claim Penny Woolcock as one of Britain's most radical and innovative film directors and screenwriters. Though she follows in the footsteps of a diverse group of social-realist film-makers, and while her oeuvre comprises other subject matter, Woolcock stands unrivalled when it comes to documenting and fictionalising the lives of marginalised working-class communities, particularly ones that exist outside the wage-labour system. Not unlike George Orwell (chronicler *par excellence* of the proletarian unnameable in the middle of the twentieth century), Woolcock is not so much interested in Britain's respectable classes as she is the everyday lives of the so-called lumpen working class, warts and all. And just as Orwell was more or less unique among his literary contemporaries for daring to

venture where others feared to tread, similarly, Woolcock has spent much of her adult years living and working with Britain's down-and-outs, be it the homeless, alcoholics, drug addicts, petty criminals, migrants and benefit claimants, among others.

As a result, many of Woolcock's films and documentaries have an extraordinary quality borne out of lived experience, intense empathy and brutal honesty, which can make for uncomfortable viewing and sober-minded reflection. Additionally, while other film-makers have tended to concentrate on the loss or remaining vestiges of traditional working-class culture, or whereas politicians and social commentators have set their sights on inner-city degradation, Woolcock invites us critically to question depictions of working-class life that amount to nothing more than fairy-tale endings, romanticised nostalgia or male heroism, by exposing the less appealing facets of Britain's working-class underbelly. And it is this aspect of Woolcock's work that I want to focus on, particularly her documentary-drama films[1] that draw our attention to some of Birmingham's and Leeds's inner-city estates, not least because of their association with gang violence, petty criminality, toxic masculinity, single mums, juvenile delinquency and other supposedly lumpen culture features.

Another reason for exploring the films of Woolcock is because, a handful of notable women film-makers notwithstanding (for example, Marion and Ruby Grierson, Jill Craigie, Muriel Box and various female members of the independent film collectives of the 1970s and 1980s), the history of British screen realism has tended to be dominated by male auteurs (such as John Grierson, Humphrey Jennings, Karel Reisz, John Schlesinger, Tony Richardson, Lindsay Anderson, Ken Loach, Alan Clarke, Mike Leigh, Stephen Frears and Shane Meadows). And yet Woolcock is one of several contemporary women directors (for example, Andrea Arnold, Clio Barnard, Kim Longinotto, Samantha Morton and Lynne Ramsay) who have helped advance social problem films beyond the didactic 'Loachian' social realist tradition in recent years, in part due to their collective employment of a feminist politics to create more thematically diverse films that speak to female viewers, but also through a foregrounding of imagery over narrative, or what has been referred to as a 'poetic optic'.

While many of Woolcock's films are politically motivated (but not always straightforwardly feminist), the extent to which her oeuvre is characteristic of this visual aesthetic identified by David Forrest (2020) and Stella Hockenhull (2017) is debatable. It is clear that Woolcock's films are not focused on dialogue as the primary means by which to progress a credible storyline (as in the case of traditional social realism), and that her casting of local residents, improvisation of dialogue and on-location shooting possess a certain poetic quality (much like the way in which Carol Ann Duffy, Philip Larkin, Alan Bennett and others have written about the ordinary in everyday life). Additionally, not unlike Clio Barnard's approach to place (see Forrest 2020: 170–2), Woolcock's stylistic use of urban landscapes as *mise-en-scène*, though often recognisable as being geographically specific, is more nuanced than the clichéd townscape shots that we typically associate with the British New Wave genre of films (see also Higson 1996).[2]

On the other hand, Beth Johnson (2016: 282–3) observes that, although meaningful comparisons might be made with the work of Barnard (*The Arbor* in particular), whose methods are similarly participatory and site-specific, Woolcock's documentary dramas tend to be more conventional insofar as they are principally concerned with truth telling and attempting to reveal the authenticity of whatever social issues are being represented. In adopting this approach, Woolcock is deeply concerned with facilitating social dialogue, opportunities and change within the communities that she is observing. This is particularly evident in her work concerning gang rivalries in Birmingham during the 2000s, where she not only directed two films (*1 Day* [2009] and *One Mile Away* [2012]) and established the One Mile Away Social Enterprise Group, but also secured the support of James Purnell, former Labour cabinet minister, and Jonathan Powell, then chief negotiator on Northern Ireland. According to Woolcock, a survey conducted by the Boston Consulting Group showed that, for a period afterwards, gang-related crime dropped significantly in Birmingham's inner-city localities.[3] Arguably, Woolcock's reformist spirit is not dissimilar to the early documentary movement and its efforts to address social problems, a topic to which we now turn.

Working-class realism

It is often said that representations of working-class life are a quintessential part of the British imaginary. Ever since urbanisation and industrialisation got under way in the late eighteenth century, a great deal of Britain's culture has been concerned with the condition of the working class. Even at a glance, one can discern a succession of novelists and poets, playwrights and painters, photographers and film-makers, whose overriding focus has been on the lived experiences of ordinary people: from the industrial novels and social commentaries of the Victorian era (see Williams 1958), through to the socially committed photography, radio broadcasts and documentary film-making of the early twentieth century (see Aitken 1998; Kee 1989; Scannell and Cardiff 1991), the kitchen-sink and new wave realism of the 1950s and 1960s (see Hill 1986; Lacey 1995; Higson 1996), the social art cinema, television drama and comedy series, to the 'Brit-grit' films of the 1970s and 1980s and beyond (Wagg 1998; Lay 2002; Cooke 2003; Forrest and Johnson 2017; Casling 2018; Hill 2019). And let us not forget the countless creative efforts of the many Jude the Obscures or Leonard Basts which, no matter how humble or sentimental they may be, provide us with intimate, first-hand accounts of actual working lives (see Rose 2002).

Of course, this is not to say that cultural representations of the working class all share identical concerns and iconographic idioms. On the contrary, the symbolic landscape of working-class representations is extremely varied and forever changing according to wider historical shifts in socio-cultural processes and relations.[4] Much nineteenth-century fiction and social criticism was symptomatic of the 'Condition-of-England Question', a series of debates about the material and spiritual consequences of laissez-faire industrial capitalism (Williams 1958; Baldick 1983; Collini 1991). Notwithstanding middle-class anxieties about social unrest, cultural decline and the

erosion of national character, a good many writers from this period sought to awaken a social conscience about the inhumanities of urban squalor and suffering. By the early to mid-twentieth century, representations of the working class began to focus more on anthropological explorations of the labouring classes. Rather than merely representing the working class impressionistically and from afar, increasing numbers of Britain's cultivated elites and labour organisations began to investigate working-class communities with a missionary-like zeal from within (Macpherson 1980; Hood 1983; Clarke 2007; Hubble 2010; Curzon 2016). Bit by bit, the hitherto 'unknown-England' of the nineteenth century was laid bare for all to see and, though the causes and effects of poverty remained paramount for a good many artists and social reformers during the 1920s and 1930s, the working class were just as likely to be portrayed as national heroes as they were victims or villains.

Come the outbreak of the Second World War and the remainder of the 1940s, representations of class differences were largely set aside in the interests of uniting the nation against a common enemy (Gillett 2003: 17). And when they did eventually resurface in the 1950s and 1960s, depictions of ordinary life were no longer confined to the workplace or the slums. Although respectability remained a key concern for most working-class families, a younger generation of radical playwrights and authors dared to portray class hatred and social alienation in the form of provincial 'angry young men' who loathed manual labour and the banality of familial domesticity (Allsop 1964; Segal 1988). Similarly, a new wave of film-makers focused on the adaptation of these working-class plays and novels in which popular (and often illicit) leisure activities loomed large, youth culture in particular. Additionally, films such as *Room at the Top* (1958), *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), *A Kind of Loving* (1962) and *This Sporting Life* (1963) were symptomatic of a much wider debate about the hypothesised demise of traditional working-class communities in the face of an emergent Americanisation and mass consumerism, social mobility and embourgeoisement, femininity and camp (Hoggart 1957; Goldthorpe et al. 1967; Hill 1986; Sinfield 1989; Rebellato 1999; Brook 2007; Savage 2010). Whereas poverty had been public enemy number one for much of the early twentieth century, many of Britain's post-war intellectuals and social commentators were more interested (albeit with varying degrees of emphasis, agreement and criticism) in how a combination of cultural standardisation, rising affluence and feminisation was having a transformative effect on working-class life and consciousness.

Jump forward another twenty-odd years, to the 1980s and 1990s, and we see yet more continuities and changes in working-class representations. This was particularly true of realist British cinema and television, or what the journalist Vanessa Thorpe (1999) famously termed 'Brit-grit'. For example, John Hill suggests that, whilst such film-makers as Ken Loach, Mike Leigh and Alan Clarke helped to maintain a social realist tradition during the Thatcher era, like the New Wave film-makers of the 1960s, they tended to concentrate on the existential plight of working-class individuals ('post-patriarchal' males in particular) and dysfunctional familial relations, which entailed a 'diminishing sense of the politico and public sphere', a 'further narrowing down of the social' (Hill 2000b: 254, 258). Claire Monk notes that,

although it had been a decade of gains for feminism and sexual liberalism, the 1990s, as far as British cinema was concerned, was largely 'preoccupied with men and masculinity in crisis' (Monk 2000a: 156) (specifically 'post-industrial male trauma') and signalled a revival of chauvinism, a charge that has been levelled at the 'kitchen sink' cycle of films as well. Elsewhere, it has been variously observed that whilst underclass and subcultural films such as *Brassed Off* (1996), *The Full Monty* (1997), *Trainspotting* (1996), *Twin Town* (1996) and *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998) heralded a return of cinematic class-consciousness during this period, they did so with a compulsive nostalgia for white working masculinity and under the guise of New Labour's re-branding of Britain's national identity as post-industrial and entrepreneurial (for example, Hallam 2000; McFarlane 2009; Monk 2000b).

The flotsam and jetsam of society

Although the analysis sketched above demonstrates that the symbolic landscape of British working-class iconography is historically contingent, comprising varying degrees of continuity and change, equally, many of these representations have tended to focus on the working proletarian, particularly in terms of male subjectivity, the centrality of the familial home and the evocation of a 'respectable' working-class milieu. And though vitally important from the standpoint of socio-political criticism and raising public awareness of unemployment's devastating consequences, even depictions of the redundant working class have a propensity to reaffirm the protagonists' individual and collective identities as noble labourers first and foremost, struggling against poverty and anguish. In the case of British films and television dramas, one thinks of *Workers and Jobs* (1935), *Love on the Dole* (1941), *Talk About Work* (1971), *Boys from the Blackstuff* (BBC1, 1982), *Meantime* (1983), *Tucker's Luck* (BBC2, 1983–5), *Riff-Raff* (1991), *Raining Stones* (1993), *Brassed Off* (1996), *The Full Monty* (1997), *I, Daniel Blake* (2016) and so on.

But what of those variously known as the residuum population, the impoverished underclass, the undeserving poor or the ragamuffin classes, who happily refuse work and other social conventions? Often taken to mean the bottom-most stratum of modern society, more or less removed from the social relations of economic production and the body politic, the idea of the lumpenproletariat is commonly attributed to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Inconsistencies of usage and subtle differences in translations notwithstanding (see Draper 1972), the term first appeared in *The German Ideology* (1845) to describe the freeloading Roman plebians as a precursor to the urban lumpenproletariat of the nineteenth century (Marx and Engels 1982: 89–90). And though hopeful about the spectre of communism and the proletariat's historical mission as a revolutionary class, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) also cautioned against

> The 'dangerous class', the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its condition of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue. (Marx and Engels 1990: 31–2)

Following the failed revolutions of 1848, both Marx and Engels wrote several newspaper articles and pamphlets that further affirmed this derogatory view of the lumpenproletariat as a treacherous mob that is predominantly mercenary and counter-revolutionary in character: from the *lazzaroni* in Naples to the Mobile Guard in Paris or the Croats in Vienna: time and again we hear of 'the armed and bought lumpenproletariat fighting against the working and thinking proletariat (Marx 1973a: 176). The most damning indictment is to be found in Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1850) where he describes the full extent of the lumpenproletariat's skulduggery and its configuration as a parasitical superstructure that comprises elements from *all* social classes:

> Alongside decayed roués of doubtful origin and uncertain means of subsistence, alongside ruined and adventurous scions of the bourgeoisie, there were vagabonds, discharged soldiers, criminals, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, confidence tricksters, *lazzaroni*, pickpockets, sleight-of-hand experts, gamblers, *maquereaux*, brothel-keepers, porters, pen-pushers, organ-grinders, rag-and-bone merchants, knife-grinders, tinkers and beggars: in short, the whole indeterminate fragmented mass … which the French call *la bohème*; with these elements so akin to himself, Bonaparte formed … a 'charitable organisation' in that all its members … felt the need to provide themselves with charity at the expense of the nation's workers. (Marx 1973b: 197)

While Marx enlarged this description of a lumpen-coterie yet further, such as his naming and shaming of the finance aristocracy as 'nothing but the lumpenproletariat reborn at the pinnacle of bourgeois society' (1973c: 39), the heterogeneity of lumpen-class types it is not the primary focus of this article. Equally, although there has been in recent years much talk of a 'Trumpentariat' (Barrow 2020: 13) or the global precariat (Standing 2011) in recent years, we are not concerned here with Marx's economic definition of the lumpenproletariat as an 'industrial reserve army' or 'relative surplus population' as outlined in the first volume of *Capital* (1983: 602–3). Rather, following the examples of Mehlman (1977), Stallybrass (1990) and Thoburn (2002), our main interest is in the idea of the lumpen class as a site of cultural difference that unleashes a nonconformist dynamism, invariably affronts bourgeois morality and problematises mainstream social class taxonomies and neoliberal statecraft.

Additionally, although the article stops short of engaging fully with such arguments, just as Marx and Engels were responding to the conservative writings of T. R. Malthus on the 'redundant population', the idea of the lumpenproletariat has since acquired a more optimistic meaning in response to major socio-political upheavals in which the lumpen played a critical role. For example, Mao Tse-Tung's (1967: 19) peasant 'secret societies' of the Red Army, Frantz Fanon's (1969: 103) 'classless idlers' of the post-war Third World, the countercultural and civil rights movements of the 1960s and more recent political struggles have prompted a new generation of deviancy sociologists, cultural historians, human geographers, critical theorists and groups of activists to rethink the subaltern classes as both victims of capitalist society and as a potentially spontaneous and militant social force (see

Cleaver 1972; Bovenkerk 1984; Bussard 1987; Hayes 1988; Cowling 2002; Jones 2005; Hilliard 2008; Denning 2010; Sakai 2017; Villanova 2021), not unlike Bakunin's (1972: 334) 'brutal and savage horde' of nineteenth-century Europe.

Having said this, depictions of the lumpen as morally and economically degenerate remain the hegemonic public discourse, both in terms of media representations and social commentary. This modern pillorying is largely attributable to the right-wing American political scientist, Charles Murray (1990 and 1994; see also IEA 1996), who published two major essays warning against the British 'underclass' or a 'New Rabble' in the 1990s. Both publications highlighted increasing trends in 'undesirable behaviour', namely the rise in criminal activity, mass idleness and the collapse of the nuclear family. Of these, Murray considered 'illegitimacy' to be the crux of the problem insofar as he characterised single mothers as being wilfully unemployed and reliant on state benefits, which, in turn, socialises their children into a culture of welfare dependency, generational poverty and social crime. Allegedly, it is this breakdown in traditional values and practices that has transformed entire working-class neighbourhoods into lumpen wastelands.

Indeed, the young 'chav-mum', juvenile delinquency and 'sink' estates have become major objects of ridicule and revulsion in recent years, evident in the proliferation of tabloid moral panics, the 'class pantomime' of 'poverty porn' television, 'ruin aesthetics' and 'chav celebrities', discriminatory government policies and territorial stigmatisation (Campbell 1993; Hayward and Yar 2006; Hanley 2008; Tyler 2008; 2013; Tyler and Bennett 2010; Jones 2011; Jensen 2014; McKenzie 2015; Butler et al. 2018; Slater 2018; Beswick 2019).[5] And it is with this in mind that we now turn to the main focus of this article: to analyse and evaluate the extent to which some of Woolcock's underclass films genuinely anthropomorphise the everyday lives of Britain's post-industrial council estates and the 'socially excluded', or whether her depictions of Britain's underprivileged are better understood as an invitation to 'cultural slumming', that is, pandering to a voyeuristic curiosity which is at once enthralled and repulsed by urban squalor, human degradation and petty criminality.

Is dis an estate which I see before me?

Woolcock's first breakthrough as a film-maker came in 1984, aged 34, when she borrowed some film-making equipment from the Oxford Film-makers Workshop to make an improvised documentary about unemployment with a group of girls at a youth club. Much to her surprise, the resulting 22-minute feature, *It's About Time*, was bought by Channel Four (see Maher 2009; Higgins 2010). From there, she did a short stint working for Trade Films Ltd, a Channel Four Workshop based in Newcastle, during which she directed *When the Dog Bites* (C4, 1988), a documentary drama that explores how the people of Consett, a small town in the north-west of County Durham, struggled to maintain a sense of social cohesion and optimism following the closure of the local steelworks in the early 1980s (Corner 1996: 139–54). Other notable productions from this early period of Woolcock's film-making career include *Women in Tropical Places* (C4, 1990), *From Wimps to Warriors* (BBC2, 1991), *The Hurting Church* (BBC2, 1992), *The Two Marys* (BBC2, 1994),

The Peer and the Peaches (BBC2, 1995), *Mad Passionate Dreams* (BBC2, 1995), *Gordonstoun* (C4, 1996) and *Macbeth on the Estate* (BBC2, 1997), among others.

Of these, *Macbeth on the Estate* is one of Woolcock's most imaginative and radical television plays to date. Filmed on the notorious Ladywood estate[6] in Birmingham as part of BBC2's *Performance* season, Woolcock's present-day adaptation of Shakespeare's Scottish tragedy recasts Macbeth as a crack-addicted hoodlum who lords it over a dystopian council estate plagued by drug dealing, gang violence, protection rackets, feral children and hypermasculinity. The film's establishing shot of a devastated urban landscape is disturbingly apocalyptic and more reminiscent of some faraway battleground than it is of Birmingham. Moments later we hear a Caribbean-Birmingham sounding Macduff (played by David Harewood) tell us 'of a time, not long past, when Duncan, de King, held d'power on dis estate – and we loved him well'. But the kingdom became a theatre of war as 'Duncan grew fat, slack and many misrule men took occasion dereof to trouble d'peace wid seditious commotion', which resulted in Duncan charging his cousin, 'de ever-loyal Macbeth, to take up arms and lead us into battle against de rebels' (see Rutter 2004: 45). Macduff's testimony is borne out as the film cuts to the second prologue in which we see several adjoining tenements blighted by dereliction, detritus and wanton vandalism. The viewer is then introduced to the play's main characters by way of a violent action sequence that involves Duncan's 'loyal soldiers' assailing unsuspecting members of a rival gang with an arsenal of improvised weapons. And so the tale of jealousy, greed and murderous treachery begins.

While the main *dramatis personae* were played by professional actors (Ray Winstone as Duncan, Andrew Tiernan as Banquo, James Frain and Susan Vidler as the Macbeths), most of the 130-supporting cast and extras were residents from Ladywood who Woolcock had befriended when directing *Shakespeare on the Estate* (1994). The latter was an award-winning documentary about Michael Bogdanov's attempts to persuade Ladywood inhabitants to rehearse and perform extracts from the Shakespearean canon. Widely known for his maverick reinterpretations of Shakespeare and a strong commitment to community theatre, Bogdanov approached the Ladywood project with the view that 'Shakespeare was totally irrelevant to 95 per cent of the population' so as to prove that 'you could take people who couldn't care less whether Shakespeare lived or died and excite them with Shakespeare in a way that surprised them' (cited in Drakakis 2007: 196–7; see also Greenhalgh 2003: 97–100). And notwithstanding a few minor hiccups, he was largely successful in engaging Ladywood's residents and connecting Shakespeare with what was going on in their own everyday lives.[7]

Like Bogdanov, Woolcock found the experience of filming *Shakespeare on the Estate* both challenging and enlightening: for example, she has vivid memories of the occasion when one of the unemployed male residents, Marko, said that he could see how much she enjoyed her job, to which she replied: 'I love it'. Woolcock then added, not meaning to be patronising, that she was sorry he did not have a job he liked, to which Marko replied: 'Oh I love my job too. I'm a thief'.[8] Despite having spent twenty-odd years having to eke out a living for herself and her son, it had never

occurred to Woolcock that some people might actually prefer to earn a livelihood through crime. It was an epiphany, and it was what prompted Woolcock to revisit Ladywood and rewrite *Macbeth* as 'social tragedy' (see Greenhalgh 2003: 96) with a particular focus on urban decay and gang rivalries.[9] But Woolcock refrains from waxing lyrical about the decline in social mores or the loss of working-class respectability. Rather, she invites the audience to bear witness to an inconvenient truth: just as Shakespeare had represented medieval Scotland as a diseased and sick land traumatised by war, greed and political ineptitude, Woolcock's recontextualisation makes visible the way in which many inner-city, multicultural housing estates have ended up becoming Britain's neglected post-industrial, post-imperial 'other'.

Even though Woolcock's production stayed relatively true to the original script, unsurprisingly the film was not without its problems and critics. For a start, it had been commissioned by the BBC, and it was very much a case of he who pays the piper calls the tunes, to the extent that a BBC producer would routinely return the previous day's rushes to Woolcock in person only to inform her that what she had filmed thus far was 'untransmittable'.[10] Whereas Woolcock had envisaged a television play that was 'daring and innovative', the BBC wanted to play it safe and kept asking for something more akin to *EastEnders*. 'It was a very painful experience, hence, I have very mixed feelings about that film', Woolcock recalls. 'There are parts of it that have a real life to it, but to me, it has a bit of a broomstick up its arse … I felt very besieged and I think I could have been much bolder'.[11] To add insult to injury, the film was criticised by a handful of traditionalists who thought that Woolcock had overly popularised Shakespeare's most famous of tragedies. One such critic noted that Woolcock was 'a documentary film-maker, not a theatre or even a TV drama director'; and that she had cut *Macbeth* to an hour and twenty minutes in length, thus reducing it to a mere 'melodrama' (Lathan 1997).

Additionally, there were suggestions that Woolcock was guilty of 'cultural and intellectual imperialism', that she was doing little more than imposing conventional western culture on a 'deprived' mixed-race housing estate. However, insofar as the cultural values, practices and aspirations of 'dis estate' are so fundamentally at odds with the culturally dominant symbolic order that constitutes 'essential Englishness', Woolcock's *Macbeth* treats its black and white residents alike, that is, as a dysgenic race unto themselves.[12] Such stereotypical representations of ethnic minorities have long been commonplace in the British media, but Woolcock's racialising of 'poor whites' as 'savage barbarians' disrupts the taken-for-granted conventions that maintain whiteness as a marker of English identity (cf. Haylett 2001). That Woolcock makes the above points using one of England's most cherished literary touchstones complicates matters further inasmuch as she appropriates the very cultural canon that is commonly taken to epitomise 'the best of British'.[13] Of course, representations of ordinary people are a theme that runs throughout Shakespeare's oeuvre: time again, his plays reveal to us that ordinariness is at the heart of our common humanity. But seeing these 'lesser *un*Englishmen and women' re-enact Shakespeare's words, and in a place seemingly devoid of any English virtue and social hope whatsoever, causes us

to query what has become of Shakespeare's scepter'd isle and its gentle people? And in the event that we should conveniently dismiss this seemingly 'foreign' land as a mere phantasm, the film's concluding line, delivered by a war-weary and bereaving Macduff, counters any possibility of wilful disbelief, leaving us in no doubt that England is indeed a country in crisis *and* denial: 'Alas, poor country! Almost afraid to know itself'.

The *Tina Trilogy*

Between 1999 and 2006, Woolcock made a series of films for Channel 4 that would further explore Britain's underclass. Known as the *Tina Trilogy* and filmed mainly on the rough, traditionally white Halton Moor and Beeston housing estates in Leeds, *Tina Goes Shopping* (1999), *Tina Takes a Break* (2001) and *Mischief Night* (2006), follow the life of a young working-class single mother called Tina (Kelli Hollis[14]). Unlike *Macbeth on the Estate*, no professional actors were used whatsoever and, though fictional stories or what Paul Ward (2005: 35) refers to as 'dramatised forms of reconstruction and performance', the scripts were 'inspired by real events' that took place on the Leeds estates.[15] And the reason Woolcock decided to 'cast people to play versions of themselves or others in their community' is because she wanted to 'make a film which could say some of the things the *Daily Mail* says about an essentially criminal subculture but from the inside out', to tell the truth about 'the culture of housing estates':

> These are communities with their own morality and economy which thrive largely outside civil society. They were built to provide workers for heavy industries, the industries have vanished leaving these communities behind, often in the middle of nowhere with nothing to do. But the lack of jobs hasn't left a vacuum, something else, something vibrant, a black economy has replaced it … Where the *Mail* is judgmental about 'scroungers', I am fascinated. I wanted to make a film without a bleeding heart, that wasn't bleating about defeated folk longing for the old days and waiting around for someone to give them a job … The left has tended to present a sentimental picture of the disenfranchised and dispossessed which I find untrue and even patronising. People don't like being pitied and seen as victims.[16]

In the first of the trilogy, we quickly learn that Tina runs a bespoke weekly 'shopping service' whereby she takes orders from the other residents on the estate, robs from the city centre stores and hand-delivers the goods for a fraction of their recommended selling price. Though she would never shoplift directly for herself, Hollis readily acknowledges that it is normal for people to routinely buy stolen goods from shoplifters who live on the estate: 'It doesn't make it right but people have to survive and sometimes that means having to nick things for yourself or to sell to someone else. Also, not everybody has money to shop in town, so it helps them as well'.[17] And indeed, unlike 'grafters' ('who go out to work legally'), Tina is just one of several characters for whom 'grafting' ('what you have to do') 'in the posh areas … where all the money is' ('like Vikings, pillaging neighbouring villages' or 'marauding Huns') is

how you get by on Britain's most impoverished estates: shoplifting, burglary, scavenging, juggling, fiddling, twocking and stealing cars are all in a day's work.

Equally, we also see that there is a sort of honour and dignity even among thieves. For example, after one of her shopping trips, Tina goes to the local pub to sell her stolen wares; however, though offering clothing items at discounted prices, Tina is informed that the 'smackheads' have been selling the same things for less, to which she retorts: 'I've got three kids to look after. [But] they're going round for their smack and selling 'em [T-shirts] for two and a half quid, undercutting everybody else'. Tina then complains to her dad, saying: 'I don't know why I bother, me. I go out all day lifting this, for smackheads to come in early and sell everything loads cheaper so I don't even make any money'. Minutes later, an older woman shouts that 'some bastard's stole me purse' and a handful of regulars identify a blond-haired man (one of the 'smackheads') standing at the bar as the culprit. One of the estate's hard men quickly seizes the thief and, following a short but severe battering, the purse is found on the man's jacket. After being told that 'cunts like you shun't be allowed to live', the bloodied man is made to stand at the bar as further punishment and as a public warning to other 'dirt bags', much to the delight of the other patrons.[18]

And yet, the heroin addict probably bought his smack from Tina's dad, who is introduced to us as Don ('like Don Corleone, the big man on the estate'). Interestingly, the character is played by Gwyn Hollis, real-life biological father to Kelli, kingpin gangster on the Beeston estate and one of the people who made the trilogy of films possible because of his credibility with other key players, which helped Woolcock win the trust of the wider community. Like Tina's character, Don proudly boasts to the camera that he 'doesn't want a normal job, normal jobs are for plebs'. And indeed, despite leaving school with several O levels in the 1970s, Gwyn has only had one legal job in his life, when he worked as an apprentice engineer for a short time after leaving school.[19] Crucially, unlike Tina who struggles to make ends meet, Don earns 'a very good living' making 'exciting money' from selling drugs and 'there's money all round'. In another scene, we are introduced to Don's 'little firm' comprising 'Mad Max' (George Stott) and 'Monday Man' (Skint Eastwood). The latter's nickname derives from his job as one of the estate's loan sharks who tends to collect money owed him at the beginning of the week when people receive their dole money and pensions (what is known locally as 'pancrack day'[20]):

> I lend 'em money, people what can't get money from anywhere else … Bad debtors don't come into my book, if they want money I'll lend 'em it. Don't care who they are or what their debt is but if I lend 'em £100 I want £150 back … no messing about, I want my money, end of … If they don't pay me, then they know consequences

Woolcock observes that, just as there are hierarchies elsewhere, 'so this social universe has its own rules and stratification'. Clearly, Don and his accomplices 'are at the top of the pile … like the entrepreneurs in the city'. In fact, the person who played Monday Man is a close friend of Gwyn Hollis and did

occasionally collect debts in real life. Woolcock also reflects that, contra so-called 'poverty porn' reality television shows and the idea of intergenerational cultures of worklessness and dependency, people 'aren't just sitting around … waiting for handouts; they're taking control of their lives and replicating the worst aspects in capitalism … A whole new culture [has] grown up, mainly around illegal activities and … it's resourceful and inventive'.[21] However, while drugs and robbing are a major source of income for most of the estate's residents, we see many other instances of people doing things for the wider community. Some of the more obvious examples of this 'local value system' (McKenzie 2015) are the networks of extended families and neighbours who support one another emotionally and financially, through 'giving respect', informal childcare, having an 'open door', standing up to bullies, closing ranks against state authorities, the endless cadging of ciggies and fivers, clubbing together for some weed and getting stoned, flogging things on tick and so on.[22]

One of the most troubling scenes in *Tina Goes Shopping* best illustrates this communitarianism: to get money for his drug addiction, Tina's boyfriend Aaron (Dylan Fielding) steals and butchers a cow in the family home. Woolcock claims she got the idea from one of the cast who told her that cow, sheep and pig rustling was not uncommon on the estate and how 'she often used to come home and find a dead animal in the bath'.[23] Apart from the comedy horror of witnessing a cow's severed head in the kitchen sink,[24] the storyline reveals the extent to which the estate's denizens rely on mutual reciprocity and bartering in order to get by. Though we see Aaron sell a piece of the cow for £5, the lump of meat exchanges hands several times for the same notional amount throughout the course of the day, irrespective of whether the recipients intend to eat it.[25] Not unlike Marcel Mauss's gift-exchange (1966: 17, 27, 31), the circular motion of passing and repassing of the meat between various women who are short of a fiver can be understood as a 'voluntary obligation' to give and take constantly, as both a self-interested transaction and an exchange that maintains some kind of 'communion and alliance', that is, a lasting indebtedness to each other.

Chav mums and juvenile delinquency

Woolcock astutely notes that this neighbourly *esprit de corps* is often 'one of the strongest indices of lack of social mobility', which 'means that you are locked into your social and economic universe'. While this is certainly true and has been well documented, the circulation of the beef joint among the estate's women residents highlights another of the film's key themes that also speaks to the idea of the modern-day lumpen, namely the vilified figure of the 'chav mum' or 'welfare mother' (see McRobbie 2007; Tyler 2008; Jones 2011). Despite many of the female protagonists having several children by different (and mostly absent) fathers, Woolcock refrains from stigmatising the women on the estate as being necessarily promiscuous, rough and ready, tarts and slags, or other derogatory sexualised stereotypes (see also McKenzie 2015: 66–71). On the contrary, although Tina does

epitomise the pram-pushing young mum, there are several moments when she articulates an unfulfilled desire to love and be loved by 'someone decent' but keeps meeting 'toerags'. Towards the end of the first film, Tina and several other women plot to give Aaron a 'smack' after they find out that he has been playing them. The estate's matriarch, Queenie (Gwen Nelson), sends 'her young 'uns to fetch back' Aaron's 'lump of meat' (which 'by night-time … had travelled halfway round the estate'), so the women 'could give him it'. Aaron is then lured to Queenie's on false pretences and is confronted by an angry female mob who assault him and effectively chase him off the estate.[26]

This is just one of several scenes where we witness the female residents looking out for others (see Hey and Bradford 2006) in order to overcome hegemonic masculinity, macho gangsterism, punitive welfare policies and neoliberal statecraft. Of course, Beatrix Campbell (1993: 177) made several comparable reflections apropos the riotous outbreaks of 1991 across several inner-city suburbs and the attendant 'crisis on estates whose social space was increasingly regulated by organised crime and masculine tyrannies':

> There is an economic emergency in many neighbourhoods where the difference between what women and men do with their troubles and with their anger shapes their strategies of survival and solidarity on the one hand, danger and destruction on the other … Crime and coercion are sustained by men. Solidarity and self-help are sustained by women. It is as stark as that. (ibid.: 303, 319)

We also observe that estates can be liminal spaces that afford working-class mums such as Tina a haven from the classificatory gaze of an essentially neoliberal, individualised and highly competitive respectable femininity, along with the associated cultural politics of maternal citizenship, the happy housewife, the entrepreneurial career woman, endless consumption and lifestyle make-overs, or what Angela McRobbie (2015: 3) has called the post-feminist 'realm of the perfect' (see also Skeggs 1997; Walkerdine 2003; McRobbie 2007; 2013; Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008; Ahmed 2010; Littler 2020). And though Woolcock's trilogy does not quite fit what Jo Littler (2020) has identified as the 'mothers behaving badly' genre, time and again, Tina and her female friends negate what many consider to be acceptable womanly subjectivities. To quote Littler (2020: 515), their revelling in the 'carnivalesque' and their rejection of 'the mythology of the perfect' facilitates both a genuine 'female camaraderie' and 'a feminism which can explore conflict and ugly feelings as a productive force'.

Certainly, this is a topic that is frequently mentioned in Lisa McKenzie's seminal ethnographic study of the St Ann's estate in Nottingham, where several female respondents tell how they felt socially excluded and pathologised as 'white trash' when they moved to other areas in the city. Consequently, despite the neighbourhood's many problems, McKenzie (2015: 76) notes that single working-class mothers would often move back to St Ann's because it provided them with a 'shared experience' and a 'common unity', that is a 'respite from constantly "being

looked down on" and "never feeling good enough"'. Likewise, Hollis suggests that the reason why some working-class mums that she knows from Beeston started going to school in their pyjamas was a reaction against the emergence of the rarefied 'yummy mummy' (Littler 2013), the 'rivalries of having to look more attractive than other mums', and, ultimately, 'young mothers putting too much pressure on themselves and having a nervous breakdown'.[27]

That *Macbeth on the Estate* and the *Tina Trilogy* coincided with Murray's (1990; 1994) admonishments of 'illegitimacy' among low-income young women Labour's launch of its Social Exclusion Unit (along with new welfare initiatives such as Sure Start) and a range of popular reality television shows (for example, *Super Nanny* [C4, 2004–8], *Little Angels* [BBC3*,* 2004–5], *The House of Tiny Tearaways* [BBC Three, 2005–7], *Jamie's School Dinners* [C4, 2005] and *Honey We're Killing the Kids!* [BBC, 2005–6]) is also significant. Though Labour was commended for attempting better to support mothers and their children, equally it has been argued that the key rationale for these social policy clusters was to reform (remoralise) abject working-class (underclass) mums (who exhibited 'wrong femininities') by universalising the values and behaviour of middle-class ones (Levitas 1998; Gewirtz 2001; Hey and Bradford 2006; Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008). Relatedly, there was an amplification of discursive practices that sought to both responsibilise and blame poorer single female parents for the supposed increase in 'feckless' youth cultures, problem families and child abuse cases, prompting Reay and Lucey (2000: 411) to note how it is was 'within these landscapes of concern' that 'children living on large inner city council estates' were 'constructed both as "at risk" and as a potential risk to others'.

The image of the child and the presence of the above-mentioned anxieties are disturbingly intertwined throughout Woolcock's recasting of *Macbeth* as an inventive televisual drama. Thus we occasionally witness innocent children who we presume are missing or have died prematurely, such as the scene where Lady Macbeth is home alone in a shrine-like nursery and lovingly studying what we assume is a photograph of her lost baby son.[28] Worse still, children sometimes end up as victims of gang-related violence, as with Macbeth's Herod-like killing of Macduff's two offspring. On the other hand, every now and then, the child represents something more wily and malicious, such as the menacing youngsters playing the Three Witches (or Weird Sisters) who predict Macbeth's ascendancy to the throne and eventual demise. Both troubled and beguiled by their eerie prophesies, even the fearless Macbeth senses that these 'weird children' are extraordinary and 'have more in them than mortal knowledge'. Indeed, it slowly dawns that the witch children might even be contriving the urban criminality and treacherous murders (see Rutter 2004: 50). The witches' grubby appearance and their sinister high-rise apartment also suggest they have been abandoned by their parents and live unsupervised, free to roam and do as they please. Indeed, many of warring foot soldiers are adolescent teenagers, particularly boys, who

seem to be similarly feral and willing accomplishes in Macbeth's drug-fuelled reign of terror over the estate.

It was the conviction and incarceration of two ten-year-old boys for the murder of toddler James Bulger in 1993 that prompted Woolcock to ask: 'What happens when children are neglected, impoverished and under educated?' (cited in Greenhalgh 2003: 101). And it is for the same reasons that Carol Chillington Rutter (2004: 40) notes that *Macbeth on the Estate* is symptomatic of 'a cultural crisis in "childless", to make us search our deep anxieties about relatedness and separation, about authority and autonomy … about valuing the child's life – or not'. But unlike William Blake's dualistic world in which innocence (the gentle lamb) and experience (the devouring tyger) co-exist, Rutter (ibid.: 47) claims that Woolcock renders all the estate's children as 'knowing' and 'unnaturally old' as opposed to them being 'innocents initiated or … even corrupted by the adults'. Put another way, they simply belong to the estate and, insofar as the estate's norm is criminality and violence, they are 'good' estate children. According to Katie Knowles (2008: 170–207, 251–4), though Woolcock was by no means the first to politicise *Macbeth*, and while the play can generally be understood as a 'war on children', her contemporary adaptation 'confronts the question of "bad" children more directly and explicitly than ever before'; however, 'rather than implicating the children themselves as innately evil', Knowles argues that Woolcock steers the audience 'to question the workings of a society that produces such children'.

All three of Woolcock's *Tina* films deal with similar issues. And again, rather than treating children as passive objects or positioning the audience as social workers, we are encouraged to observe the young actors as 'central protagonists' who have (albeit limited) degrees of agency about their choices in life (Lay 2002: 109). For example, we see Don's young nephew happily moving (or what is called 'shotting') his uncle's drugs around the estate and pronouncing how he has 'always wanted to be like my Uncle Don – with Mercedes and all that money. I'd love to drive round in that thing, fast, and with all those birds looking at me'.[29] However, instead of representing this as juvenile delinquency or the fault of bad parenting (Jensen 2018), Tina informs us that her dad 'says that it's good for him, to get him out of house and make himself *useful.* If he dun't learn about real money now, he'll just be another sad bastard. Just wants best for him, really'. Woolcock reflects that 'in estate catchment areas boys will candidly reply they want to be gangsters or drug dealers when you ask what they want to do when they grow up. It's the way it is. They don't want a dead-end job for minimum wage'. And though she realises that some of these youths will likely 'be in and out of prison for the rest of their lives',[30] by the same token:

> I always feel intensely irritated when people say that these boys get into trouble out of boredom and if only there were more ping pong tables everything would be alright. There is nothing *boring* about pinching any car you want, driving it around like a maniac and torching it. Boring is doing

> your homework and watching telly with your middle-class parents. Once someone has experienced that kind of buzz it's hard to seduce them back into civil society.[31]

Similarly, Woolcock dramatises several factual stories about the difficulties of parenting on rough council estates that befittingly unsettle ongoing political discourses and social policies that see 'tough love' as a solution to 'Broken Britain' and 'problem families' (Mooney 2011; Jensen 2012). It was during *Tina Takes a Break* that she 'observed child rearing practices which middle class parents would disapprove of but also that these were parents who loved their children and were doing their best to prepare them for life'.[32] In particular, Woolcock recalls some of the mums on the Halton Moor estate explaining that if 'your kid comes in crying saying someone bullied them, you have to push them out the door and tell them to sort it out. It's hard and it breaks your heart but if that kid becomes a victim they are dead in the water'.[33] Another of Woolcock's related anecdotes-cum-insights is about one of the estate's mums not allowing her young son to take up a scholarship to attend a local private school:

> She knew what would happen to Jason leaving the estate in a posh school uniform every day. He'd be a soft target there and she was also convinced that he would also be a target at school because of his background. He would never be able to bring friends back home and he would fit in nowhere. My middle-class friends are always horrified by this story, feeling that Helen denied her son a huge opportunity but she did what she genuinely felt was best and who are we to know better.

In fact, the mum's dilemma is reminiscent of several post-war working-class autobiographies and community studies that convey similar accounts of children from deprived socio-economic backgrounds being held back educationally due to financial hardship, social barriers or mistrust of the class system of schools. The latter reason is oft-cited in Brian Jackson's and Dennis Marsden's seminal *Education and the Working Class*, such as the father who is 'more in contact with the neighbourhood, more concerned with the immediate, everyday affairs on the estate' and actively discourages both his son and daughter from going to their local grammar schools (1969: 261; see also Marsden 1973: 70–2; Young and Willmott 1962: 170–85). One is particularly reminded of Richard Hoggart's (1957) autobiographical account of growing up in Hunslet (another impoverished inner-city Leeds suburb, barely two miles from Halton Moor) during the inter-war period, in which he recounts the difficulties of being emotionally uprooted from his own class and 'at the friction-point of two cultures' (because of being 'marked out' among his peers from an early age) and becoming what he famously called a 'scholarship boy' (see also Bailey et al. 2012: 73–93). Indeed, Woolcock's empathetic insight is uncannily summed up by Hoggart (1992: 38–9) thus:

> We had virtually no lines out to lives, interests, concerns, beyond ourselves. This was not an innate selfishness or self-absorption; these were the terms,

> the ground-plan of our lives forced on us by the stringency with which our mother had to operate. School friendships stopped at the playground gates, since there could be no exchange of visits. We belonged to no sporting or recreational or community or school groups; we were wholly outsiders because we had to be so much insiders and, since we knew no other way, we did not seek to belong.

Conclusion

Filmed over twenty-odd years ago, Woolcock's *Macbeth* and *Tina Trilogy* remain timely and apposite cultural representations in terms of thinking the idea of the lumpenproletariat in contemporary Britain. Though the spiralling cost of living crisis and yet another recession followed a decade of corporate greed, stagnating wages and austerity cuts to public services, social housing and welfare benefits, the Tory government blamed the calamity in part on 'feckless', work-shy families who are reliant on state handouts (see Spice 2022; Sultana 2022). And despite claims that Covid was a 'great equaliser' that created a stronger sense of social cohesion, in fact, the virus further accentuated structural inequalities and insecurities. Several recently published reports, briefings and personal testimonies (Dromey et al. 2020; Talbot 2021; Patrick and Andersen 2022; Sangster et al. 2022; Siddiqui 2022) clearly demonstrate that larger and single parent families (90 per cent of whom are women) are experiencing a disproportionate worsening of living standards in the wake of the pandemic, soaring inflation and the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 (which restricts benefits to the first two children).[34] Society's most disadvantaged people remain an easy target for the political class and their persistent scapegoating of the undeserving poor as a parasitical class.

Entirely unsurprisingly, there has been a simultaneous increase in the numbers of people who have resorted to using food banks or shoplifting everyday groceries and necessities, such as baby essentials and toiletries (either for themselves or to sell on the black market, like Tina). However, contrary to the usual stereotypes, increasing numbers of shopkeepers, supermarket managers and retail analysts are reporting that they are seeing 'every kind of person stealing, from schoolkids to 60-year-olds … it's not just those who need drugs' (Morris 2022). The Chief Inspectorate of Constabulary, Andy Cooke, even advised police officers to use their discretion when deciding whether to arrest individuals who are experiencing hunger poverty and are caught stealing in order to be able to eat (Dodd 2022a). Relatedly, more than a few senior police chiefs have expressed concerns that already impoverished communities could experience a rise in antisocial behaviour and other types of crime (Nicoll 2022). Youth charities and the Mayor of London are particularly worried that boys and young men could be lured into violent gang crime as a way to support financially their struggling families (Dodd 2022b). And insurers are warning that the cost of living crisis may even cause an increase in rustling of animals like sheep and cows (Prior 2022). Again, Woolcock's documentary dramas of Leeds and Birmingham's down-and-out are remarkably prescient as the assortment of

lumpen are reconfigured both as a public discourse and as a burgeoning material reality.

Which brings us to the question of whether the present-day 'dangerous class' is best understood as a tool of reactionary manoeuvring or a revolutionary force. On the one hand, there is a possibility that mounting disaffection and desperation could turn into irrepressible anger and result in widespread civil unrest, similar to the 2011 London riots. And as noted by J. Sakai (2017: 124), as sure as night is dark and day is light, 'any kind of crisis at the grassroots of society' will involve fragments of the lumpen because 'society's big disorder is like their order. Containing new possibilities and opportunities'. However, whilst some on the left will welcome spontaneous disturbances of the status quo, one is also reminded of Campbell's (1993: 303) insightful reflections following the 1991 riots, not least her criticisms of lawless masculinity, the violent appropriation of public spaces, the misguided destruction of important community resources and the eruption of right-wing populism. Rebellion alone does not mean that the lumpen non-class will be swept into a radical movement. Much depends on organisation and leadership. And while trade unions are doing much to harness the political energy of mass protests and industrial actions, given their marginality to the social relations of economic production and the creation of surplus value, the lowest echelons of the non-working class and disenfranchised youth are unlikely to become overnight Robin Hoods or agents of socialist intrigue.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Penny Woolcock, Kelli Hollis and Skint Eastwood for agreeing to be interviewed. And I am additionally thankful to Kelli for showing me round Leeds and contextualising some of the *Tina* stories and characters.

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Notes

1 Paget (2011: 262–96) and Biressi and Nunn (2005: 59–69) offer a fuller discussion about whether these types of films are best understood as 'dramatised documentary', 'documentary drama', 'docudrama', 'observational documentary' and so on.

2 Reflecting on various cultural representations from the 1990s, Philip Dodd (1990: 17) observes that 'the North [of England] is less a number of particular places with specific histories than a Lowryscape, a settled place with an agreed iconography'. Moreover, he considers how the traditional (white, working-class and masculine) iconography of 'the North' has been refashioned and modernised by women writers and feminism more generally.

3 <https://pennywoolcock.com/onemileaway> (accessed 30 May 2024).

4 See Stead (1989) for a comparative study of changing filmic depictions of the working class in Britain and America over the course of the twentieth century; Eagleton and Pierce (1979) for an examination of changing attitudes to social class in the English novel since the early nineteenth century; and Forrest (2020: 5–7) who makes the case for there being multiple traditions of realism in British film culture that change over time.

5 See also, Morris (1994); Novak (1997); Page (1997); Waquant (2008); Pearce and Milne (2010).

6 For an autobiographical history of Ladywood, see Hanley (2008).

7 It is for similar reasons that Roy Hattersley (2009: 31) prefers Shakespearean productions that are 'living at this hour' as opposed to those that treat Shakespeare 'as if he is part of our quaint and almost forgotten past'.

8 <https://pennywoolcock.com/blog/foremanlecture2004> (accessed 9 September 2022).

9 In fact, Woolcock returned to Birmingham even more recently to film *1 Day* (2009) and *One Mile Away* (2012), which are about two of Birmingham's most notorious gangs, the Burger Bar Boys and the Johnson Crew.

10 <https://pennywoolcock.com/macbethontheestate> (accessed 11 August 2022).

11 Interview with Penny Woolcock, 18 December 2011.

12 Though in the context of so-called 'white trash' in Detroit, and while recognising that the term of reference can serve 'as a means of insisting upon the difference between whites and blacks', John Hartigan Jr (1997: 43, 47) notes how 'poor whites' occupy a 'position in a racialised order of representation' 'where class and race differences become conflated, overlapping rather than remaining clear and distinct … where the once emphatic

cultural boundary between whites and blacks becomes unstable'. Likewise, Imogen Tyler (2013: 187–8) argues that, following the 2011 London riots, the term 'chav' signified 'whiteness polluted by poverty and contaminated by territorial proximity to poor black and migrant populations'.

13 For example, Roy Hattersley (2009: 9) notes that 'England – at least the England of our imagination – was made by Shakespeare. He, more than any other man or woman, created the idea of marital England on which our patriotism is based'. The late Roger Scruton (2006: 205) provides a similarly patriotic celebration of Shakespeare, who he insists is 'not merely the greatest of English writers, but also the most English among them'.

14 Kelli Hollis is the exception insofar as she had some previous experience performing in amateur theatre and has since gone on to become a professional actor and played leading roles in several popular television programmes, such as *Shameless* and *Emmerdale.*

15 Apart from numerous interviews in which Woolcock herself recounts how she came to write the Tina scripts, Kelli Hollis and Skint Eastwood (who played Monday Man) also confirmed that many of the films' plots, especially in *Tina Goes Shopping*, were based on stories about actual happenings that Penny had heard from residents. To quote Hollis: 'Most of Penny's films are about the people she meets and their life experiences'. Interviews with Kerri Hollis and Skint Eastwood, 21 February 2022.

16 <https://pennywoolcock.com/blog/foremanlecture2004> (accessed 9 September 2022).

17 Interview with Kerri Hollis, 21 February 2022.

18 Hollis is particularly insightful apropos council estate cultures, the enforcement of de facto moral codes and a loyalty to the community in which you live: 'One thing you can't take away from council estates is the honesty, it is what it is … regardless of people's choices or what they have to do … you don't have to worry about them stabbing you in the back or being sly or grassing you up … There's a real comradery'. Interview with Kerri Hollis, 21 February 2022.

19 Interview with Kerri Hollis, 21 February 2022.

20 Interview with Skint Eastwood, 21 February 2022.

21 <https://pennywoolcock.com/blog/foremanlecture2004> (accessed 9 September 2022).

22 Interviews with Kerri Hollis and Skint Eastwood, 21 February 2022.

23 <https://pennywoolcock.com/blog/foremanlecture2004> (accessed 9 September 2022).

24 TV critic, Robert Hanks (1999), notes that 'There was a time when the kitchen sink was a paradigm of gritty working-class realism – the kitchen sink in question would probably be overflowing with greasy water and unwashed tea-cups, an image of banal drudgery'. However, the 'only kitchen sink we glimpsed in *Tina Goes Shopping* … was splattered with blood and had a cow's head poking out of it. Clearly, something has changed, but what? The reality, or just the realism?'.

25 Hollis reflected on this female communitarianism wherein women will go out of their way to help other families because *inter alia* 'you've got something in your cupboard and they haven't', 'that's what women do, we stick together'.

26 Growing up surrounded by strong matriarchal figures is a topic that Hollis talks about at length, and whilst she acknowledges that male adults and teenagers tends to rule the streets on the Leeds estates, equally, Hollis was emphatic that men 'don't mess with the women in our family'.

27 Interview with Kerri Hollis, 21 February 2022.

28 Unlike the original play script, there is no suggestion of infanticide (see, for example, Chamberlain 2005).

29 For a fuller analysis of 'shotting' and drug-related gang culture, see McKenzie (2015: 163–8).

30 In fact, this is exactly what happened to the child actor, Lee Brimble, who played Muffy in *Tina Takes a Break.* Both Woolcock and Hollis recount the occasion when they took Lee tenpin bowling with an agent from Curtis Brown who wanted to sign him up when he was just fourteen, but Lee declined the opportunity because he wanted to be 'known as a gangster' in real life. See <https://pennywoolcock.com/tinatakesabreak> (accessed 9 September 2022). Also interview with Kerri Hollis, 21 February 2022.

31 <https://pennywoolcock.com/blog/foremanlecture2004> (accessed 9 September 2022).

32 <https://pennywoolcock.com/tinatakesabreak> (accessed 9 September 2022).

33 <https://pennywoolcock.com/blog/foremanlecture2004> (accessed 9 September 2022).

34 Children of large families and lone parents are significantly more likely to be living in absolute and relative poverty. Child Poverty Action group have a long history of supporting and campaigning for families living in poverty. And Gingerbread is a UK charity that does important work to reduce stigma against single parents.

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