Ken Loach, *Family Life* (1971) and Socialist Realism:

Some Historical and Theoretical Aspects

Abstract

This article considers some historical and theoretical aspects of Ken Loach's 1971 film about mental illness, *Family Life*. Historically, it explores the film's influences, particularly that of the 1960s 'anti-psychiatrist' and counter-cultural figure, R.D. Laing. In this respect, the article specifies a contemporaneous critique of *Family Life* in Peter Sedgwick's (1972) hostile review for *Socialist Worker*. In light of this critique, the article then reconsiders, theoretically, Loach's strategies of socialist-realist representation in *Family Life*, particularly as they relate to: 1) mental illness and institutional psychiatry; and 2) the distinction drawn by Raymond Williams between artistic and political forms of representation.

Keywords: Loach, Laing, Sedgwick, *Family Life*, mental illness, psychiatry, representation

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1. Introduction

This article considers Ken Loach's 1971 film about institutional psychiatry and mental illness, *Family Life*. It is both historical and theoretical. Historically, it analyses the influences behind the making of *Family Life* – especially that of the counter-cultural 'guru' and 'anti-psychiatrist'of the 1960s, R.D. Laing. A consensus has been that *Family Life* is a definitively 'Laingian' film insofar as Laing's theories – that psychiatry is a repressive institution, that 'madness' is fostered in the milieu of the nuclear family, and that 'madness' itself is 'socially intelligible' (Laing and Esterson, 1964: 13) – provide the film's primary influences. This consensus turns out to be true although the details are more nuanced than it implies. We show that Laing's theoretical influence is mediated mainly through the writing of David Mercer rather than the direction of Loach and that Loach and producer Tony Garnett were also influenced by the 'therapeutic community' movement of the late 1960s and by sociological theory. Generally, though, Garnett and Loach, committed to socialist politics and producing socialist-realist[1] films, assumed that Laing was a 'good' influence and that his theories were largely correct.

That assumption was opposed by Peter Sedgwick's (1972) hostile review. Sedgwick's critique is distinctive in that he challenges *Family Life* as a socialist who holds Laingian theory to be both false and detrimental for socialism. He also takes Loach to task in an area in which Loach is thought to be strong: his representation of working-class identity. By contrast, Sedgwick argues that Loach only provides an 'incomplete' representation of working-class identity in *Family Life* – a representation which works to the detriment of the parents of the film's main protagonist. This section concludes our historical analysis of *Family Life* by adding Sedgwick's dissenting voice to the consensus.

The final section addresses some theoretical problems flagged up by Sedgwick's critique. Following Raymond Williams' (1976, 2004) concerns with *realism* and *representation* (see also Petley, 1986*)* we discuss the interaction of *artistic* and *political* forms of representation in the context of *Family Life*.

Williams argued that Loach had extended the scope of realism not only through his 'socialist realism' - 'in the Marxist tradition' (ibid.: 76), probing beneath ' a realism "of the surface" to 'underlying social or historical movements' (Williams, 1976: 219) - but by displaying a conscious commitment 'to a particular political viewpoint' (Williams, 2004: 79): socialism. This 'conscious commitment', though, as Williams also observed, points to the 'degree of possible overlap' (1976: 225) between artistic and political representation: Loach not only claims to represent 'things as they *really* are' in *Family Life* (Williams, 1976: 2) (artistic representation) but to *critique* that reality and provide an account of how things could and ought to be different (political representation). Although the two forms of representation are not the same, for Williams they share a 'common cultural assumption' (ibid.: 225; also Freadman, 2005) in that both 'stand for' and/or 'speak for' their 'objects' - in the case of *Family Life* they 'stand for' the reality of mental illness and institutional psychiatry and they 'speak for' a critique of that institution and for more humane intervention and treatment. Yet according to Sedgwick, Loach goes wrong on both counts: artistically, *Family Life* does not provide a true representation of mental illness and institutional psychiatry; whilst its political critique is fallacious and the alternative treatments proposed have limited scope for working-class people.

Generally, Sedgwick and Loach shared similar left-wing commitments and Sedgwick acknowledged Mercer, Garnett and Loach as a 'team of committed socialists'. So why such hostility to *Family Life?* The answer lies in the 'contested' nature of what Nick Crossley (2006) has called 'the field of psychiatric contention': historically, there has been little political or scientific consensus about what constitutes 'mental illness' and how best to 'treat' it. Sedgwick's hostility to *Family Life* was itself a reflection of this contestation.

2. Ken Loach, R.D. Laing, and *Family Life* (1971)

Loach's film, which emerged at the end of his 'early' period - after *Kes* (1969) but pre-dating the 'creative resurgence' (Robins, 2003) of his 'internationalist' works (e.g. *Land and Freedom* [1995]) - reprised an earlier television drama, *In Two Minds* (1967). In both cases his collaborators were the dramatist Mercer and producer Garnett.

Family Life tells the story of Janice Baildon, an unemployed nineteen year old woman (Sandy Ratcliff), still living at home with her parents (Bill Dean and Grace Cave). Whilst the domestic situation seems unexceptional in working-class terms, it could be said to be one full of what psychiatrists have called 'high expressed emotion' (Vaughn and Leff, 1976). The younger of two sisters - her sibling (Hilary Martin) being married and upwardly mobile - Janice is a disappointment to her parents and their well-intentioned criticisms are a feature of her 'family life'. When she falls pregnant to her boyfriend (Malcolm Tierney) the subsequent 'voluntary' abortion precipitates a mental decline.

She enters the orbit of institutional psychiatry. Loach presents what the sociologist Erving Goffman (1961) called the 'moral career of the mental patient' in both positive and negative ways:

1. Positively, she is admitted to a 'therapeutic community' led by a libertarian psychiatrist ('Mike' [Michael Riddall]) whose therapeutic interventions are 'talking treatments' and group psychotherapy rather than drugs. But this promising development is stopped when said psychiatrist falls victim to the powers-that-be (National Health Service [NHS] bureaucrats and more biologically-oriented psychiatrists) who disband the community and ‘move on’ its leader.

2. Janice is then subjected to: drug treatment; forced administration of electro-convulsive therapy (ECT); finally, after she absconds from hospital, lawful detention under the Mental Health Act (1959). The denouement serves as *Family Life's coup de théâtre*: echoing Charcot's public demonstrations of female 'hysterics' in the late nineteenth century ‘asylums’ (see Didi-Huberman, 2003), Janice is paraded before a group of medical students, her docile demeanour serving as proof, as her psychiatrist explains, of a 'typically schizophrenic' clinical picture.

Although not as successful as *Kes*, *Family Life* was still well-received. Within Loach's work it's been largely neglected, being considered a lesser companion-piece to *Kes* whilst recapitulating the

former's themes of ‘working class people surviving in capitalist society' (Newsinger, 1999). In terms of content, two aspects have been noted: 1) the indictment of institutional psychiatry as a repressive state apparatus (see Althusser, 1971); and 2) the pervasive influence of the theory and practice of the 1960s counter-cultural 'guru' and 'anti-psychiatrist', R.D. Laing. Nevertheless, despite its neglect, *Family Life* was still considered to have enough contemporary relevance that Birkbeck College, University of London, thought it fitting to round off an 'urgent' symposium on the ideas of Laing as late as April 2015 with a screening, introduced by the film's producer, Garnett.[2] It was also devoted a section in John Hill’s (2011a: 123-133) *Ken Loach: The Politics of Film and Television*. In both cases, the connection to Laing was assumed.

That assumption is correct - but the details of Laing's influence need to be specified. Contemporaneously, it was signalled in two contrasting ways. First, following the 'main line' of the 'repressive psychiatry' thesis, was the interview with Garnett and Loach conducted by the editorial collective of *Seven Days*[3] - a radical weekly newspaper of the 1970s. In response to the question, 'How did you come to make *Family Life*?’ Garnett responded by reference to the theories of Goffman and Laing and to actual meetings with Laing. That the influence was not only theoretical, Garnett makes plain:

> 'we went to Duncan Rd. and asked people like Leon Redler, Mike Yokum—they're part of the Philadelphia Association[4]—to help. Since Kingsley Hall[5] closed, they've been attempting to create “asylums,” in the best sense, in houses...where people who have had long and awful experiences in bins[6] can just “be.”'

So, the link seems to have been as much at the level of Laing as instigator of a social movement - the 'therapeutic community' movement of the 1960s - as it was to the theories of Laing as contained in his best-selling books, *The Divided Self* (1990a) and *Sanity, Madness and the Family* (1964). For the collaborators of *Family Life*, the therapeutic community movement functioned as what Crossley (1999) has called a 'working utopia' - an ideological alternative, materialised in practice (e.g. Kingsley Hall) and reproduced over time as a means of resisting the status quo (the 'bins').

At the level of representation, Loach had an incisive way of using the 'working utopia' notion in practice: in the film, the soon-to-be-sacked psychiatrist ('Mike') was actually Michael Riddall - a *real* psychiatrist connected to the therapeutic community movement who also had mainstream experience of the 'bins'. Loach explained what, for him, was a typical casting strategy:

> 'he (Riddall) was fresh from the experience of working in a NHS hospital, where he had to cope with problems on a very large scale…And he made a very real contribution. He could say, "It's not like this—this is how it is." He was one of the touchstones of reality'.

We will return to the status of 'working utopias' as 'touchstones of reality' in the article's final section. For the present, it's sufficient to say that the Laing-Loach connection in *Family Life* is clearly in evidence at this level of practice - via the social movement activism of therapeutic communities materialised representationally in the casting of 'Mike'. But what of the Laingian influence at the level of theory?

Here, the connections are also present - but more in terms of Mercer's writing than Loach's direction. If what unites Laing's theories of mental illness and *Family Life* is a focus upon the micro-sociology of the family, then core Laingian notions of 'ontological insecurity' (Laing, 1990a: 39-64) and 'the false self system' (ibid.; 94-105) as manifestations of the 'schizoid condition' (ibid.: 78-93), are in evidence representationally in the figure of Janice. Mercer's denouement, the parading of Janice's 'psychopathology' before medical students, possesses an unmistakeably Laingian 'ring' (ibid.: 31):

> '[t]he…psychiatrist wishing to be..."scientific"...may propose to confine himself to the "objectively" observed behaviour of the patient before him...To see "signs" of "disease" is not to see neutrally. Nor is it neutral to see a smile as contractions of the circumoral muscles'.

Yet, specifying the details of Laing's influence upon Mercer is tricky - partly because Mercer himself, speaking contemporaneously on BBC2's arts programme *Late Night Line-Up* denied that he had 'any particular theory...in mind' (Moat, n.d.; also Mustafa, 1981: 98; Potter, 1967) for *In Two Minds*. This disclaimer, however, turns out to be false. Shortly after *Late Night Line-Up,*

Dennis Potter writing in the *New Statesman* opined that not only was Mercer's drama *obviously* based upon Laing's theories but that Laing himself had received a consultancy fee from the BBC for providing expert advice (Potter, 1967: 339). Laing's consultancy was indeed a fact, which Mercer (1973) later admitted, whilst insisting, nevertheless, upon the originality of a 'completely invented piece' (ibid.: 49). Of the latter there is no doubt – all the same, as Khalid El Mubarak Mustafa (1981) has shown, textual correspondences exist between Mercer's scripts (for *In Two Minds/Family Life*) and the anonymised case-study material of, in particular, *Sanity, Madness and the Family.* In other words, Mercer studied, then adapted Laing for his dramatic *mise-en-scene* – with Laing on hand to advise. This relation of' 'correspondence' is an apt way of specifying Laing's influence on Mercer, except that we would go farther than Mustafa in drawing the circuit of influence wider than *Sanity, Madness and the Family* to include, as Norman Silverstein (1973) suggests, the case-studies of *The Divided Self* (1990a: 120-133 and 178-205).

Laing's theoretical influence on Loach, however, is less textual. It's true that Loach and Garnett knew Laing and that they were all part of the left-wing milieu of the time. But the transmission of the Laingian influence through Mercer's writing can be overstated. As Mercer (1973: 49) conceded, he had no knowledge, whilst completing *In Two Mind*s, 'that it was going to be given the documentary treatment by Ken Loach' and he was known to be dissatisfied by Loach's later improvisations to the script of *Family Life* (Hayward, 2005: 123). As Hill (2011a) notes, the main thematic shift between *In Two Minds* and *Family Life* concerns the role, not of the working-class family, but of the ' "Laingian" psychiatrist' (ibid.: 123) who was a disembodied voice 'off screen' in the TV version but 'appears in front of the camera in a significantly enlarged role' (ibid.) for the cinema. That 'enlarged role' consisted of the 'talking treatments' of the 'therapeutic community' - which makes sense chronologically as this had reached its heyday in the period between *In Two*

Minds (1966) and *Family Life* (1971). Kingsley Hall, the most famous of these communities, opened in 1965 and closed in 1970.

In any case, whilst, for Mercer, the Laingian influence was formative, it does not exhaust the influences of Garnett and Loach. As their careers testify, these were primarily socialist - but also micro-sociological. Garnett confirms this in the *Seven Days* interview:

> 'I came across Erving Goffman's book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* [1959], which just knocked me over. I started to read in areas...which weren't broached at all in the academic world'.

Note, surprisingly, that Garnett does *not* cite as an influence Goffman's *Asylums*, subtitled *Essays on the Social Situations of Mental Patients and other Inmates* and first published in 1961 - an acknowledged classic on the micro-sociology of the 'bins'. Rather, it's the use of the dramaturgical metaphor of Goffman's earlier work which 'knocked him over'. Nevertheless, Goffman's appeal as an evocation of 'deviancy' was similar to Laing's.

To sum up this section, then, apropos the Laing-Loach connection. Laing's influence appears most directly in Mercer's writing but also in the formation of the 'therapeutic community' movement, advocating alternative treatments for those diagnosed as mentally ill. Loach 'acts' this influence out in the casting of a 'real-life' psychiatrist. However, although there are theoretical influences from Laingian theory, *Family Life* also owes a debt to Goffman. Collectively, Garnett, Loach and Mercer portray institutional psychiatry as a repressive state apparatus in keeping with their socialist politics. Generally, Laing was considered a 'good' socialist influence; specifically, he was thought to provide an accurate account of mental illness and institutional psychiatry. However, both assumptions underlying the Laingian influence have been critiqued.

3. Sedgwick's Critique

This brings us on to the *second* contemporaneous response to *Family Life*. This is to be found in the work of long-time activist of the British New Left, Peter Sedgwick.[7] Sedgwick reviewed *Family Life* for *Socialist Worker* shortly after its release and his intervention takes a provocative form.[8]

Sedgwick was hostile to Loach's film. He accepts a 'strong' version of the Laing-Loach connection – for him *Family Life* is a definitively 'Laingian' film (1982: 267) - which he subsumes under the heading of 'current left-wing attitudes to the treatment of mental illness'. But he effects an interpretative shift in his refusal of the central representational strategy wielded by Loach: the viewer's identification with the figure of Janice. Sedgwick's review title - 'Whose mad, you or the system?' - challenges what he sees as a false Laing-Loach dichotomy which privileges Janice's experience before anyone else's. For *either*, Janice is 'mad', the 'illness' resides within her therefore psychiatric intervention is justified 'for her own good'; *or* - the Laing-Loach position according to Sedgwick - the 'system' is 'mad' and the individual experiencing illness 'is groping towards a true revolutionary analysis'. According to this perspective, 'the psychiatric treatment of mental illness, is seen as a part…of the brain-washing…apparatus of modern capitalism'; whilst, the ray of hope, as per *Family Life*, can have nothing to do with mainstream psychiatry but only with 'intensive therapy of the Laingian type'. With the latter quote Sedgwick is referencing Laing's account of the 'schizophrenic experience' as a paradoxical process of 'being sane in an insane world', a process which a true therapeutic community nurtures:

> '[w]e start from the split in our experience into what seem to be two worlds, inner and outer...Some people...enter or are thrown into...total inner space and time...The person who has entered this inner realm...will find himself...going on a journey...This process could have a central function in a truly sane society' (Laing, 1990b: 102-107).

But by refusing Loach's central identification with Janice, Sedgwick's *extends* the scope of *Family Life's* representational schema to include the following figures:

1. 'large masses of the working population' including,

2. 'members of the families living in the same household'; not forgetting,

3. 'active militants in the trade union and socialist movements' who 'often have to contend, not only with the pressing demands of the struggle and the attacks of the capitalist class...but also...with psychological collapses...in the isolated surroundings of the family home'.

It's important to be clear what Sedgwick *is* and is *not* doing with this interpretative shift. He is *not* imploring Loach to 'make a better, more socialist film'. As Sedgwick concedes, *Family Life* is 'extremely powerful' and 'made by a…team of committed Socialists'. But, contra the 'rave reviews from virtually all the critics especially…left-wing ones', Sedgwick's effects what Stuart Hall (1993) called an 'oppositional' reading. The strategy is significant in being a critique of socialists *by* a socialist. Although we are used to providing an oppositional reading of Hollywood films (e.g. Cresswell and Karimova, 2013), what Sedgwick offers, instead, is an *internal* left-wing critique. In Hall's (1993) terms, this critique 'opposes' the representational strategies of Loach by 'detotalizing' the original representation then 'retotalizing' it by means of the extended representations noted above.

Sedgwick's 'retotalizing' strategy references *artistic* concerns but, equally, issues of *political* representation. Via his interpretative shift he retains a focus upon Janice's 'madness' and psychiatric repression: Loach's 'message', he admits, 'is in many respects true.' Nevertheless, it is incomplete in representational terms, constituting,

> 'a half-truth at best. And the half of the message that is false is dangerous - all the more dangerous because it is likely, through this skilful...film, to reach and impress a wide audience'.

Politically, Loach's representation strategy is incomplete for Sedgwick because the ubiquity of mental illness requires NHS provision *en masse*, an unthinkable possibility within the confines of the Laingian schema:

> '[t]he Laingian schizophrenic, living full-time in a...commune with his psycho-analyst, savouring the ups and downs of his romantically mystical 'trip', is a delightful spectacle for the intelligentsia...he is not a practical possibility for the average working man or woman.'

And the upshot for Sedgwick is that we require strategies of artistic representation which are politically effective *as* strategies of political representation. For if such representational harmony fails to obtain,

> 'the burden of mental illness will be thrown back on to the working class, to be dealt with in the isolated...home-situation...it must be a central demand for the...socialist movement that...the state must accept responsibility for the care of the mentally afflicted'.

Note how Sedgwick rejects the nuanced Laing-Loach connection with which we close section 2. On the contrary, Sedgwick maintains a *strong* version of the link - he does seem to think that *Family Life* is straightforwardly the cinematic representation of Laingian theory whilst his low valuation of the therapeutic community movement makes the nuanced account unappealing. For Sedgwick, casting real-life Michael Riddall as libertarian 'Mike' may add to the socialist-realism - but it's a realism that has failed the working-class.

Sedgwick's provocation met with a hostile response within the 'Letters' pages of *Socialist Worker*: 'an unprecedented flood of angry letters', he conceded, with only one correspondent affirming support. Yet he remained undeterred:

> 'I believe that thousands...of people are mentally ill: that many of them can be made much more ill by psychiatry (including crackpot analysis of the Laingian type...), and that many of them can improve their condition to a state nearer to that of mental health.'

And, in response to the allegations that he was 1) advocating treatments known to be repressive (e.g. ECT) and 2) pursuing a strategy of reactionary reform, his riposte was equally bold:

> '[u]nlike some left-wing critics of psychiatry I am not prepared to state that ECT should never be used...ECT, like tranquillisers, can be used as an aid to social treatment'.

There are those that may baulk at Sedgwick's defence of ECT and his apparent reformism - but his critique needs to be situated as one salvo only in his ongoing assault against that intellectual trend known as 'anti-psychiatry'. For Sedgwick, anti-psychiatry subsumed such thinkers as Michel

Foucault (1965), Erving Goffman (1961), Thomas Szasz (1961) and, of course, Laing. The culmination of this line of analysis is his major work, *Psychopolitics* (2015) from 1982, in which Sedgwick devotes two chapters to Laing. Keeping our concerns about 'representation' in view, his critique is worth reprising.

Now from the vantage point of the early 1980s, Sedgwick periodises Laing's work into three phases only the first of which he intellectually values. This is the period from which *The Divided Self* (1960) is the main contribution. In *Psychopolitics*, Sedgwick praises Laing's ability to integrate diverse intellectual trends into a composite picture of mental illness. But, by contrast to the 'anti-psychiatric' pronouncements of the later 1960s, for Sedgwick this earlier work was compatible with institutional psychiatry and, indeed, contributed to it. On the other hand, Laing's 'radical' second phase of the mid-to-late 1960s, symbolised by his speech to the Dialectics of Liberation conference of 1967 (Laing, 1968; Hill, 2013: 137), was entirely incoherent. For Sedgwick, this period had two harmful effects: first an extension of the 'unit' of mental illness, which remained the disturbed individual for the early Laing, to entail the micro-sociological 'unit' (i.e. the family) (Sedgwick, 2015: 80-83); second, a political gesture, almost wholly rhetorical, towards a structural theory with which to provide the missing macro-linkage to the family's micro-pathologies. This gesture may have sounded socialist to many (see Martin, 1970) but, to Sedgwick, was almost entirely devoid of political meaning. Laing's third phase (1970s onwards), which Sedgwick characterises as a repudiation of his earlier 'radical trip', was for him (Sedgwick) predictable and need not detain us.

How, then, to sum up Sedgwick's perspective on Laing? And, in light of his *Socialist Worker* critique, Laing's influence on Loach? First, Sedgwick's summation of the Laingian influence was that it was doubly harmful. In representational terms, his 'detotalizing' then 'retotalizing' account of *Family Life* precisely targets the 'half-truth' he sees as its narrative core which delimits its

political scope and represents as desirable only those treatment approaches to which the working-class were excluded. At the same time, Sedgwick was acutely aware of Laing's artistic appeal – which he also critiqued. This he noted both in terms of the influence upon Mercer, Garnett and Loach but, later, also upon the 'tragedian' David Edgar and his acclaimed play of the mid-1970s, *Mary Barnes* (Edgar, 1979; Sedgwick, 1982: 8-9) – a dramatization of one woman's journey through the 'schizophrenic experience' and based upon the twin accounts of herself and her therapist at Kingsley Hall (see Barnes and Berke, 1971). Laing's influence, then, is even more broadly artistic than just cinematic because, as David Martin pointed out in 1970, his contribution was to the '*rhetorical* armoury of the contemporary left' (Martin, 1970: 179, emphasis added). Laing's rhetoric of his middle-period married up well with an already established *mise-en-scène* which was serviceably televisual (*In Two Minds*), cinematic (*Family Life*) and dramaturgical (*Mary Barnes*): at its centre, an alienated young woman whose story may be narratively personified vis-à-vis the powers-that-be – whether they take the form of 'schizophrenogenic' parents and/or institutional psychiatry.

This narrative, as Sedgwick knew, made for a 'good' story. But was it *too* good? Again, following Hall (1996), we might say that not only does Laing provide an 'identity' at the heart of *Family Life* in the figure of Janice, he simultaneously provides for the viewer, via Loach's direction, an *identification*. For Hall, recall, identification *precedes* identity: if an identity is to be assumed, an identification with someone (a loved one), some collective (a social class) or some ideology (e.g. socialism) must first be attempted. Loach, generally, is acknowledged for giving priority to working-class identities (e.g. Janice) about whom audiences have either made a prior identification or come to do so through the experience of viewing. As he said to his *Seven Days* interlocutors:

> '[o]ne thing which I think has been central to the films which we've done has been to try to make films for the class which we think is the only politically important class—the working class.'

The standard objection here is that Loach is inattentive to questions of gender (e.g. Bindel, 2014) and ethnicity (Chen, 2013; also Hill, 2011b). Sedgwick's critique, however, is different; it is driven by social class. Again, advancing a left-wing critique, Sedgwick charges Loach with providing an incomplete identification with the working-class, especially with Janice's parents. It's significant that, in addition to his socialist activism, Sedgwick was also prominent within the National Schizophrenic Fellowship (NSF), a pressure group representing the needs of the carers and relatives of the mentally ill (see Davies and Davies, 2015). But his critique also chimes with feminist objections to Laing's notion of the 'schizophrenogenic mother' - Mrs. Baildon – as tantamount to 'mother-blaming' (Bondi and Burman, 2001) or to representing working-class families as an 'insanity generator' (Umansky, 1996: 25). For Sedgwick, Loach, through his strategy of identification with Janice, provides an incomplete identification with the working-class and the cause of this incompleteness is the influence of Laing.

Sedgwick's critique is distinctive. It's a critique of socialists by a socialist and it hits Loach where Loach is thought to be strong: the representation of working-class identity. It's also a 'naïve' critique - in two senses. First, although it's concerned with Hall's dynamic of identity and identification, it does not deal, like later elaborations of Hall, with the complexities of 'intersectionality' (e.g. Walby et al, 2012) and the interplay of gender, ethnicity and class. It's concerned solely with class. It's also 'naïve' in its approach to representation. Sedgwick's seems to have thought that artistic and political representation *should* coincide - not just 'overlap' as per Williams' view - and that Loach, in following Laing, had misrepresented not only Janice's parents but institutional psychiatry, which, for Sedgwick, is not only 'repressive'. He simply rejected the positive assumptions which Loach made about Laing. We would add that calling Sedgwick's approach to representation 'naïve', is not meant pejoratively but, rather, as an indication of an approach to realism and representation.

Surprisingly, Loach himself has also been accused of a 'naïve' representation of social reality – an accusation which we address in our final section.

4. Socialist-Realism, Mental Illness and Cinematic Representation

Most critiques of Loach's work have skirted around Hall's dynamic of identity and identification in favour of a consideration of its 'realist' status – an understandable response given his longevity as a film-maker of the Left (see Hill, 2011). But, in these closing remarks, we want to suggest its significance for coming to grips with the 'incompleteness' which Sedgwick detects in *Family Life*. And that dynamic of identity/identification turns out to be deeply entwined with Williams' 'Keywords' with which we opened this article.

Apropos *realism* and *representation*, Loach has been subjected to the following generic critiques:

1. *The charge of 'didacticism'*. In an urge to represent 'depth realism' – one of the hallmarks of socialist-realism according to Williams (1976: 219) – Loach, it is said, trips himself up into outright polemicism (see Hill, 2011a: 2). This has a paradoxical effect. For in the aspiration not merely to be authentic but to 'emphasise hidden or underlying forces or movements' (Williams, 1976: 219), the stumble into outright socialist pedagogy fails to maintain even its own 'surface' realism. Although the indictment is more commonly made against Loach's capital P-political films (e.g. *Land and Freedom*, 1995) than his small p-political micro-dramas (e.g. *Family Life)*, it clearly chimes with Sedgwick's worries about the didactic effect of Laing upon Loach and, hence, upon a wider reception:

'[u]nwittingly, the authors of this film have created a climate of opinion in which their audiences will no longer be so keen to resist the present massive Tory attack on the psychiatric facilities of the Health Service.'

2. The charge of didacticism is related to Loach's strategies of representation – fully developed by the time of *Family Life.* After the TV success of *Cathy Come Home* (1967),

Loach had rejected a strategy of mixing narrative drama with factual discourse through editorial interjections (see Hill, 2013; Smart, 2013). This was on account of the obviousness of the 'join' it entailed between documentary and cinematic realism. But the gain in sophistication came with a loss of precision. The consequence is a classic dilemma for socialist-realism: for, if the 'facts' cannot just be allowed to 'speak for themselves', what then 'stands for' or otherwise 'speaks for' the message of socialist-realism? One answer, as Jacob Leigh (2002: 71) pointed out, is *metaphor*. Though Leigh (2002: 61) is thinking mostly of *Kes*, we think that when he says ,'*Kes* uses metaphor to give significance to the power struggles of school and home', we could readily substitute *Family Life* and 'hospital and home' for the sentences opening and closing phrases. Hence, only slightly amending Leigh (ibid.: 71), we would say that,

'*Family Life* combines realist techniques with dramatic and performance strategies to create a "metaphorical model of reality" that it presents predominantly from the protagonists point of view.'

And the charge then would be that the move away from the documentary realism associated with *Cathy Come Home* leads Loach into an over-reliance on metaphor and a diminution in realism.

3. On the other hand, one benefit of deploying a metaphorical model of reality may be its capacity to uncover the *contradictions* lurking beneath the surface of everyday life. After all, as a rhetorical trope, metaphor represents the figurative means par excellence for conveying contradiction insofar as its modus operandi is the juxtaposition of logically incompatible elements into a newly constituted symbol or sign (see Ricoeur, 2003). It's surprising, therefore, that one of the sharpest critiques directed at Loach has been his inability to represent contradiction. This is the well-known Screen perspective on Loach (see Bennett, 1981; Caughie, 1980; MacCabe, 1985; McArthur, 1975; Tribe, 1977) in the aftermath of his trade union dramas *The Big Flame* (1969) and *Days of Hope* (1975) (Hill,

2011a: 128-130). The objection was this: that Loach had succumbed to a 'naïve' realism, which was simultaneously tautological and lacking in depth. Colin MacCabe (in English, 2006: 259) opined of such 'realism' that it 'articulate[s] a classic relation between narrative and vision in which what we see is true and this truth is confirmed by what we see'. Moreover, by omitting to problematize the role of the 'audience' (i.e. the cinema-goer), naïve realism of the Loach variety failed to provoke the sort of 'Brechtian' appreciation of 'contradiction' that could be potentially radical (see Smart, 2013). The indictment was that Loach gave his audience a 'perfect representation' (MacCabe, 1985: 35) – so 'perfect' that it could never be problematized, only 'taken as read'.

Williams (2004) himself intervened in the Screen debate – marginally on the side of Loach. Noting the defining features of realism as comprising three foci:

1. upon the *secular* in contrast to the religious;
2. upon the *contemporary* in contrast to the historical;
3. upon the *socially extended* – i.e. the working-class – in contrast to social elites (see Petley, 1986: 101);

he added (ibid.: 78), with specific reference to Loach and socialist-realism, a fourth:

4. 'the consciously interpretative in relation to a particular political viewpoint'.

Where *Family Life* is concerned, Williams' points 3 and 4 pertain to Sedgwick's critique. Sedgwick's concern was that the representations of working-class identity in *Family Life* were not 'extended' enough; hence, his urge to connect the issue of artistic representation to political representation as a one-to-one match, lest marginal experiences receive only marginally accessible 'treatments'. But, as Williams' notes, what appears to Sedgwick as Loach's 'incompleteness' is,

in historical terms, an advance: Loach is, in fact, burrowing down into the minutiae of working-class experience to uncover ever more stigmatised forms. Hence, Loach's delimitation of the representational scope may be defended in Williams' terms: as a 'consciously interpretative' act, 'in relation to a particular political viewpoint' and, therefore, as an *extension* of realism rather than a diminution.

To defend Loach in this way is to specify a relationship which Williams (1976: 225) conceded was 'difficult to estimate': that obtaining between *artistic* and *political* forms of representation. It is tempting to say that Sedgwick speaks on the 'political' side of that equation and Loach for the 'artistic'. But this is not correct. It was Loach, recall, who remarked to his *Seven Days* interlocutors that,

> '[o]ne thing which I think has been central to the films which we've done has been to try to make films for the class which we think is the only politically important class—the working class'

Rather, we would express the relation like this. Loach was fully aware that artistic and political representation 'overlapped' – in that respect the charge of 'didacticism' rings true. As he said: he is trying 'to make films *for* the working class' not *about* them. For all that, art is not the same as politics and it is via his socialist-realist method that Loach mediates their relation. That method comprises three parts:

1. socialist-realist casting which eschews 'star' performers in favour of matching up as closely as possible the biography of the actor with the biography of the role (e.g. libertarian 'Mike'). It is in this way that acting becomes what Loach referred to as a 'touchstone of reality';
2. the deployment of 'working utopias' to signify a socialist alternative to repressive state apparatuses (e.g. 'Mike's 'therapeutic community' in *Family Life*);

3. the development of a metaphorical model of reality which remains, nevertheless, socialist-realist.

Point 3 may be further expanded. For Loach, the metaphorical model deployed is characterised by a particular rhetorical trope: *synecdoche*. The most straightforward definition of 'synecdoche' is Ernesto Laclau's (2005: 72): 'the part representing the whole'. And the purpose of synecdochical representation, as Hayden White (1985: 73) has observed, is to sanction, 'a movement…towards integration of all apparently particular phenomena into a whole, the quality of which was such as to justify belief in the possibility of understanding the particular as a microcosm of a macrocosmic totality'. It is suited to micro-drama and to providing the 'depth' realism to which socialist realism strives. In *Family Life*, the microcosmic psychodynamics of, respectively, the familial *mise-en-scène* and institutional psychiatry, 'stand for' the macrocosmic capitalist system of social relations (see Hill, 2011a: 126-129). As such, Loach's synecdochical representation is clearly didactic – but the didacticism is tempered always by the dictates of realism. Neither is synecdochical representation *deterministic*. Whilst Janice's fate is grim in *Family Life* it is also *contingent*. Loach clearly identifies those junctures when her fate could have been different: had 'Mike' not been 'moved on' or the therapeutic community disbanded; had her boyfriend been more committed; had she gone to live with her sister as her sister implored her. Hence the coherence of Loach's socialist-realist method for which the authenticity of the acting tempers the metaphorical model deployed whilst creating a transformative space for alternatives to repressive state apparatuses.

Nevertheless, the dynamic of identity/identification is a problem for Loach. Sedgwick was not wrong to detect an 'incompleteness'. Janice does not represent *all* the potential experiences of mental illness; nor does she represent the working-class; nor is institutional psychiatry *only* repressive. Yet Sedgwick's critique is 'naïve' to the extent that he deals only with political and not artistic representation. The situation was different for Loach. His pursuit of socialist-realist method

made him fully aware of the 'overlap' between artistic and political representation and he knew how to shuttle between them. All the same, there is a limit to synecdochical representation as it functions in *Family Life*. This is really the limit of the micro-drama as an artistic form (see Hill, 2011: 129). In seeking to represent the macrocosmic capitalist system *within* the microcosmic family drama, Loach tends to over-personify the former and over-polemicize the latter. Specifically, the primary identification with Janice leads to a stereotyping of 'schizophrenogenic' parents and 'repressive' professionals. The problem is akin to the accusations of 'conspiracy theory' Hill (1986: 60) levels at Loach's political dramas (e.g. *Days of Hope*) - but there at least the historical influences consulted were wide-ranging and the identifications available to viewers more varied (see Leigh, 2002: 101-114). By contrast, the Laingian influence in *Family Life* can be traced mainly to correspondences between Mercer's script and Laing's case-studies, mediated via Loach's direction. So, despite his 'naivete', Sedgwick had a point in complaining of incomplete working-class identifications in *Family Life* - and he was precise in locating the cause of that incompleteness to the influence of Laing.

The Screen critique remains significant for Loach despite Williams' defence. Is *Family Life* contradictory - in a radical sense? Does the inclusion of the 'working utopia' contradict psychiatric repression? Or does its disbandment augment it? Does Loach's denouement unsettle us, in Brechtian fashion? Does it stir us to anti-psychiatric political action? Or does it only depress us? The answer is that it *depends*. But what it depends on isn't really that much to do with artistic representation; it isn't even very much to do with political representation. It has a lot to do with political *attitude*, political *commitment* - and that exists mostly *before* the viewing event. For, if we stick closely to Hall (1993) and if we see a form of socialist-realism such as *Family Life* as involving a process of *encoding*, at the point of production, then *decoding* at the point of consumption, then the decoding of both *Family Life* and Sedgwick's *Socialist Worker* review tells

its own contradictory tale. Of *Family Life's* progenitor *In Two Minds*, Garnett admitted an ambivalent mail-bag[9]: about half the respondents identified with the proto-Janice character, half with her parents. But the pattern of identification was different with Sedgwick's review - all but one of his 'angry' respondents identified with Janice and rallied to Laing. The sociology of decoding practices matters and a BBC2 audience is just not the same as the readership of *Socialist Worker*. In this case the subject-matter counts for a lot and given that institutional psychiatry is part of what Crossley (2006) has called 'the field of psychiatric contention', then contradiction was built into the reception of *Family Life*. The readers of *Socialist Worker* circa 1972, committed to a topical mixture of Marxism and Laing, castigated Sedgwick as 'against the grain'; but half of *In Two Minds* BBC2 viewers, possibly parents, thought that psychiatry's paternalism was justified, even including coercion. Sedgwick's distinctiveness consisted in insisting that Mr. and Mrs. Baildon might require some 'representation' as well.

Psychiatry was and *is* a 'field of contention'. When we presented this article recently at a conference about Sedgwick's ongoing significance,[10] most of the non-Film Studies audience of left-leaning professionals still sided with Loach and Laing and thought that Sedgwick's critique was too harsh. Some already committed 'Sedgwickians' disagreed. The balance would have been different at a medical convention; different again in a workshop for carers; different again at a Film Studies conference. For the latter the field of contention might have been Loach's politics; for the others, it could have been the status of Laing. Loach plus Laing, though, is not inherently contradictory, not as encoded by Loach, who assumed that the Laingian influence was 'good' and, hence, provided what MacCabe called a 'perfect' representation - 'perfect' in that artistic and political representation overlapped in a 'good' socialist way. It becomes contradictory if you decode *Family Life* as Sedgwick did, in which case the Laingian influence was far from 'perfect'. Sedgwick thought that

artistic and political representation should coincide rather than overlap – but for him they did not in *Family Life*, which is why he was hostile.

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[1] We use the term 'socialist-realism' with regard to Loach as this is the form of realism identified by Williams as applicable to him. Related terms such as i) 'Soviet realism' and ii) 'social realism' were rejected because: i) Soviet realism is clearly historically and geographically specific; and ii) British social realism of the 1960s is clearly contemporaneous with Loach – but not all social realist cinema is intentionally *socialist* as is Loach's.
[2] See http://www.bbk.ac.uk/culture/about-us/events/bbk-local?uid=f8ca82d422fb268231489c53c06ed8ad
[3] See http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC10-11folder/LoachGarInt.html
[4] An overarching organisation founded by Laing and associates in 1965 and responsible for the running of many therapeutic communities. See: http://laingsociety.org/laingbods/cvita/redler.htm
[5] The most famous of the therapeutic communities in the UK associated with Laing. See URL: http://www.philadelphia-association.org.uk/Kingsley-Hall.html
[6] 'Bins', as a shortened version of 'dustbin' was common slang and still is for the old Victorian lunatic asylums.
[7] Sedgwick's work is archived by the Marxists' Internet Archive (https://www.marxists.org/archive/sedgwick/) and there is also an independent commemorative website (http://www.petersedgwick.org/).
[8] All of the subsequent references pertain to Sedgwick's review from February 5th, 1972 (https://www.marxists.org/archive/sedgwick/1972/02/family.htm) and his subsequent response to a 'flood of angry letters' on the 11th of March (https://www.marxists.org/archive/sedgwick/1972/03/familyltr.htm).

[9] See the *Seven Days* interview.
[10] URL: http://www.hope.ac.uk/psychopoliticsc21/