

Queer Social Realism and Architecture in British Cinema: Tenement Housing, Unions and the Affective Body

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Abstract : This paper explores the significance of British cinema in the late 1950s and early 1960s as offering a renaissance of realist discourse, in the representation of everyday social issues. Offering a rejection of Hollywood cinema and the superficiality of the middle classes, these 'kitchen sink dramas' often set within modest and sometimes squalid domestic and social environments, focused on the political struggle of the disenfranchised examining poverty, the oppressed and the outsider. While films like *Look Back in Anger* and *Room at the Top* looked primarily at male heterosexual subjectivity, films like *A Taste of Honey* and *Victim* focused on female and queer male narratives. Framing the urban landscape as a discursive architectural arena, representing basic living conditions and threatening social worlds, these iconic films established new storytelling processes for the outsider. This paper examines this historical context foregrounding the contemporary films *Beautiful Thing* (Hettie Macdonald, 1996), *Weekend* (Andrew Haigh, 2011) and *Pride* (Marcus Warchus, 2014), while employing the process of textual analysis in relation to theories of affect, defined by writers such as Lisa U. Marks and Sara Ahmed. Considering both romance narratives and public demonstrations of unity, where the queer 'affective' body is placed within architectural and social space, *Beautiful Thing* tells the story of gay male teenagers falling in love despite oppression from family and school, *Weekend* examines a one-night stand between young gay men and the unlikeliness of commitment, but the drive for sensitivity, and *Pride* foregrounds an historical relationship between queer youth activists and the miner's union, who were on strike between 1984-5. These films frame the queer 'affective' body within politicized public space, evident in lower class men's working clubs, tenement housing and brutal modernist tower blocks, focusing on architectural features such as windows, doorways and staircases, relating temporality, desire and change. Through such an examination a hidden history of gay male performativity is revealed, framing the potential of contemporary cinema to focus on the context of the outsider in encouraging social change.

Keywords : queer, affect, cinema, architecture, life chances

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