The years between 1956 and 1963 have been customarily regarded by studies of post-war English film as marked by a move towards realism. The first witnessed the start of the Free Cinema movement, as well as the ‘official’ launch of the populist trend of the plays and novels of the ‘angry young men’. The last is seen as the year in which kitchen-sink realism and the whole post-war populist wave lost impact. A closer look reveals, however, that the spectrum of post-war innovation, closely linked to an aspiration to realism, should be enlarged, for cinematic realism was very much alive on television after the death of the kitchen-sink dramas. As John Caughie crucially argues: ‘The breach which was opened in 1956 and seemed to close in 1963 actually remained opened in a place that very few “serious” critics thought to look: in television, and specifically in BBC television drama after 1964’ (2000, p. 58).

This chapter will be concerned with one television film, which in its innovative format both incorporated and negated the realist tradition of the post-war years. Up the Junction, directed by Ken Loach in 1965, showed that perhaps English cinema needed television finally to embrace the subversion of film language pioneered a few years earlier by various ‘new waves’ across the world. Usually overshadowed by Loach’s best known work for television, Cathy Come Home (1966), Up the Junction was an innovative film not only in the context of television dramas but also in relation to English cinema, and established an important bridge between both worlds.

In the mid-1960s, television was still on the cusp of achieving the ubiquitous status it holds now, and it could be seen as a relatively new medium in its formative stages. ‘Drama’ was one of the many formats supported by the vehicle, and after an initial period of cementing conventions it began to be challenged by new possibilities in terms of subjects and languages. Caught in a tradition of theatricality, which meant most television plays were shot or transmitted live from the studio in the mode of a theatre play, the late 1950s and early 1960s saw an insurgence of voices questioning the constraints of such conventions and stressing the need for innovation. The new medium of television thus invited a new language in its search for specificity.
What distinguished television from film and theatre, alongside its production modes and the technology of reproduction, was its essential domesticity. Television was quotidian, everyday, and belonged to the ‘unsanctified’ space of the living room, deprived of the aura of the theatre (and of the film theatre). And in its domesticity it was an essentially demotic medium, having the potential to reach and ‘speak to’ the nation as a whole. Moreover, in 1965 the rise of commodity culture and of affluence meant that the working classes could afford to own television sets. This defining characteristic in some ways set the tone for television drama’s specific challenge in the 1950s–60s. A rejection of theatricality involved a conscious attempt to introduce everyday life on television, and the search for new ways to address the everyday.

In a first instance, film technology played a crucial part in the development of a new language, but television drama was searching for something other than theatre or film, trying to find what could be specifically televisial. *Up the Junction* is a seminal work in that it embodies this search for specificity and for new ways to articulate everyday life. Its break with theatricality was immensely helped by the 16mm technology, which allowed not only for location shooting with synchronous sound, but also for the post-shoot editing, subverting the limitations of electronic studio and live shooting. It somehow brought to the ‘unsanctified’ space of television elements of the ‘respected’ art of film, benefitting from television’s ephemerality and fragmentation and turning them into the very essence of its filmic language.

It is possible to detect an interesting paradox in the moment television drama incorporates film and with it the ability to record and edit. John Caughie has called this transitional moment television’s ‘Fall from innocence’, in that it embodied this search for specificity and for new ways to articulate everyday life. Its break with theatricality was seen as too much like the ‘purity’ of theatre itself. *Up the Junction* and its moment epitomized not so much a distancing from a ‘pure’ or uncorrupted television drama, but rather a search for the specificity of television drama, or in other words for its ‘purity’. And despite having assimilated film, television drama (or television film) knew it could never really be cinema. It had to move towards something televisual, and *Up the Junction* was particularly successful in absorbing influences and creating something fresh. It incorporated television’s current-affairs format, and especially the direct address, to its mixture of 16mm and electronic images, thus bringing the old studio drama, film and the specific televisial style together for the first time. The paradox refers to the fact that the immediacy of live drama generally resulted in a still and stuffy style (the theatrical), while the incorporation of film (or the loss of immediacy) resulted in a vibrant and ‘alive’ style which – in aspiring to be cinema – occasionally found the televisual.
Up the Junction was the fruit of a realist impulse that contained an important subversion of the traditional conventions of film language. As a work of fiction, it invited the element of the ‘document’ into its diegesis. It is, in the words of Tony Garnett (2000, p. 18), ‘a dramatic document’, which set out to capture everyday life’s fragmentary essence and the 1960s spirit of change, rejecting the coherence of illusionism and inaugurating a new form of realism in the English audiovisual landscape.

‘A little closer to the modern scene’

Up the Junction was first shown on BBC1’s third season of the Wednesday Play, on 3 November 1965, from 9.40 p.m. to 10.50 p.m. It was based on a series of short stories by Nell Dunn, first published in book form in 1963. Dunn wrote her stories from personal experience: bored with her comfortable life in wealthy Chelsea, she decided to move across the river to Battersea and, in the words of Pulp’s singer/songwriter Jarvis Cocker, ‘live like common people’. She got a job in a chocolate factory and became fascinated by the liveliness and warmth of the working-class community of that area. Up the Junction was mainly founded on observation, and the first story, ‘Out with the Girls’, firmly places the first person narrator as an outsider to the community being portrayed, as seen in the following dialogue:

- You come from Battersea, don’t yer?
- Yeah, me and Sylvie do. She don’t though. She’s an heiress from Chelsea.

(Dunn, 1988, p. 13)

The short stories, despite not following a continuous narrative, mainly focus on episodes in the lives of Sylvie, Rube and the narrator – the heiress from Chelsea – who live in Battersea and work in the same factory. Extensively based on interviews, the stories are structured around dialogue written in the vernacular, increasing their observational character. Dunn’s fiction has a straight dialogue with reality which brings it close to the world of the newspaper and journalism, and it is fitting that four of the 16 stories in Up the Junction first appeared on the pages of the New Statesman in the early 1960s.

Loach considers Up the Junction his first real film. It was produced by James MacTaggart but owes a lot to the collaboration with Tony Garnett, who worked as story editor before assuming the producer title in Cathy Come Home, marking the start of a collaborative process with Loach that would last many years. Up the Junction had an audience of almost ten million viewers, and its three main roles were played by Geraldine Sherman (Rube), whose only previous film experience had been an uncredited appearance in A Hard Day’s Night (Richard Lester, 1964); Vickery Turner (Eileen), making her screen debut;
and Carol White (Sylvie), an experienced if not renowned actress who was to star in Loach’s two following films, *Cathy Come Home* and *Poor Cow* (1967).

The production history of *Up the Junction* somehow matches the spirit of immediacy of the book. Loach recalls how ‘there was a gap in the BBC schedule, and so we had six weeks to get something together. … It was agreed that I would knock a script out of this little book and make a collage of events and mood pieces’ (Fuller, 1998, p. 13). As mentioned before, television drama until the mid-1960s had mostly been transmitted live from a studio, with pre-recorded material being inserted on the spot. For the pre-recorded material, the shooting still operated as if during a live transmission, perpetuating the theatrical format. The use of film during production and post-production in television remained exclusive to the documentary and the news department. In a move that would deeply affect the whole production of *Up the Junction*, the BBC finally yielded to the pressures of Garnett and Loach and allowed a few days shooting on location with a 16mm camera. During this time, their cameraman Tony Imi played an essential part in making the most of the short time they had, and shot approximately half of the film on location.

*Up the Junction*’s location sequences were shot on an Éclair, a small handheld silent (self-blipped) 16mm camera with a separate sound recording system (an electrical battery powered tape recorder connected by cable to the camera, which emitted a synchronized pulse), developed by André Coutant in the beginning of the 1960s. The Éclair’s manoeuvrability allowed for inconspicuous shooting on the streets, increasing the impression of authenticity and immediacy of the images. The other major breakthrough of the Éclair was the possibility of shooting on 16mm with synchronized sound, which increased the reality coefficient of the images and led to new definitions of realism. This move caused a shift of the creative input from the writer to the director during the process of production, since being on location with a 16mm camera allowed for a strong element of improvisation.

*Up the Junction* benefitted immensely from the new 16mm synch-sound technology, and from the sense of spontaneity of location shooting, of being in direct contact with the ‘real’. This is noticeable in sequences that show Rube, Sylvie and Eileen almost as flâneurs in the streets of Battersea, echoing Jo’s ‘unmotivated’ walks through Salford in *A Taste of Honey* (Tony Richardson, 1961). The space of the city in the film is indeed dominated by the three girls: they are seen in a long tracking shot walking down the street and singing (in synch sound) ‘I Should Have Known Better’ by The Beatles. They go past piles of rubble, reinforcing the idea of the fluidity of space in the ever-changing 1960s London. Later in the film, Rube is seen walking aimlessly across the Common, in a series of shots displaying her in full body, close-up or profile, and always in a tracking movement. And the film ends with a sequence of shots of the girls walking down a busy street, looking at shop windows, playing pinball, talking and laughing among the hustle and bustle.
Perhaps the most famous location sequence in *Up the Junction* is the swimming pool sequence, in which the girls go for a night swim with three boys they had met in the pub earlier in the evening. The whole sequence is edited in jump-cuts of the six jumping in the water stripped to their underwear, playing with each other like kids and finally kissing and hugging. The closeness and the thrill of these more erotic than romantic encounters is conveyed by beautifully shot close-up images of the couples’ embraces and kisses, captured by Tony Imi with the Éclair from inside the swimming pool.

As well as benefitting from the mobility of the Éclair, Loach made sure that the studio sequences in *Up the Junction* were shot in a way not dissimilar to the location sequences, privileging improvisation over a carefully planned structure. And because these sequences were shot less like television and more like a film, it became almost impossible to edit on tape, still a cumbersome and slow technique at the time. Loach explains:

> The only solution was to cut it on the 16mm back-up print that the BBC used at the time as a safety measure. This was greeted with absolute horror because they said it wasn’t up to broadcast quality – it was very grey and misty. … But they let us cut on 16mm in the end because it was the only way they could salvage the material. (Fuller, 1998, p. 14)

*Up the Junction* epitomized the search for a new language, but it was also the product of changes being felt in the world of television drama since the end of the 1950s, when new tendencies began to be embraced. Sydney Newman, the crucial figure behind two of the most important slots for the presentation of new drama on television at the time, first at ABC and later at the BBC, should be seen as a catalyst of the reactions against drama conventions rather than as the sole figure responsible for them. He did, however, foment innovation on more than one level, by encouraging the inclusion of topical issues and working-class themes – a move in tune with the populist vein of literature, theatre and cinema at the time – and by promoting television drama’s break with the theatrical and welcoming the work of new writers and directors, as well as giving power to people such as James MacTaggart and Tony Garnett, great advocates of innovation.

Ken Loach was among the new team of directors working for the *Wednesday Play*, Newman’s slot for drama at the BBC, which started to air on Wednesday evenings in October 1964. His first directorial opportunity came in early 1964 with three episodes of the popular police series *Z Cars*. At the end of the same year he directed Troy Kennedy Martin’s and John McGrath’s (the creators of *Z Cars*) six-part series *Diary of a Young Man*. This series already signalled a shift away from the more established conventions of television drama, as Stuart Laing points out: ‘The style was explicitly non-naturalistic and self-regarding, using stills, voice-overs, fantasy sequences and time-shifts freely to disrupt the straightforward narrative’ (1997, p. 15).
Earlier in 1964, Troy Kennedy Martin’s article ‘Nats Go Home: First Statement of a New Drama for Television’ had been published in the theatre magazine _Encore_. An open attack on the theatricality of television dramas, the article called for the development of a new mode of production and a new language for television. The ‘nats’ in the article’s title referred to the naturalism inherited from the theatre, defined by Martin as an over-reliance on dialogue and a dependence on ‘a strict form of natural time’, a consequence of plays being broadcast live from a studio. He believed that the ‘dictatorship’ of the text limited the camera to photographing dialogue, and the absence of pre-recorded material eliminated the creative possibilities of the editing. Moving away from the theatrical presupposed the erosion of the text as the spinal cord of the work. Martin advocated the use of voiceover narration to take the weight off the stage dialogue, consequently allowing for an increased use of the ‘lost speech of everyday life’ that is characteristic of cinema.

Martin’s arguments are not as clear cut as they might seem, but what is important here is to place _Up the Junction_ in the context of his crucial call for a demotic televisual language, ‘a new idea of form, new punctuation and new style’ and ‘something which can be applied to mass audience viewing’ (1964, p. 21). His article, which also echoed other calls against the theatricality of television drama at the time, set out to awaken the director to the stimulus of the contemporary:

> It is to be hoped that the great demands this kind of drama makes will stir some kind of response – and that their [the directors’] basic television thinking, which is reminiscent of Victor Sylvester’s fox-trots being danced in the world of the Beatles, will be fragmented into something a little closer to the modern scene.

(1964, p. 32)

### The fragmentation of everyday life

_Up the Junction_ was put together as a jigsaw of images and sounds, not strictly to ‘tell a story’ but to describe and comment on a world. As in the book, it is set around three main events: Rube’s abortion, Terry’s fatal motorcycle accident and the death of Mrs Hardy. These are, however, interwoven in the film’s kaleidoscopic structure and only stand out for their nature and not for their treatment, happening naturally alongside sequences devoid of any strong narrative motivation. From the book, which in Loach’s words ‘was made up of little vignettes, like newspaper pieces or descriptions’ (Fuller, 1998, p. 13), the film also incorporated the element of the document to its fiction, thus infusing it with the immediacy and direct contact with reality present in the world of the news. The document was brought into the film
especially through the use of images and sounds directly addressed to the
viewer (henceforth referred to as ‘direct address’).

Topicality plays a part in approximating Up the Junction to the journalistic
practice, as exemplified by the inclusion of a powerful sequence on abortion,
in tune with the debate on legalization which indeed came two years later
in 1967. It is, however, in the film form where the dialogue between film
and journalism is best observed. This was in tune with the subversion of
film language carried out by the French nouvelle vague and other new waves
in the early 1960s, a time when filmmakers seemed fascinated with the
contemporary and ephemeral character of the newspaper and the radio.

Up the Junction’s incorporation of the ‘document’ through the direct-
address technique revealed Loach’s intention partly to emulate the style of
the news and current-affairs programmes on television:

It was very much to do with our programming slot. For about forty weeks
a year, the Wednesday Play aired every Wednesday at 9pm, after the late
evening news. We were very anxious for our plays not to be considered
dramas but as continuations of the news. The big investigative document-
tary programme at the time was World in Action ... and we tried to copy
its techniques and cut with a rough, raw, edgy quality, which enabled us
to deal with issues head on.

(Fuller, 1998, p. 15)

World in Action was Granada’s current-affairs programme, which ran from
1963 to 1998. Unlike Panorama, the studio-based BBC rival programme,
World in Action avoided the ‘guests-talking-to-the-anchor-who-talks-to-
the-audience’ format, and abandoned the studio in favour of the streets.
It devoted each half-hour programme to a single issue and, making the
most of the mobility of lightweight film equipment, pioneered a form of
pictorial journalism on location. Innovative also was its use of the direct
address, through which interviewees talked straight to the camera without
the mediation of an anchorman, thus breaking the spatial divide between
television and the living room.

Up the Junction, through Dunn’s book, brought in from the television
world the fragmented character of televisual news and especially of World
in Action, incorporating its use of the direct address to bring in ‘pieces’
taken from reality with no apparent articulation, producing a different kind
of realism from that achieved by means of illusionistic representations of
reality. One eloquent example is the long sequence focusing exclusively on
a tallyman, who is driving a car and directly addresses the camera as if he
were talking to someone in the back seat. He explains the rules of his trade
detail, and the film gives no indication of whom he is seemingly speak-
ing to. His voice thus becomes an unarticulated element within the film’s
fiction (Figure 13.1).
The use of voiceovers in *Up the Junction* is perhaps the main means through which the ‘document’ is interwoven into the diegesis. Here it is important to point out that although Dunn’s book was written in the first person, from the perspective of an outsider narrator, in the film the subject of enunciation is fragmented as a result of the elimination of the outsider character and of a single subjective point of view. This enabled the film to achieve a more democratic and demotic structure: it is the camera and the tape recorder that observes and registers, and the resulting vision does not need to be validated by that of an outsider/observer character.

This democratization of the subject of enunciation becomes explicit through the use of voiceovers in the film’s soundtrack, which includes not only commentary by the three main characters but also by many other characters in the film, as well as unidentifiable voices speaking in the first person and relating an experience. This means that the episodes in the lives of the three girls are underpinned with comments introduced through the technique of the direct address. The effect is the social contextualization of the individual drama. Caughie makes an important point in relation to the hierarchy between what he calls ‘the voice of the drama’ and ‘the voice of the documentary’ in *Up the Junction*. In his view, ‘the voice of the drama’, for instance the diegetic dialogue between two characters, ‘exists at the same level of banal “typicality” as the inserted monologues of the background voice-overs – the “voice of the documentary”’ (2000, p. 116).

*Up the Junction*‘s use of the direct address in a variety of witness-style voiceovers is in tune with a Brechtian rejection of illusionism, as Raymond Williams explains in *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*: ‘What Brecht seized on was the exclusion, by particular conventions of verisimilitude, of all direct commentary, alternative consciousness, alternative points of view’ (1973, p. 318). *Up the Junction* indeed privileges through the direct address the

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*Figure 13.1* Direct address in *Up the Junction*: Who is the tallyman speaking to? Reproduced with kind permission from BBC and Ken Loach.
presentation of alternative points of view, and invites the active engagement of the spectator with the richness of what is heard and seen. Despite not clearly adopting the tableau structure, the film is nevertheless composed of self-contained segments not linked by causal relationship, once again indicating the fragmentary essence of everyday life.

*Up the Junction* opens with a close-up image of a man looking straight at the camera – thus acknowledging the audience – and singing ‘Oh, oh little girl, pretty little girl, you’re such a good little girl, why don’t you let me make you a bad girl?’. What follows is a montage of shots cut to this song (‘Bad Girl’), which has words by Nell Dunn and alludes to teenage sex – a theme that runs through the film. This prelude sequence – entirely cut to music – contains a few important movements that relate to the film as a whole. It sways between inside and outside, the detail and the general, the old and the new. The sequence starts inside the club, moves outside to establish the location – the station sign and the chimneys of the power station leave no doubt that this is Battersea – and then moves back inside the club where the action takes place. The constant zooming in and out alternately highlights the detail and the general, a movement suggestive of the very structure of the film, based on the articulation between the individual and the collective. The zoom was commonly associated at the time with the new kind of film language derived from direct cinema and cinéma vérité, which privileged the 16mm handheld camera and the freedom it engendered. *Up the Junction*’s repeated use of the zoom also indicates a rejection of the conventions of both studio drama and classical narrative film associated with the 35mm gauge. Finally, old and new are juxtaposed in the same image as the tracking shot of a row of old terraced houses ends on a new tower block.

Rube, Sylvie and Eileen, first seen at the station platform, are now inside the club talking to three young men, Terry, Dave and Ron. Most of the dialogue heard is of the ‘behavioural’ type, the ‘lost dialogue of everyday life’ retrieved and spoken in the vernacular, and not conveying any essential narrative information. Rather than shot-reverse shot montage, with its customary reactive dialogue, the sequence is edited to present only fragments of conversations. The soundtrack is further complicated by pieces of other people’s conversations, as well as the song in the background. The imagetrack is made of an abundance of close-up images of the three girls and boys and other people in the club, as well as extreme close-up shots of hands and mouths. It is therefore not only the speech but also the body that is fragmented by the editing and the camerawork.

A long sequence inside the chocolate factory is another example of fragmentation of the narrative voice in *Up the Junction*. The camera lingers on workers talking about their lives before revealing Sylvie and Eileen working in the production line (Figure 13.2). The soundtrack is once again very busy, with dialogue, factory noise and background music competing against one another. The montage principle dominates, dialogue only heard in
fragments and never carried forward. The camera movement used to film a conversation between three women working at the conveyor belt is revealing of this democratic structure: the camera pans left from one close-up to the next, stopping to capture what each of them has to say, and finally tilts down to reveal the conveyor belt and the repetitive movement of hands putting chocolates in a box.

The montage principle of the factory sequence is exaggerated by the use of cutting to music, which results in a much faster editing, aimed at mimicking the repetitive and mechanical nature of the factory work. A close-up shot reveals a circular machinery structure going round and round to the beat of Johnny Kid & the Pirates’ 1963 song ‘Hungry for Love’, and images of the workers alternate in rapid succession with a close-up shot of the loudspeaker, of the conveyor belt and of hands putting chocolates in a box. The pace of the editing is dictated by the song and the mechanical and fragmentary nature of the factory work.

This music-video structure, recurrent in Up the Junction, was pioneering at the time. Dunn had already used quotes from popular songs referring to specific passages in her book, and the film explores pop music’s potential even further by using it intra- and extradiegetically in almost every sequence. Hits from the 1960s such as The Kinks’ ‘I Need You’, Sonny & Cher’s ‘I Got You Babe’ and The Searchers’ ‘Sugar and Spice’ are essential to the creation of a contemporary atmosphere in the film, and frequently relate to sex and romance, establishing a contrast with the problematic relationships portrayed. Up the Junction’s link with pop music finds an echo in the 1978 release of an eponymous record by the band Squeeze, which reached
number two on the UK singles chart that year. The song relates indirectly to
the book and the film, offering a first-person description in the vernacular
of the hardships of working-class life in Clapham, as well as dealing with the
subject of an unexpected pregnancy. The disappointing cinema version of
*Up the Junction* (Peter Collinson, 1968) also contained an eponymous song
by Manfred Mann, which compares as unfavourably to Squeeze’s song as
Collinson’s film to Loach’s.3

Rube’s backstreet abortion episode occupies the central part of the film.
The subject is introduced by a series of images of pregnant women walking
down the street, accompanied by unidentified voiceovers commenting on
the hardships of motherhood, unwanted pregnancies and abortions. It starts
with the following testimony:

I never once lay down with him. I used to meet him in a back alley off
the Latchmere. I never really knew what he was at. I never got no pleas-
ure out of it. I didn’t know I was carrying till I was five months. I couldn’t
believe it. I kept thinking it would pass off.

This initial part of the sequence operates in an asynchronous mode, in
that the voices heard do not belong to the women seen on the imagerack,
despite relating to them through the subject of pregnancy. However, both
tracks have the value of ‘document’, inserted as they are into the fiction’s
fabric with no articulation, and remain illustrative throughout, providing
the backdrop context for Rube’s abortion. This is introduced by an extreme
close-up of Rube’s face (Figure 13.3), and by the return of the synch sound.

Gazing at the camera, she says in a fatalistic tone: ‘When you love a boy,
you want to give him the best thing in the world. And there’s only one
thing, isn’t there?’ This statement calls the film from the general back to the
particular, from the document back to fiction, and next Rube is seen with
Eileen looking for Winnie, the abortionist. Over a shot of the girls walking
through the Common, new voiceovers are introduced, relating more stories
of pregnancies and abortions. Also heard is the more authoritative voiceover
of a doctor, who provides a ‘scientific’ take on the issue, in sharp contrast
with the vernacular voices heard until this point:

In my surgery I see at least one woman a week who is seriously con-
templating an abortion. Quite apart from the 35 deaths per year that
we know are directly attributable to the back street abortions, the most
common and seriously disturbing result must be that this girl is unable
to have any more babies. She may not be able to have any. She may be
unable to have a family.

Rube sees Winnie, but it is later, once back in her room, that she has to
endure the abortion process itself, suffering immense pain and sickness.
Her wall is decorated with ripped up pictures and posters of Elizabeth Taylor, an allusion to cinema, pop culture and to her young age (she is just 17 years old). After a series of jump-cuts of extreme close-up images of her face, sweating and frantically shaking with pain, the voiceover of the doctor is reintroduced, silencing her screams: 'Take the lowest figure: 52,000 abortions a year. That's 1000 abortions a week. Something like five or six every hour of every day. And that's taking the minimum figure.' This statement is abruptly and unexpectedly followed by Ben E. King's 'Yes', a song about a woman giving in to sex (and which had been used by Dunn in the abortion chapter 'Bang on the Common'): ‘Yes, you can hurt me / Yes, you can squeeze me / Yes, you can have my caress.’

This song relates directly to Rube's fatalistic statement ('when you love a boy'), and provides, in Brechtian style, a commentary to her present situation, as well as a soothing counterpart to the images of her pain and the sound of her screams. The song continues to play over a sequence of images of Rube in the Common, on the station platform and in the pub toilet. Here, it is perhaps worth noting the importance of Joan Littlewood and the Theatre Workshop, especially their 1963 production of Oh What a Lovely War, in the spread of Brecht's ideas within the English context. Heavily influenced by Brecht's epic theatre and drawing on music hall techniques (song and dance, the sketch structure), the widely acclaimed play about World War I had had a considerable impact on Loach and Garnett. Stephen Lacey recalls that in the play ‘the newspanel announcement of losses of 85,000 men at Verdun was juxtaposed with the singing of “Goodbye-ee”, an ironic song about
a soldier leaving to go off to war' (Lacey, 1995, p. 160). *Up the Junction* uses
exactly the same strategy by contrasting the doctor's statistics on abortions
with the song's invitation to sex. The sequence finally ends with an abrupt
cut from a close-up of Rube to one of Sylvie and the latter's voiceover: 'I was
the youngest bride in Battersea.' It is her 'story' that will now be told, and
her predominantly white image (she wears a white blouse and a white hair
band, a probable reference to 'youngest bride') contrasts sharply with Rube's
black hair, blouse and strong eye make-up.

Loach once claimed to have lost interest in Brechtian techniques
towards the end of the 1960s, suggesting that they had lost their impact.
Paradoxically, this rejection coincided with the gradual politicization of his
filmmaking, suggesting that his interest in Brecht around the time of *Up the
Junction, Cathy Come Home* and *Poor Cow* had not only been political but
also, and sometimes to a greater extent, formal. Loach admitted that back
in his university years as a law student 'Brecht was fashionable' (Fuller, 1998,
p. 4) and that he was aware of his work. *Up the Junction* shows that Brecht
was a decisive influence on him, both in terms of form (anti-illusionistic
storytelling) and political content.

The ephemeral and fragmented quality of the real resulting from the
narrative strategies adopted in *Up the Junction*, which draw directly from
television news style, characterizes the film as essentially modern. In 1863
Charles Baudelaire, in a well-known phrase, described modernity as 'the
transitory, the fugitive, the contingent' (1992, p. 355). Loach's filming style,
marked by a 'distracted' camera that never lingers on the same character
for too long, seems attracted precisely by what is fleeting and unstable, the
urban fragmentary experience which characterizes modernity. A telling illus-
tration is the film's third sequence, in which Eileen and Dave talk and have
sex inside a derelict house, followed by a series of shots of derelict houses
being demolished. This was a time of slum clearances, when old houses,
and with them an old way of life, were being pulled down to be replaced by
council estates. This transitory moment is reflected in both the demolition
images and the film's fragmented structure (Figure 13.4).

*Up the Junction* is indeed about fluidity and movement. It captures the
spirit of the time with its dynamic camera, jump-cuts and dense soundtrack.
It is not by chance that the three main characters are first seen standing on
a railway station platform and last seen walking around busy streets. They
embody the fluidity of space and sense of transformation as experienced in
the 1960s, bringing with them a breath of fresh air to English cinema and
television.

A dramatic document

*Up the Junction* partly incorporated the realist tradition of the kitchen-sink dra-
mas in its use of location shooting, unknown or non-professional actors, and
Up the Junction

its concern with topical issues and the everyday lives of the working classes. Ken Loach, however, declared that, despite following in the footsteps of the kitchen-sink dramas, ‘we felt … that we could take that sense of authenticity a few notches further’ (Loach, 2003). As a director, he was moved by an impulse towards a greater realism, which related dialectically with the preceding form of realism, a move that is well explained by John Hill: ‘Realist innovations … take place in a kind of dialectic with what has gone before, underwriting their own appeal to be uncovering reality by exposing the artificiality and conventionality of what has passed for reality previously’ (1986, p. 127).

Up the Junction’s realism exposed the artificiality of what had previously passed for reality, namely the structured organization of the real of the kitchen-sink dramas. Loach’s realist principle implied that, to convey immediacy and actuality, it was necessary to incorporate chaotic and fragmented aspects of reality as they presented themselves to the camera, rather than reorganize them according to a given set of rules. It also had to incorporate the document as a non-articulated element into the fabric of the fiction.

With Cathy Come Home, Loach assumes a more rigid position as the spokesperson for the plight of the homeless, and the film’s ‘realism’ works as an act of denunciation, intended to instruct, sensitize and awaken the public to a specific issue. Up the Junction was conceived more as a celebration and was motivated by a feeling of empathy rather than the duty of protest, working as a platform for the voices of ordinary people. It represents a rejection not only of the theatricality of television drama but also of the conventionalities of cinema’s illusionist grammar, and therefore stands as a seminal work within (and between) both
It is a landmark in Loach’s career as well as in the English audiovisual landscape.

Notes

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1. My PhD thesis *Everyday Voices: The Demotic Impulse in English Post-war Film and Television* focuses on the aspiration to realism present in the post-war period of renewal, and redefines its boundaries to include the cycle of ‘spiv films’ (1945–51) and *Up the Junction* (1965).

2. Jo can also be seen as prefiguring the revelation of the working-class girl’s voice as seen in *Up the Junction*.

3. In 1995 the band Pulp released the single ‘Common People’, which speaks of a girl who ‘wants to live like common people’, and thus rents a flat above a shop, cuts her hair, gets a job, smokes some cigarettes, plays some pool, pretending she never went to school. This is almost a checklist of the actions performed by the ‘heiress from Chelsea’ in the 1968 version of *Up the Junction*, which, unlike Loach’s, kept the character of the outsider.

References


Williams, Raymond (1973), *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*. Harmondsworth: Pelican Books.