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Taking the 5.15: Mods, Social Mobility and the Brighton Train

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Holding the gatefold sleeve of *Quadrophenia* in one's hands for the first time, Ethan Russell's series of vivid black-and-white photographs provide an evocative commentary to the album's songs. Yet one of the images doesn't seem to fit. It is the frame of a young man slumped between two city gents in an upholstered first-class train carriage. The two men, in matching bowler hats, waistcoats, trousers of pinstripe, handkerchiefs in breast pockets, appear almost comically synchronized, immersed in the evening paper. Between them, in checked shirt and Carnaby St tie, sits Jimmy, far enough down in seat and frame that he occupies a boyish position, disengaged from the news and from the scene around him, a symbol of generational alienation.

Upon listening to the songs, we discover that this oddly mundane image accompanies '5.15', the album's most famous track. The song relates a climactic moment of the album's narrative. Separated from his destroyed scooter yet desperate to escape London for the scene of his recent seaside skirmish, Jimmy alights the quarter-past five 'Brighton Belle' at Victoria. As Pete Townshend's

liner notes tell us, this marked the “the low point in his life ... he gets pillled up and takes the train to Brighton.”¹ He finds himself coasting in an amphetamine haze through carriages of commuters returning home. The song abruptly shifts from the reflective mid-tempo intro to a churning rocker whose horn chart conjures up, among other things, the rail rhythms of James Brown’s ‘Night Train.’ As Townshend’s plaintive vocal asks “Why Should I Care?” this becomes a song about detachment, a “sadly ecstatic” ride through a personal dreamscape as Jimmy recalls the concert-halls, the women and the confrontations that make up his own teenage wasteland.

This sequence of Jimmy taking the 5.15 was to become one of the most iconic moments in Franc Roddam’s big screen adaptation. In that film , we see Jimmy board the train, scoff pills and apply eye-liner in the toilet, before a key shot directly quotes the original album sleeve photograph, with the same actor even employed as one of the commuters. Here, the image becomes something else, fleshed out into a hallucinogenic music video, in which Jimmy edges woozily along narrow corridors that visually echo the Brighton and Shepherd’s Bush alleyways from earlier in the film, and into compartments that serve as theatre for an interior series of confrontations and day-dreams. The insistent 4/4 frenzy of the song soundtracks the low point in Jimmy’s life, but is also undeniably exhilarating, a moment of grace and rebirth on board a locomotive hurtling its passengers coastward.

¹ Peter Townshend, *Quadrophenia: Music from the Soundtrack of the Who Film* (London: Polydor, 1973) Sound recording, liner notes.

Quadrophenia is a story told – fittingly - in four different media: songs and photographs, film, and finally as fiction, thanks to Alan Fletcher’s 1979 novelization.² In each, the image of Jimmy taking the 5.15 exerts a powerful and mysterious force, for a number of reasons. There is the episode’s sheer incongruity: a surreal juxtaposition of transcendence and despair amidst the mundane everydayness contained within the song’s title: an early train home, a time committed to memory by the commuter. There is also something of a mythic dimension, with our protagonist descending into a fantastical Brighton as if to an underworld for a final reckoning. It is also a scene loaded with ironies. Rather than unwinding on the early train homewards from the office Jimmy is fleeing his own home in a state of escalating tension; rather than becoming a first-class commuter, he is a fake and a substitute, a pilled-up vagabond fleeing his mistakes in the capital for the promise of sea and sand.

This chapter uses the 5.15 scene as a way into *Quadrophenia*’s most powerful theme: that of mobility, both literal and social. In its various incarnations, the treatment of issues of aspiration and thwarted social desire in Jimmy’s story are one of its most enduring legacies, and a theme whose tensions resonate ever more powerfully for its twenty first century audiences. All of these tensions are contained within the 5.15 image. The image of Jimmy aboard the Brighton train was one symbolic moment that allowed the album, film and novel to explore the

² The four version are as follows: Peter Townshend, *Quadrophenia: Music from the Soundtrack of the Who Film* (1973) incorporating Ethan Russell’s images; Franc Roddam dir. *Quadrophenia* (1979); Alan Fletcher, *Quadrophenia* (London: Corgi, 1979). To this list we might also add the hit single ‘The Day We Caught the Train’ (1994) by the mod rock band Ocean Colour Scene, which revives the narrative of Jimmy on the 5.15.

connections between transport, identity and the meanings of Mod. In what follows, I pick apart the things that each medium does with this scene, and place them within the broader literary and cinematic history of the railway carriage as arena of class drama, and within broader debates over youth subcultures and social mobility. Debates that are essential to the meaning of the three different incarnations of *Quadrophenia*, and the distance between the historical moment of its mid-1960s setting and the later, more fraught years in which first album and then film met the world.

Going Mobile

British Mod was simultaneously an expression of, and rebuke to, post-war social aspiration. In its most characteristic incarnations, the subculture was a direct product of the unprecedented social and economic freedoms available for the 1960s working and lower middle class youth, whose rising living standards allowed for the enjoyment of a consumer life their parents could only imagine. Mod was therefore a fascinating offshoot what postwar sociologists heralded as the age of the “affluent worker,” individuals with sharply increased spending power, leisure time and an unprecedented ability to define the parameters of their social and cultural worlds.³ In part this was about consumerism and the desire to live well on whatever budget one had possible. As chronicler of the subculture Richard Weight has argued, “Mod was the closest British have come to constructing their own version of the American Dream, -- a mobilising,

³ Ferdinand Zweig, *The Worker in an Affluent Society* (1961) and John H. Goldthorpe, *The Affluent Worker: Political Attitudes and Behaviour* (1968).

energising legend of opportunity which rebuked the snobbery and deference that conspired to give Britain one of the lowest levels of social mobility.”⁴

This aspiration was most obvious in the Mod fixation with personal presentation. The archetypal stance of being strikingly neat and overdressed, smart both mentally and sartorially, gave off various messages. A generational dynamic was clearly important. Through styling oneself more deliberately, young men in particular could escape looking like their fathers and by doing so reject the confines of their parents’ less cosmopolitan lives. It also led to class confusion, when Mods might be better dressed than their bosses. Yet this was aspiration as subversion. Mods might style themselves as well as their more affluent counterparts, but this went hand in hand with an apparent rejection of the values of what they saw as bourgeois conformity. For this reason, as the sociologist Dick Hebdige has argued, Mod was defined by its subversive appropriation of commodities, redefining the meaning of consumer items such as lavish Italian menswear. To dress even more smartly than one’s betters was an act of socially mobile rebellion.⁵

Social mobility was perhaps even more obvious in the kinds of transport celebrated by Mod. The subculture seized in particular on the European scooter as an elegant expression of modern values. The upright, small-wheeled vehicle met demands for practical, elegant design whilst its Franco-Italian heritage and styling lent an air of conspicuous cosmopolitanism. Unlike motorbikes, scooters

⁴ Richard Weight, *MOD: A Very British Style* (2013), 4

⁵ See Tony Jefferson, *Resistance Through Rituals* (1993)

were defiantly urban machines. They were designed to zip around town, sometimes rather slowly, a product of style and convenience rather than speed or power. But practicality was rivalled in importance by transport as a means of self-expression. The scooter was a symbol moving at speed, both practical and distinctively modern, infinitely customizable, another instance of subversion through consumer choice.

Moreover, when driven en masse, the scooter was transformed into a symbol of solidarity. Driving in flocks through London, or to the legendary skirmishes at Clacton, Great Yarmouth and Brighton, Scooter-riding Mods found an experience that cemented the kind of group identity whose spirit animates *Quadrophenia*. Here's the voice of Jimmy from Fletcher's novelization, remembering the "event" of riding en masse:

At each junction and each roundabout we picked up more riders, by themselves or in groups, waving and smiling, joining the great sweep of the convoy as it headed in formation towards the A23, the Southbound road, picking up speed as it turned out of London. Towards Brighton. We gave a display for the towns along the way, like Lewes and Reigate, where people had come out of their houses to watch us pass by. It gave us all a great sense of power and pride, to be part of the convoy, to be mods" "in the sweep of the great convoy, in the middle of an event.⁶

There was a strange mixture of modernity and nostalgia at work in an "event" like this, summoning up the imagery and associations of cavalry from cinematic war films and Westerns. Riding in unison displayed a communal form of

⁶ Fletcher, *Quadrophenia*, 120.

rebellion. It marked those who rode together out from the miners in the album's song 'The Dirty Jobs' who get driven to work on "a local bus."⁷ And whilst the very possibility of scooter ownership was the product of affluence, it also rebelled against what the sociologists of the period called the "embourgeoised" affluent worker, home-centred, and family-minded.⁸ Post-war economic freedom and social mobility came together in a transport technology that was both means of escape and subversive icon of collective expression.

In all of these associations, scooters seem to offer a decisive alternative to the modernity symbolized by trains. The romance of the railway certainly still held great sway within mid-century popular culture; rail imagery is, after all, an enduring theme of the rock-and-roll and rhythm-and-blues music cherished in Mod circles. Paul Anderson's oral history of the movement helps flesh this out. One London Mod that he interviewed, named Pat Farrell, reports stories of a large disjoined crowd breaking into the number 'Night Train' on a tube train after pub closing time, "and the whole train started singing and dancing James Brown style."⁹ Trains, particularly those whose timetables skirted the edges of the night, were also central to enabling the candle-burning excesses of Mod leisure. Think of Jimmy wailing, in the song 'Cut My Hair', about "coming down / Got home on the very first train from town." But scooter-riding challenged train-riding in a number of ways. Where scooters were active; trains were passive. Railways represented an earlier, obsolete form of modernity, with its own outmoded codes of display. Scooters were European, cosmopolitan; the railway

⁷ 'The Dirty Jobs', *Quadrophenia*.

⁸ Zweig, *The New Acquisitive Society*, 1-12

⁹ quoted in Anderson, *Modes: The New Religion*, 61.

was English, even Victorian, tied up with an earlier industrial narrative of modernity. Trains led “backward” in history. Britain’s role and pride in itself as the birthplace of rail was a collective expression and civic narrative that Mod attempted to frustrate.

The specific Brighton route depicted in *Quadrophenia* was a case in point. Sitting on the 5.15 Jimmy found himself on one of Britain’s most well-known routes, amidst city workers commuting back to the towns that threaded the capital to the coast.¹⁰ Thanks to the arrival of this line in the 1840s, Brighton had been transformed from louche seaside resort to perhaps the grandest of all ‘railway towns’, and become a byword for railway modernity. The route through the South Downs involved one of Britain’s largest cuttings, its viaduct across the Ouse Valley was one of the most elegant in the country. It was a remarkably *modern* route: becoming the first electrified mainline, and from the 1930s onwards, playing host to Southern Railway’s iconic Brighton Belle service, delivering commuters and day-trippers to the coast in Pullman-carriage style. The 1953 film *London to Brighton in Four Minutes*, a sped-up version of a Belle journey from Victoria, captured the high point of this sense of the route’s prestige.¹¹ It was a route that Mods even deigned to use. The London Mod Pat Farrell, quoted above, recalls witnessing the arrival from London through Sussex to the outskirts of the town in 1964: “the paper train had just pulled in and there were hundreds and hundreds of kids who had all got off at Preston Park and

¹⁰ Andrew Martin, *Belles and Whistles*, 171-175

¹¹ British Broadcasting Corporation, *London to Brighton in Four Minutes* (1953). The BBC repeated the exercise in 1983 and 2013, but the last version had to be a special service, as no non-stoppers now exist. All three can be viewed at < <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-23853863> < [Accessed 4 July 2016]

jumped over the fence because they never had tickets”¹² Another of Farrell’s contemporaries added that “I think the first time we went to Brighton was when someone said ‘We’re all going to Brighton on the Mod train’. It was winter, just after Christmas as at the beginning of 1963. We all met at Victoria and bunked on the milk train.”¹³

Yet compared with these romantic routes and daring journeys, Jimmy in *Quadrophenia* found himself on one of the line’s more mundane services. ‘5.15’ is as much a state of mind as a departure time. It spoke of the prudent early train home, the regimented escape from the temptations of the London evening in favour of domestic commitments. And this is why the 5.15 train, and in particular the train compartment, provided such an apt and powerful space and place in which Townshend and Roddam could dramatise their verdicts on the diminishing power of post-war myths of social mobility.

The Train Compartment

Since the arrival of the railway, writers had quickly seized upon the fascination of the railway compartment as a site for human drama.¹⁴ They represented a new form of moving sitting rooms in which social games might be played out, in which every traveler is aware of being objectified and assessed. The setting looms in the background of major works such as Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (1877) and Edith Wharton’s *House of Mirth* (1905), and provides the foreground for sensation novels such as M.E. Braddon’s *The Lovels of Arden* (1871), which

¹² quoted in Anderson, *Mods: The New Religion*, 80.

¹³ Pat Farrell quoted in Anderson, *Mods: The New Religion*, 61.

¹⁴ See Ian Carter, *Railways and culture in Britain*, 212-220.

exploited the sexual and social tensions implicit in such forced proximity. As literary critic Matthew Beaumont has argued, with their enforced contact, anonymity and false kinships, “these are spaces characteristic of modernity because structured by the most contingent of intimacies”.¹⁵ Stratified and segregated by class, these are places where we can act out our notorious genteel British unsociability in a curious suspension of public and domestic space -- the dual “inside, outside” of Townshend’s refrain in the lyrics to ‘5:15.’ Such dynamics have proved irresistible for filmmakers. Carriages could be the space of potential romance in *Brief Encounter* (1945), or in thrillers such as Alfred Hitchcock’s *Norh by Northwest* (1959) could be transformed into a space of threat. In other genres, compartments could be more lighthearted. In the years leading up to Roddam’s film of *Quadrophenia*, the most popular British reference point was the television show *The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin* (1976-1979), whose Pooter-esque hero anarchically disrupts the order of his Surbiton to Waterloo journey at the beginning of each episode.

More likely, however, *Quadrophenia* referenced not just this general setting, but a specific instance of youth culture invading the rail carriage: the opening sequence of Richard Lester’s 1964 film *Hard Days Night*. In that scene, the Beatles confront a gentleman in the first class carriage, resulting in an exchange that playfully evokes the tectonic shifts at play around youth and social

¹⁵ Matthew Beaumont, ‘Railway Mania: The Train Compartment as the Scene of a Crime’ in Matthew Beaumont and Michael J. Freeman eds. *The Railway and Modernity*, 130

mobility.¹⁶ Having taken their seats, Ringo switches on his portable radio, and an older passenger reacts angrily:

JOHNSON *puts down his paper firmly.*

JOHNSON

And we'll have that thing off as well, thank you.

RINGO

But I ...

JOHNSON *leans over and switches it off.*

JOHNSON

An elementary knowledge of the Railway Acts would tell you I'm perfectly within my rights.

He smiles frostily.

PAUL

Yeah, but we want to hear it and there's more of us than you. We're a community, like, a majority vote. Up the workers and all that stuff!

¹⁶ Lester, Richard dir. *A Hard Day's Night* (1964). The film's script is available in public domain form at <<http://www.aellea.com/script/ahdn.htm>> [Accessed 4 July 2016]

JOHNSON

Then I suggest you take that damned thing into the corridor or some other part of the train where you obviously belong.

JOHN

(leaning forward to him)

Gie's a kiss!

PAUL

Shurrup! Look, Mister, we've paid for our seats too, you know.

JOHNSON

I travel on this train regularly, twice a week.

JOHN

Knock it off, Paul, y' can't win with his sort. After all, it's his train, isn't it, Mister?

JOHNSON

And don't you take that tone with me, young man!

GEORGE

But...

JOHNSON

(*accusingly*)

I fought the war for your sort.

RINGO

Bet you're sorry you won!¹⁷

It is a light-heartedly staged scene but possesses an irresistible charge. The gentleman Johnson has recourse to the law and the war: the railway act and military service. McCartney ironically voices socialism; Lennon revels in acidic wit. The four use childhood, sarcasm and sexual ambiguity to dismantle the culture of deference. And we delight in it. As an opening flourish of the film, the scene offers a triumphant and cathartic moment of youthful rebellion, celebrating the new powers of upwardly mobile regional youth. However, the class dynamics were certainly more complex than they seem, and the entire exchange is confused by the musicians' status as newly affluent: flaunting their financial and social capital; wrong-footing the prior generation. It is an archetypal *nouveau riche* scene: the *arriviste* as manchild.

It is tempting to read the sequence of Jimmy on the 5.15 as a continuation of this defiant acting out. Taking out of context, Russell's album sleeve photograph is in keeping with this spirit. It seems to depict a fractious culture of deference on the cusp of eruption, folk devil slumped between the wary Establishment, eroding Britain's moral and cultural fabric.¹⁸ The song supports this, reviving the stuttered vocal tic and the lyrics of 'My Generation' (1965), making the song a

¹⁷ *A Hard Day's Night* script, <<http://www.aellea.com/script/ahdn.htm>> [Accessed 4 July 2016].

¹⁸ See Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972).

self-conscious re-run of the youth culture battles of the previous decade: the call-to-arms of polka dot versus striped tie. Jimmy declares ownership: his legs thrust forward towards the viewer, seemingly invading the seats opposite, almost striding forward from the frame.

It is a scene of silent resentment at the affluent teenager, at his preening narcissism, and at the entitlement of Jimmy's generation of working and lower middle class Londoners. Yet like John, Paul, George and Ringo, this well dressed barbarian is, as far as his fellow commuters know, a customer who has exercised a consumer right, and an "elementary knowledge of the railway act" tells them that they must tolerate his rise. Jimmy in the first image is an aspirant caught a moment of Britain's short-lived economic and cultural boom, the high point of social mobility. And so Russell's image also seems to capture a moment of repose. The picture suggests a relatively settled, harmonious co-existence. The incongruity seems domesticated. All three travel silently in the same direction.

Roddam's film version dramatizes these ambiguities, and adds a few more. The shots make pains to relate back to the album sleeve. But there are key changes. Jimmy's suit is sharper, now more obviously Italian. The disdain, embarrassment and resentment at this interloper on the commuter's faces is more obvious and more pronounced as they try to ignore the arrival of the wired young man. Not only wired, but eye-linered: the make-up on Phil Daniel's face adds a fresh dimension to the scene. In the version of the song that plays over these shots, the verses are re-ordered to emphasise the "he-man drag" that Jimmy assumes as he is discovered in the ladies room applying eyeliner. Just as femininity was a

central charge leveled at mod, and just as mod rejected the rockers' crude conception of masculinity, Jimmy is here a feminized interloper into the homosocial world of the middle aged male commuter. The train car becomes not a space of individual desire but an ultimate chance for controlled performance of fluid gender and sexuality that seems at points to owe much to the glitter of early 1970s glam as to the period in which it is set.

In this way, the sequence can be read as a darker replaying of the *Hard Day's Night* scene. It uses similar compositions; it draws upon a similar cast of characters, not least the schoolgirls who provide the audience to the protagonists' rebellion; it involves the same simmering notes of ambiguous sexual tension. Yet for Jimmy, the situation and outcome are quite different. Fletcher's novelization fleshes out Jimmy's thoughts in this scene:

I went into the next first-class compartment (doing it with a bit of style) and settled in between two miserable types in dark suits and bowler hats. They seemed to shrink away, as I was a leper or something, though I realized it was probably my eyes – the liner really showed up – which unnerved them. They went back to their papers, and I thought about the kind of life they led, the horror of it. They'd never experienced nothing, never been in the street, never been blocked, nothing. They seemed hardly real, and they hadn't got a clue about me, about the kind of life I was leading and why I was there, on a commuter train to Brighton flowing South.

Just as with the fab four, or with defiance of Sting's character Ace Face in the courtroom, Jimmy revels in his ability to unnerve. But this is the culmination not

the onset of his journey; his train invasion is not triumph but defeat, a hollow defiance. A hollowness that is captured in the twin sense of the word “blocked” here. Drug lingo, but more broadly, a useful way of describing the growing social obstacles Jimmy faces – obstacles that ultimately provide the core subject of the album and film.

Blocked

Quadrophenia was a dialogue between three different periods of British life: the mid-60s setting; the early 1970s of the album’s composition; and the end of that decade, when Roddam’s film was released. With this dialogue in mind, the meanings of Jimmy’s story evolve in subtle ways. Let’s begin with the first context. In the incarnation of high 1960s Mod that album and film depict, the subculture held most appeal and significance to an respectable urban working class that was, in the words of sociologist Phil Cohen, “caught and pulled apart by two opposed pressures of social mobility”: upwards into the ranks of the new suburban working class elite or downwards into the lumpen proletariat.¹⁹ Mod’s defiant stylisation seemed to signify a positive answer to this impasse. Its optimistic, future-oriented aesthetic chimed with the spirit of years that were defined by empowerment and increased opportunity. As the overall standard of living continued to rise in line with a growing economy from the late 1950s onwards, young urban workers such as Townshend’s Jimmy were symbolic of the fast pace of change, their experiences as liberating as they were

¹⁹ Phil Cohen, ‘Subcultural Conflict and Working-Class Community’ in Ken Gelder ed., *The Subcultures Reader*, 88

disorientating. But this was a mood that changed dramatically in the early years of the next decade.²⁰ Global financial uncertainty, the 1973 oil crisis, and the industrial conflicts that led the Edward Heath government to declare repeated states of emergency all helped to put the brakes on earlier speed of social advance. By the time that Townshend was completing *Quadrophenia* in 1973, the national balance of payments was in deficit, and unemployment and inflation were rising. For the first time, a post-war generation might find themselves “blocked”.

This second context helps account for the dark mood that hangs over the *Quadrophenia* album. It is there in the stark loneliness of Russell’s monochrome shots of London, in the themes of work and employment that run through the songs and the liner notes. It is also there in the uneasy sense of guilt that the band projects, as they look back at the subculture and historical moments that nurtured and enabled their success. Both in the explicit reference to The Who’s financial success (“Our Mums and Dads are all very nice and live in bungalows which we bought for them in the Outer Hebrides”) and in the visual juxtaposition in one of the photographs of their situation with that of Jimmy: the former carousing post-performance, the latter forlorn and alone on the street.²¹

These qualities also lend a wistful nostalgia to the original 5.15 image and the social potential and ease of access it might represent. In 1964, the city gents

²⁰ Dominic Sandbrook, *State of Emergency: The Way We Were. Britain, 1970–1974* (London : Allen Lane, 2010),

²¹ The liner notes centre on an extended liner notes piece by Townshend entitled ‘Quadrophenia’

Jimmy sits between might represent his own future, one of his *quad* of four potential personalities that smartness and ambition could lead him towards. But the later context also allows us to see the whole 5.15 sequence as extended mockery. It offers us the quietly recognized reality of mod: that mobility is only surface; upward journeys are only clothes deep. In the words of Stanley Cohen, Jimmy is the archetype of the Mod as actor “not quite in their place,” a bathetic replay of the triumphant railway rebellion of McCartney, Harrison, Lennon and Starkey.²² And it chimes with the lesson Jimmy learns in perhaps the most fundamental moment of his journey towards disillusionment, as he alights upon Ace Face as bell boy (“He ended up working at the same hotel. But he wasn’t the manager”) and realizes that both rebellion and social empowerment had only been spectacle and show.²³

Read through the more despairing lens of 1973, *Quadrophenia* therefore turns into a parable about the myths of social mobility, and the gains and losses of consumerism. As the liner notes said, “work wasn’t worth the effort”²⁴ Some teenagers from poorer, semi-educated backgrounds never saw the point of aspiration in the first place. Mod was always a con. Desires were thwarted Mods found solace in their culture and The difference between appearance and reality was of course the subject of ‘Substitute’. For all its association with modernity and futurity, Mod had never been an entirely optimistic worldview. Among the many oral histories of the movement, one 1964 interview that Weight quotes, with a London Mod called John Brady, then working as a mechanic, seems

²² Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 164

²³ liner notes, *Quadrophenia*

²⁴ liner notes, *Quadrophenia*

particularly apt, as he reflects that “There’s a lot of hate in me ... I suppose its because I don’t have a chance. I don’t talk right and I haven’t been to the right schools. I haven’t had an education. That makes you sick, to see them preaching at you.”²⁵

These aspects were to come to the fore in the third context of 1979. During the remainder of the 1970s, the pace of social advance for young workers such as Jimmy had slowed even more. By the time of Roddam’s film adaptation, the initial surge in mobility of the early post-war decades seemed doubly far away. Economic stagnation, the dismantling of whatever opportunities the grammar school system had offered, uneven access to the promise of higher education, and the institutional resilience of the British class system were taken as read as evidence of social malaise in a country that increasingly excluded the underprivileged urban young. This was the era of the breakdown of the affluent worker thesis, as working class school leavers found themselves hit hardest by the economic changes. Understandably, one of the keynotes of Roddam’s *Quadrophenia* was that of political nostalgia, taking that which was already latent in the original album and book and extending it further into an 1980s social imagination.

But the 1979 context also added a new layer of fury and alienation, and *Quadrophenia* has often been seen as re-imagining Mod through punk. Their potential for a shared emotional range that was most obvious when the two came together, as in the Mod revival touchstones such as The Jam’s Eton Rifles’

²⁵ quoted in Weight, *Mod*, 218-219.

(1979), which took similar frustration with social mobility as their topic. Roddam's film took the muted disaffection and alienation of Townshend's view of the 1960s and ran with it, looking back at the events of fifteen years before through a punk-inspired lens of disillusion and nihilism that marks it out as far different from the flamboyance of Ken Russell's film re-imagining of *Tommy* (1975).²⁶ Both the spirit of punk rebellion, and the full weight of punk nihilism were writ large in the court room scene. The obviously punk-inspired figure of Ace Face might be able to use disposable income to escape the situation, but he still fought the law and the law still won.

On one level Roddam's repackaging of past rebellion might be seen as a cynical consumer act. But the film also took part in the dialogue that Townshend had started about the nature of the 1960s, offering a jaundiced view on what had been lost since in terms of social possibilities. Foreign audiences seemed to understand these meanings particularly clearly. A *Los Angeles Times* review of the film thought that it "threatens to explode at every turn. Given the limited social mobility in Britain, the future promised only more of the same frustration."²⁷ One of the ironies of the film version is that while it superficially celebrates Mod culture, and was central to its subsequent revivals, it was also a damning critique. Mod was presented as all surface; not a route out of one's social station. Through the figure of Jimmy, it dramatized a distinct disillusionment among sections of working class youth with the democratic impetus of Mod, as consumerism failed to generate the social mobility that the

²⁶ Dave Allen. 'Cultural Adventurers' in Forster, Laurel, and Sue Harper. *British Culture and Society in the 1970s*, 144.

²⁷ quoted in Feldman, *We are the Mods*, 134.

precepts of the cult had promised. And it also dramatized a failure in the social solidarity that helped the subculture to coalesce in the first place. Many of the participants in oral histories testify to this powerful group identity. But as more than one came to recognise, such kinship was no match for the realities of class and the criminal justice system “When you’re working class, it’s them and us” argued one; another lamented “there’s the powers, and then there’s them that ain’t got the power, unless we stick together”²⁸

If *Quadrophenia* was Townshend’s soundtrack of the frustrated hopes of a generation, his message resonated even more in 1979. And it certainly rings true for twenty-first century viewers who have grown used to the kinds of stasis that album and film depict. The ‘5.15’ scene remains at the film’s heart, and offers a way of reading these shifting meanings. In 1973, the Townshend and Russell’s imagery offered a glimpse of the nation as a rail carriage, heading forward into an uncertain future. By the end of the decade, the same scene encapsulates Roddam’s dismantling of the myth that the young generation was, in fact, going mobile. By playing with ideas of movement, transport, social class and subcultural style the ‘5.15’ sequence allows us to think towards a more nuanced understanding of what social mobility might mean: not simply a question of movement up or even down the social scale, perhaps, but one of a mobile society that moves to meet its members, co-opting lifestyles and attitudes as part of consumer culture. And it tempts us to imagine an equivalent scene today. To reflect upon the new meanings it could have as ideas of transport, urban geography and social mobility have shifted once again. Within the modern

²⁸ quoted in Paul Anderson, *Modes*, 70.

metropolis, it is urban workers like Jimmy who have become commuters: travelling distances into the centre of cities whose cores have been re-defined economically and socially, and from which they are excluded. Moreover, we might say that, in the modern rail carriage, the concern of Mod with appearance and consumerism is now met most clearly in terms of the technology one holds in one's hand. The gradations of device one communes with during our journeys, and on which we might listen to or watch *Quadrophenia* itself, out of our brains on the train.

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