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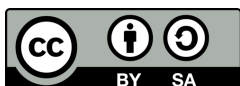
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Wrestling with Decadence:  
*The Touchables* (1968) and Swinging London Cinema of the 1960s<sup>1</sup>

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The primary touchstones when considering the relationship between decadence and cinema are probably those films in closest chronological proximity to the emergence of the decadent tradition in literature and the visual arts in the fin-de-siècle period of the late nineteenth century – the same historical moment in which cinema itself was born. Hollywood cinema of the pre-sound era spanning the 1890s to the 1920s certainly offers no shortage of figures whose work is amenable to being categorized as decadent, including directors such as Cecil B. DeMille or Erich Von Stroheim, or stars such as Theda Bara or Louise Brooks (figures whose vampishness would eventually transmogrify into the spider women and femmes fatales of 40s film noir). Alternately, one might turn to representations of particular historical moments seen as decadent, such as the fall of Babylon or the decline of Rome, or in the twentieth century, the Weimar era and its tragic aftermath: the ‘divine decadence’ Liza Minnelli’s Sally Bowles attributes to her green nail polish in *Cabaret* (1972) that was also on dark display in films like Luchino Visconti’s *The Damned* (1969) and Liliana Caviani’s *The Night Porter* (1974), both decried by Susan Sontag for espousing a sense of perverse decadent glamour.<sup>2</sup> Or perhaps the relationship between cinema and decadence might be most effectively conceptualized through the aesthetic and narrative obsessions of particular filmmakers, possible examples including the likes of Visconti, Josef von Sternberg, Federico Fellini, or David Lynch, whose respective oeuvres are coloured by different kinds of engagement with decadent images and ideas.

However, in this article we wish to make a case for the 1960s as a particular period of ‘neo-decadence’ in cinema, and to use the cult film *The Touchables* (1968; fig. 1) as our core case study for exploring how decadent tropes were adapted and updated for a new moment of cultural licentiousness, excess, and experimentation, within what some conservative-minded critics feared

was becoming a decadent society. It will explore how both the film's on screen diegesis and the off-screen conditions of its production might both be read in relation to ideas of decadence, both in terms of Hollywood history and post-war British society.



Fig. 1: Movie poster for *The Touchables* (1968).

Described by one contemporary reviewer as an ‘incredibly obtuse’ and ‘self-indulgent’ film in which ‘the world is youth-oriented, sex roles are being reversed and nothing shocks anymore’, *The Touchables* certainly corresponds with literary scholar M. H. Abrams’s textbook definition of decadence as a mode of ‘lassitude, satiety, and ennui’ centred on ‘drugged perception, sexual experimentation, and the deliberate inversion of conventional moral, social, and artistic norms’ as well as stylistic ‘high artifice’ and an emphasis on ‘the bizarre in [its] subject matter’.<sup>3</sup> These attributes are all in evidence in *The Touchables*, a film as frequently visually arresting as it is mystifying

and irritating: while that same reviewer decried its ‘switched-on nonsense’ they still had to give it credit for its ‘stunning editing and photography’.<sup>4</sup> Its selection as the film to close the 1968 San Francisco Film Festival says something of the attempt to see it as a defining cultural text of the era, being shown in the beating heart of the contemporary counterculture.<sup>5</sup> But what is of greatest interest to us here is how *The Touchables* updates and reinvents the provocations of fin-de-siècle decadence for an equivalent ‘permissive society’ in the 1960s.

### **Swinging London and Ailing Hollywood: The Production Context of the 1960s**

*The Touchables* was a product of the specific production climate of ‘swinging London’, the phenomenon by which Britain became a hotbed for Hollywood runaway production during the decade. This zeitgeist capitalized on the idea of Britain, or more specifically London, as a hub of cultural novelty and excitement, immortalized through the *Time* magazine cover of April 1966 that proclaimed London ‘the swinging city’. London thus became internationally understood as an intriguing and compelling site of aesthetic and moral innovation in the 1960s, which often happened to chime with imagery and ideologies associated with decadence. As Nick Freeman notes:

For those in the vanguard of social change, it was a powerful symbol of a new Britain that was supposedly classless, dynamic, *fun*. [...] For those inclined to see decadence in a less positive light, the city was an equally convenient and memorable image of decline. Whether or not there actually was a Swinging London is less important than what it might represent, and this was invariably a nebulous ‘permissive society’ that licensed sexual and narcotic experiment and rejected traditional social and moral constraints.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, films that engaged with these permissive elements of 1960s British culture were seen as particularly attractive to the much sought-after youth audiences who were increasingly becoming the mainstay of a cinemagoing public dramatically declining in overall numbers (in the Western world), particularly because of the growth of television. By the 1960s, it had become clear that the old logics of successful studio production no longer applied; the age of ‘nobody knows anything’ (to quote William Goldman’s famous dictum) had begun, and this sense of perplexed desperation among studio controllers about how to attract audiences only accelerated as the decade progressed,



resulting in some strange corporate behaviours. As Aubrey Solomon suggests, ‘If there was ever a time when all rhyme and reason (if there ever was any in films) was missing from the movie business, it was 1968–70’.<sup>7</sup> Studios put financial heft behind the gamble of wholesome big-budget musicals trying to appeal to family audiences, in the hope of replicating the record-breaking box-office takings of *The Sound of Music* (1965). However, they mostly fell far short of that goal, with super-productions such as *Doctor Dolittle* (1967), *Star!* (1968), *Finian’s Rainbow* (1968), *Paint Your Wagon* (1969), and *Hello Dolly!* (1969) suffering catastrophic losses instead.<sup>8</sup> The lure of colour film spectacle had been considerably weakened by the increasing availability of colour television, already ubiquitous in the US by the mid-1960s and introduced to the UK in 1967, then across all its channels by the decade’s end. But the other answer to the question of how to prevent haemorrhaging film audiences was to avoid the blanket cross-demographic appeal of the family film in favour of something more niche, and to go for the youth market. From about 1963 onwards, this often entailed trying to capitalize on the contemporary enthusiasm for British youth culture, riding high from Beatlemania.<sup>9</sup> Equally important in movie circles was the Oscar-winning success of *Tom Jones* (1963), the bawdy and visually inventive costume picture which made an international star of Albert Finney, and the growing popularity of the James Bond films; both centred on the sexual adventures of their licentious young male protagonists.

Tom Jones, James Bond, and The Beatles were all brought to cinema screens through the auspices of United Artists, the first Hollywood studio to make British productions a crucial component of their sixties slate, but not the last.<sup>10</sup> As director John Boorman noted of this period, ‘There was a complete loss of nerve by the American studios’ that left them ‘so confused and so uncertain as to what to do’, and ‘London was this swinging place, and there was this desire to import British or European directors who would somehow have the answers’.<sup>11</sup> By the mid-1960s every major Hollywood studio was undertaking significant production activities in Britain, in the hope of harnessing some of that success for themselves. This resulted in a cycle of London-centred films encompassing numerous spy thrillers and caper movies such as *The Ipcress File* (1965),

*Kaleidoscope* (1966), and the social satire of *Darling* (1965), as well as a host of modish but melancholic comedies like *The Knack ...and how to get it* (1965), *Alfie* (1966), *Georgy Girl* (1966), and *Morgan: A Suitable Case for Treatment* (1966), all of which seemed designed to speak to young audiences beguiled by British culture both in the UK and overseas. These films were also appreciated for their sexual candour, pushing against the strictures of the unsustainable and soon-to-collapse Production Code.<sup>12</sup> The surprising US box-office success of MGM's London-set, Antonioni-directed *Blow Up* (1966), a film deeply mired in the culture of swinging London and as narratively opaque and enigmatic as the director's previous Italian work, provided further fuel for the idea that new kinds of audiences were looking for new kinds of things in their films, and that the classical virtues of cogent narrative were no longer paramount to their requirements (although the crucial factor in *Blow Up*'s success was more likely to have been its incorporation of sexually explicit material and plentiful female nudity – enough to see it denied a Production Code seal of approval).<sup>13</sup> *Blow Up* may have 'left most of the older executives scratching their heads', according to Peter Biskind, but its success in spite of that not only destabilized received wisdom but also had liberating concomitant effects for emergent filmmakers, one of whom told Biskind: '*Blow Up* confused the hell out of them. People really started feeling they didn't know what was going on. It was much easier to get stuff going'.<sup>14</sup>

This milieu – in which new kinds of filmmaking, however outlandish or risk-taking, might be backed by studios if they were felt to potentially connect with youth audiences, and in which London settings were still the acme of fashionability – provided the context for Twentieth Century Fox's decision to support John Bryan's production company Film Designs in their making of *The Touchables*. The directorial debut of noted sixties photographer Robert Freeman [fig. 2] (who shot Khrushchev and John Coltrane as well as The Beatles' first five album covers and the first Pirelli pin-up calendar), *The Touchables* follows the cool London lives of an 'indomitable clan of ultra-modern girls' – Sadie (Judy Huxtable), Melanie (Esther Anderson), Busbee (Marilyn Rickard) and Samson (Kathy Simmonds) – who kidnap a pop star (Christian, played by David Anthony) and

then transport him to a transparent plastic pleasure-dome in the countryside, where they take turns in using him for their gratification.<sup>15</sup> A meandering parallel subplot about professional wrestling, predatory gay desire, and criminal extortion develops alongside until the two plotlines converge and culminate in a moderately violent but ultimately inconclusive dénouement. It is a thriller of sorts – although putting any decisive generic label on an evasive film described by its own director as seeking to communicate ‘an atmosphere or a vague modern environment’ rather than tell a story is a questionable endeavour.<sup>16</sup> The film may commence on a curtain being dramatically drawn back to reveal a waxwork of Alfred Hitchcock, but overall it is very far from the Hitchcockian model of suspense in film, opting for a far more diffuse construction.<sup>17</sup> The Hitchcock waxwork behind a *Psycho*-esque curtain is less significant as auteurist touchstone than as kitsch memorabilia, a piece of quirky set dressing at the achingly hip party that opens the film, and the first of the ‘genuine replicas’ that litter the film. Arguably, the waxwork of Michael Caine, then one of the top British acting exports after the success of *Alfie*, plays a more vital role, as the girls’ first practice ‘kidnap’ victim before they move on to abduct a real live man.



Fig. 2 (00:05:38): Robert Freeman’s directorial debut.

Beginning *The Touchables* on the happenstance and kitsch randomness of a swinging party, with all its loosely-motivated interactions and actions, sets the tone for the film to come, in the most apposite fashion. Plot, as Robert Freeman suggested in his description of the film, is not *The Touchables*' driving force; rather, its stylized presentation of a series of fashionable vignettes is its true raison d'être. Freeman underlined this quality in describing the film in the trade press as a 'time-slice happening' and 'a collection of experiences' rather than a film that would offer viewers a standard narrative.<sup>18</sup> The 'vague modern environment' it seeks to invoke is swinging London in all its aspirational modishness and permissiveness, and American trade paper *Box Office* predicted 'all the English gear and slang' in this 'latest piece of pop propaganda to come from swinging London' would make the film 'a winner'.<sup>19</sup>

Heavily indebted to the aesthetics of magazine and television advertising and editorial and fashion photography (in which Freeman had frequently worked) as well as nascent music video, *The Touchables* attempted to harness contemporary trends in service of a production that would be expressive of, and appeal to, youth. This directly tied into Twentieth Century Fox's tactic at the time to 'Think young!', as it announced in an advertisement in the UK film trade press for its 1967 production slate (which included the forthcoming *The Touchables*).<sup>20</sup> The film seems to have had a chaotically impromptu genesis, typical of the risk-taking, febrile cultural moment of swinging London. Willing to stake some of Fox's *Sound of Music* profits on a bid to appeal to a more fashionable demographic, the studio's young new head of production, Richard Zanuck, apparently green-lit both *The Touchables* and Mike Sarne's *Joanna* (1968), another swinging London story by a debutant director, 'on a street corner, outside Zanuck's hotel, in a matter of seconds', Mike Sarne recalled, as 'Zanuck just looked at me, looked at Bob, and said, "I'm going to give each of you a million to do your pictures" and that was that.'<sup>21</sup> This anecdote is especially evocative of a neo-decadent production context, as large sums of money were being chaotically dispensed perhaps in order to try to pull back from the precipice of unstoppable Hollywood decline, or perhaps in a feckless gesture of disregard for the future as the whole system got ready to plunge over the edge.

## A Penchant for Decadence: The Late 1960s as Neo-decadent Era

According to design historian Lesley Jackson, the ‘sharp edged, precise’ aesthetic of early-to-mid-60s swinging London began to give way to a ‘melt-down of forms’ around 1967, with a new countercultural aesthetic which ‘began to rediscover and revel in the richness of Victorian design’, including visual culture associated with the decadent tradition of the *fin de siècle*.<sup>22</sup> The 1966 exhibition of Aubrey Beardsley’s work at London’s Victoria and Albert Museum had proven especially instrumental in effecting a stylistic shift; Beardsley featuring on the cover of The Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) is testimony to this, as is his work’s influence on both the cover art of their earlier album *Revolver* (1966) and the animation style of their 1968 feature, *Yellow Submarine*.<sup>23</sup> Equally influential was the art-nouveau style of Alphonse Mucha, in particular his curlicue-haired goddesses, co-opted and repurposed for the psychedelic poster art of the late 1960s and remarkably similar to the new feminine ideal espoused in late-60s fashion exemplified by the flowing gowns and flowing locks worn by Biba’s models.<sup>24</sup> Their vampish, panda-eyed personae chimed with the vamps of silent cinema; therefore, it made perfect sense that the forgotten face of Theda Bara would be reanimated as the cover girl for the key countercultural publication of the moment, the *International Times*.

As this widespread renewal of interest in the aesthetics of decadence and the *fin de siècle* manifested itself across popular culture in the late-60s, it was inevitable that it should also seep into the cinema of the period as it attempted to keep pace with changing fashions. In cinema, the monochrome mod look of earlier swinging London films like Richard Lester’s *The Knack* gave way to a different and more sumptuous visual style inspired by the decadent revival. We can discern its imprint upon the ornate sets created by production designer Assheton Gorton for Hollywood-financed London-set films such as the swinging rom-com *The Bliss of Mrs Blossom* (1968) and the psychedelic fantasia *Wonderwall* (1968), or in the exotic, sequestered spaces curated by interior

designer Christopher Gibbs for the Mick Jagger film *Performance* (completed 1968 but only released in re-edited form by a disgusted Warner Brothers in 1971).<sup>25</sup>

In many ways *Performance* exemplifies high-sixties neo-decadence. A jaded young artist, Jagger's musician Turner, shuts himself away and dedicates himself to a life of sensual pleasure and inner examination, fuelled by narcotics, in a manner somewhat reminiscent of Des Esseintes, the protagonist of J.-K. Huysmans's foundational 1884 decadent text, *À rebours*, translated into English by Robert Baldick as *Against Nature*. The very precepts of 'natural' masculine heteronormative western identity are called into question through Turner's psychologically-combative encounter with Chas, James Fox's violent gangster who seeks sanctuary within Turner's refuge, with *Performance's* narrative motif of uncanny doubling and split personality recalling the fin-de-siècle literary work of Robert Louis Stevenson and Oscar Wilde (around this time, swinging London also provided an apt setting for Massimo Dallamano's updated *Dorian Gray* (1970)). Entrancingly perverse in both style and subject matter, a film like *Performance* demonstrates how the appeal of decadence at this time was not only a matter of aesthetics but also of ethos, especially its emphasis on sensual, experiential pleasure, sexual rule-breaking, and the querying of fixed identities. In fact the two were inextricably intertwined: thus it was not only for his unique exotic graphic style that Beardsley's work was admired but also for the iconoclastic content presented through it, still outré enough to see prints of his work seized from a shop on Regent Street on grounds of obscenity in 1966 – even while the V&A were celebrating him.<sup>26</sup>

*The Touchables* also presents that same potent combination of sensual aesthetics allied with sexual and social experimentation that animated the neo-decadent *Performance*. Indeed, the writer and co-director of *Performance*, Donald Cammell, also had a hand in the making of *The Touchables*, as co-originator of its screenplay (alongside his advertising executive brother David Cammell).<sup>27</sup> One might view *The Touchables* as a partial rehearsal of some of the themes and ideas developed in *Performance*, another film centred on underworld thugs who track down and menace a bunch of countercultural butterflies who have hidden themselves away to pursue their sensory

experimentation. Like Jagger's enigmatic and inscrutable Turner, the 'touchable' girls are impossible to read, their feelings inaccessible to the viewer. This is partly due to the film's deliberate attempt to have its characters maintain their cool throughout, no matter how preposterous the situation they find themselves in. But it might also be an inadvertent side-effect of the casting decisions being motivated more by model good looks than acting ability.<sup>28</sup> Either way, it has the effect of making what reviewer Renata Adler called 'mod vacuous' the film's primary performative mode.<sup>29</sup> Sometimes the mode is enacted through a listless lackadaisical delivery of the dialogue – the scene in which the girls monotonously chant 'rhubarb rhubarb' (standard cover dialogue for background extras) while in conversation at the dinner table is especially illustrative of this deliberately slipshod approach to meaningful character dialogue – and sometimes through a cinematographic style in which the girls are deployed more in the manner of props. Sometimes they are shot in fetishistic ad-style close-up (the film's title sequence provides an extended example of this) but other times in longer shot, posed and positioned to adorn a stylish interior in the manner of a magazine layout; Busbee lounging seductively on multi-coloured globular floor cushions in the dome is a good example of this 'Sunday colour supplement' visual style [fig. 3].<sup>30</sup> Even moments that should ostensibly provide dramatic excitement, like the girls' daring abduction of the pop star Christian, are shot and edited in such a way as to make them feel curiously empty: the action is framed in the middle distance, positioning it more as monochromatic spectacle (with each character clad in black and white) than a moment of genuine struggle or suspense. It sums up the overall emotional tenor of *The Touchables*: nothing carries emotional weight or depth; everything takes place at the level of spectacle and surface.

The emphasis placed on production design in *The Touchables* also plays into these tendencies, although this aspect of the film is perhaps unsurprising given its producer was the celebrated set designer John Bryan who had created astonishing *trompe-l'œil* production design for films such as *Oliver Twist* (1948) and *Becket* (1964). Although there are some more casually arrayed scenes that take place in cars and on real London streets as well as locations like modern office

blocks and a Mayfair gentleman's club, three carefully curated domestic interiors provide the venue for much of the film's main action.



Fig. 3 (00:39:27): 'Sunday colour supplement' cinematography.



Fig. 4 (00:16:14): A kitsch dinner with Michael Caine and Michelangelo.



The first is the palatial bachelor pad of wrestler Ricki Starr (playing himself in the film), self-styled Renaissance man and Melanie's erstwhile boyfriend, who acts as host to the girls as they hatch their initial kidnap plans. His wood-panelled home is full of paintings and sculptures by Michelangelo [fig. 4] although these artworks are, he admits, 'genuine replicas' and 'genuine reproductions', playing on ideas of authenticity in a manner highly reminiscent of decadent discourse – indeed, as noted earlier, imagery associated with simulacra, replication, and automata reverberates throughout the film, from waxworks to wind-up robots. Through his surroundings, Starr is presented as a connoisseur who not only quotes Pope and Aristotle, referring to his extensive library of leather-bound volumes, but also dines on lobster at a table laid with all the accoutrements of aristocratic gracious living. This fitted into Starr's off-screen reputation as connoisseur and 'erudite intellectual who read Thoreau's *Walden*, listened to classical music and drank fine wines', but it also corresponded with the Sunday supplement tropes of luxurious living that John Berger skewers so brilliantly in *Ways of Seeing* as 'translat[ing] the language of oil painting into publicity clichés'.<sup>31</sup> Starr's reputation as neo-decadent dandy and aesthete also mapped onto his effete professional persona, and the film shows him performing his (real-life) balletic, acrobatic act, pirouetting round the wrestling ring bedecked in gold trunks and silver slippers.

Whereas Starr's bachelor pad is a more conventionally decadent sequestered masculine and queer space, the second significant domestic space in the film, the girls' shared London flat, offers a different kind of trendily repurposed old-fashioned space, as an open-plan apartment at the top of what looks like a Victorian school building.<sup>32</sup> Just as in *Blow Up*, the fashionable protagonists live in re-styled Victorian buildings rather than ultra-modern settings, 'apt environments for the beautiful people to inhabit, exacerbating their coolness through the piquantly contrasting traditionalism'.<sup>33</sup> The shared space is kitted out in the fashionably bohemian, apparently casual style of the period with furniture in unexpected places (Samson's bed in the main living area), and pictures tacked up on the asymmetric whitewashed walls. The slightly removed camera positioning mentioned previously is also in evidence here, although there is intimate under-the-bedcovers

photography of Samson watching Christian being interviewed on television, with the mini portable television placed between her legs imbuing the scene with a masturbatory feel [fig. 5]. Such up-to-the-minute technology being foregrounded – as with the mobile television Sadie watches in her speeding car – also consolidates the idea that these are ultra-modern girls even if they do live in the attic of a Victorian schoolhouse.



Fig. 5 (00:24:02): Getting off on the telly.

These representational tropes – the distanced camerawork, the combination of modernity with more traditional elements in the *mise en scène* – continue and increase in the third and most significant domestic space of all: the inflated plastic pleasure-dome to which the girls flee with their captive pop star. Described in an early version of the script as ‘a beautiful transparent dome [...] about eighty feet high, towering above the nearby trees’, when built it was the largest transparent pneumatic dome in the world.<sup>34</sup> With its polished aluminium floor and see-through walls, the dome appears simultaneously boundless and finite. Its transparency allows a view of the landscape in which it is located – Frensham Ponds, near Farnham in Surrey – to permeate its man-made membrane, situating the interior of the dome in its wider rural setting. Yet the slightly opaque

quality of the plastic creates a hazy barrier that keeps what is inside in sharp, brightly lit focus, and renders what is outside less precise, more impressionistic [fig. 6].



Fig. 6 (00:35:26): Dome sweet dome, at dawn.



Fig. 7 (00:33:20): One of the first shots of the plastic pleasure dome.

This separates the dome from the outside world, creating a sense of distance that is all the more pronounced because the shapes and colours of that outside world are still recognizable.

Exterior long shots show the dome resting in the landscape like a huge bubble or amniotic sac, ethereal despite its vast size, at once there and barely there [fig. 7]. The dome plays with the eye, and with the viewer's perception of space and distance, like a giant piece of three-dimensional op art. This was, as an advertisement in *Variety* put it, 'the kind of pleasure-dome that Samuel Coleridge [...] never hallucinated'.<sup>35</sup>

The dome itself functions as the supreme neo-decadent space. It is a form of retreat, a fantastic bubble that keeps its inhabitants removed from the normal world, akin to those cloistered environments in which the protagonists of fin-de-siècle decadent literature situate themselves, all the better to relish their apart-ness and the asocial artificial realms they have created. In *À rebours* this is a dark interior space, full of synthetic sensory delights, which can be tightly controlled and into which no quotidian tedium is permitted to penetrate. In an entirely appropriate updating of this trope for the modern plastic age, the dark chambers in which acts of unspeakable perversity and amorality are committed have been transformed in *The Touchables* into polyamorous free love in broad daylight (even accompanied by a cover of 'The Beatles' 'Good Day Sunshine') in a dwelling made of the quintessential modern material, and the zenith of the unnatural and the artificial: plastic.<sup>36</sup>

However, the set dressing of the dome points towards some more established or familiar decadent associations. The fur rug that covers the naked bodies of the fivesome as they sleep together in their carousel bed invokes the famous Redlands drug bust of February 1967 which resulted in the arrest of the Rolling Stones' Mick Jagger and Keith Richards and salacious press reportage of Jagger's girlfriend Marianne Faithful being caught *in flagrante* and naked save for the draping of a fur blanket: the acme of 60s neo-decadence even accompanied by 'a strong, sweet smell of incense', according to tabloid coverage.<sup>37</sup> The revolving fairground carousel bed (to which Christian is later pinioned like Vitruvian Man; see fig. 8) along with the pinball and billiard tables are reminders of the centrality of decadent visual culture to the arch appreciation of the kitsch vernacular folk art of popular entertainment, from Des Esseintes' enthusiasm for circus acrobats

and ventriloquists to the poster art of Toulouse-Lautrec featuring popular dancers and comedians.<sup>38</sup> *The Touchables* shows off the shiny embellishments of its carefully selected *objets d'art* in a musical montage sequence which intercuts the girls playing pinball and billiards with each of them seducing Christian in turn, playing on the double meaning of the idea of 'scoring'.



Fig. 8 (00:38:58): The pop star (David Anthony) as Vitruvian man.

### **Appealing to our Worst Instincts? Advertising, Affluence, and *The Touchables***

The only sequence in *The Touchables* critic Renata Adler felt really worked was Melanie's silhouetted freeform dance in front of a rapid-fire strobing montage of projected images from contemporary advertising.<sup>39</sup> This sequence being the point where the film came alive for at least one critic is perhaps a sign that it was on surer ground in a moment heavily imbricated with the imagery of consumer culture. *The Touchables* was the product of creatives with strong track records in advertising: not only had Freeman already done extensive award-winning work in print and film advertising for David Cammell's leading advertising agency partnership, Cammell, Hudson, and Brownjohn, art director Peter Hampton, associate producer John Oldknow, assistant director Ted

Morley, and camera operator Tony Troke had also all previously made television advertisements, and cinematographer Alan Pudney had collaborated with Freeman on commercials (and would continue to work with him in the same medium after finishing the film).<sup>40</sup> The movement of personnel between advertising and film was common in Britain throughout the 1960s, not least because employment in the film industry frequently remained precarious even during a boom time for production, and the two forms exerted an increasingly recognizable stylistic influence on each other.<sup>41</sup> For instance, the aforementioned elevated and slightly removed camera position taken in numerous scenes mimics the imagery of an interior decor magazine spread, presenting objects as potentially purchasable commodities. Numerous reviewers of the film picked up on *The Touchables*' advertising-inflected aesthetic: one noted 'a *mise en scène* that drips with the highly lacquered kinkiness of a glossy advertising lay-out' conjuring up a 'world of disposable daydreams', while Adler felt its sex scenes were 'a bit like commercials, in their timing, for stockings or shaving cream'.<sup>42</sup> Yet another suggested that *The Touchables* represented a *reductio ad absurdum* in the cross-pollination of advertising style into cinema, with the film functioning as 'simply a commercial for itself'.<sup>43</sup> Resemblance to advertising was inevitably viewed in pejorative terms at this time: its influence was conceptualized as being inherently negative. Ken Russell, who himself directed a number of commercials, nevertheless described ad-men as a scourge on society whose 'minds and values were depraved'.<sup>44</sup> *The Touchables*, therefore, appeared to exemplify all that critics believed to be wrong with the advertising industry's baleful influence both on British society and on cinema, frequently understood as an indicator of Americanization and moral turpitude, promoting ephemeral sensation, illusion, and acquisitiveness.<sup>45</sup> The arrival of commercial television in Britain in late 1955 had increased the amount and accessibility of moving image advertising, prompting its opponents to claim that it would 'pervert and reduce the standards of taste, morality and culture in this country for a generation'.<sup>46</sup> Particular targets were the musical stings or jingles deployed in TV adverts, banal and yet unforgettable: one of the most famous, 'Good morning, good morning, our best to you this morning' for Kellogg's Corn Flakes, is chorused by the girls in *The Touchables*

at breakfast time; the same jingle would inspire John Lennon's *Sgt. Pepper* composition 'Good Morning Good Morning'.

Advertising needed to have an immediate impact and encouraged a focus on catchy tunes and surface beauty, on the immediate (and often artificially stimulated) desires of the individual rather than the needs of society as a whole. As such, it was deemed to promote the superficial, rather than the substantive; the ephemeral, rather than the enduring; the sensual, rather than the rational, urging the public at large to spend money that it did not have 'on items it may not want or does not need'.<sup>47</sup> No wonder its most vociferous critics, such as Labour politician Aneurin Bevan, considered the advertising industry to be 'evil' and guilty of 'artificially appealing to [mankind's] worst instincts'.<sup>48</sup> But advertising was only a symptom of the underlying problem. To a certain extent, affluence itself was understood as a form of decadence, with damaging effects on the population. The sense that Britain may have changed for the worse, and moved away from its perceived traditional ascetic virtues and values towards self-indulgence was evident in frequently critical responses to affluence 'conceived in terms of moral and cultural loss besides material gain'.<sup>49</sup> Greater amounts of disposable income and increased access to credit via hire-purchase agreements meant that more workers were able to define themselves not by what they made or did at work, but by what they consumed or did at home. A greater cultural emphasis on pleasure and indulgence was understood by some to speak to national lassitude and a lack of moral integrity or collective purpose. Even Harold Macmillan, the Prime Minister who acted as midwife to post-war affluence, maintained ambivalent feelings about the society he had helped to usher in, noting as early as 1960 that in 'a large part' of British life 'a sort of vague, materialist, agnostic creed flourishes'.<sup>50</sup>

Therefore, the glossy amoral aimlessness of a film like *The Touchables* – whose 'vague modern environment' even recalls Macmillan's expression of his fears – slotted neatly into ongoing debates about social, cultural, and moral change in 1960s Britain. Freeman claimed in the press that it was a story of 'expendable living and casual amorality', but it is unclear whether the film is

intended as a satire or critique of contemporary consumer culture in an age of affluence.<sup>51</sup> Certainly, Freeman, the Cammells, and other personnel's extensive work in advertising might blunt or problematize any sense of outright attack. Keeping its agnostic, coolly uncommitted 'mod vacuous' stance, *The Touchables* remains hard to read in terms of intentions, as one critic noted: 'Film's concept is never clear. If meant as a put-down of a current cinema cycle, it is a puerile effort; if eyed as a psychological study, it is immature; if conceived as escapism, it is entirely inadequate and forced.'<sup>52</sup> It is certainly bold of the film to include an extended discussion of the definition of the word 'farrago' (looked up in Ricki Starr's leather-bound dictionary) when it so closely resembles a farrago itself.

In their ceaseless, indolent sensation-seeking, the girls come to resemble – albeit in a lower register – the anti-heroes of decadent literature, like Des Esseintes, always seeking rarefied and exquisite experiences (the 'new perfumes, larger blossoms, pleasures still untasted' Huysmans refers to, quoting Flaubert); shifting from stealing waxworks, to kidnapping pop stars, sleeping with them to sentencing them to death by firing squad – just for (attempted) kicks.<sup>53</sup> But these 'birds from mod and far-out London [...] who drive fast cars, shower in men's locker rooms, [and] shed lovers the way they do their clothes', endlessly seeking new ways to pique their jaded appetites, also exemplify the contemporary disease of 'neophilia', as defined by conservative critic Christopher Booker, which he felt was incubated and encouraged by a vapid superficial culture.<sup>54</sup> Certainly the listless qualities of their performances contribute to this sense of dissipated numbness, as does the film's constant movement from one spectacle to the next (Ricki Starr even comments at one point: 'you're confusing movement with action'), in a mood Adler aptly characterized as 'a sort of fidgety mod pornography'.<sup>55</sup>

### **Bursting the Bubble: A Cautionary Tale of Pneumatic Pleasure-domes**



Along with its beautiful young cast, *The Touchables*' space-age inflated PVC dome was one of its prime visual attractions. On screen, it appears serene and still, despite whatever farragoes might be taking place within and around it, harmonious within its pastoral setting. But during the film's production it was the source of continual difficulties and delays: a *folie de grandeur* that seemed to speak eloquently of the overblown extravagance of budgets and production design in British cinema during its peak moment of overseas investment. Fabricated by waterproof garment manufacturer Pakamac, the dome had been designed by Arthur Quarmby, an architect who was hugely excited by the possibilities offered by the combination of plastics and pneumatics. Building with these materials and technologies had the potential to free designers from some of the restraints that had previously determined a building's formal and aesthetic properties and made possible some of the more playful, ovoid/spherical designs that emerged during the 1960s. Demonstrating that the phrase 'blow-up' had multiple meanings during the period, Quarmby had developed a prototype inflatable chair in 1964 – the type of furniture which, like paper dresses and cardboard seats, spoke of the era's emphasis on disposability and modernity.

Quarmby later recalled that the dome desired by Freeman was an inherently problematic shape: 'a three-quarter sphere is a pretty dodgy form pneumatically – pressure and uplift conditions vary around it and a difficult concentration of stresses develops at the crown'.<sup>56</sup> In short, it looked stunning, but was prone to wind damage. This was an issue that would haunt the production, especially as shooting on the film did not start until September 1967 – just in time for the gustier autumn weather that followed the balmy 'Summer of Love'.<sup>57</sup> Following various 'mis-adventures', Film Designs took delivery of four different domes, each of which cost £2,400. The daily progress reports compiled by production manager John Oldknow give a flavour of problems faced:

Monday 6 November: '[Third] Dome arrived on site at 8.30 a.m.'

Thursday 9 November 1967: 'Dome successfully inflated.'

Saturday 11 November 1967: 'The dome was totally destroyed at 12.15 a.m.'<sup>58</sup>

With each new bubble came more, and increasingly restrictive, usage instructions. For much of the shoot, the dome had to be deflated if wind speeds rose above 30mph, although there was some

concern after the initial inflation of the third dome that this might be lowered to just 10mph. Days were lost as the producers arranged meetings to insure the dome(s). Because high winds were likely to burst its crown, the crew became greatly interested in atmospheric conditions: the policy that was eventually agreed obliged the production to contact ‘the nearest official meteorological forecast office’ twice a day. A recording anemometer was installed on site for good measure. The production team eventually adopted a fatalistic attitude towards this capricious plastic god: ‘It is obviously impossible to foretell what will happen with these domes, though from past experience it would seem unlikely that we will complete shooting without further disasters’.<sup>59</sup>

Although shooting on *The Touchables* was initially anticipated to take fifty days, in the end, the production overran by an extra thirty-four days, and problems with the dome were held to be the root cause of twenty-eight of these. This slippage from the schedule was, of course, hugely expensive. Budgeted at £301,055, *The Touchables* ended up costing £150,000 more, with the dome responsible for at least £90,000 of this additional expenditure. Because the dome was so central to much of the film, when it was out of action there was not always much else for the cast and crew to do, yet they still needed to be paid. It appears that so desperate were Freeman and Bryan to make progress that some scenes were rewritten so that they no longer featured it.<sup>60</sup>

Quarmby suggests that the various mishaps that befell the production inspired a new ending: ‘the [earlier] bursting was so effective that it was done again, deliberately, at the climax of the film.’<sup>61</sup> ‘Climax’ is perhaps an overstatement, but certainly in the film’s final scenes the dome is burst and we see it fall in on itself, while the girls, unmoved by this spectacle, simply flee the scene and return to London. Ending on an image of a bursting bubble, of deflation and collapse, is so much more than a serendipitous way to end an aimless, plotless film. It was not only a kind of in-joke about admitting defeat in the Sisyphean endeavour of keeping the dome erect but it also acted as a perfect metaphor for so many aspects of the broader culture from which *The Touchables* originated [figs 9–11].



Fig. 9 (01:28:49): The Swinging Sixties' bubble begins to burst.



Fig. 10 (01:28:52): Going, going...



Fig. 11 (01:28:58): Gone.

1968 was the peak year of Hollywood investment in the British film industry, when all the major studios' extensive UK production slates were at their height. Thereafter, the 'swinging London' film scene went into dramatic decline as too many of its products had failed to provide the box-office returns that had been hoped for. *The Touchables* certainly did not catch on with audiences and performed poorly.<sup>62</sup> Studios were also tightening their belts after the failure of numerous mega-productions: *Doctor Dolittle* and *Star!* lost Fox in excess of \$13 million and \$10 million, respectively.<sup>63</sup> But the studio system of old was on borrowed time, as the takeover by conglomerates and in some cases asset-stripping of the Hollywood majors was imminent, with hotelier Kirk Kerkorian's 1970 takeover of MGM – mainly to use its name and trademarks for his Las Vegas resort – perhaps the most blithely philistine of all. There were some green shoots of recovery in the shape of smaller Hollywood films which did connect with smart younger audiences, such as *Easy Rider* (1969), representing the emergence of 'New Hollywood' which would come to fuller fruition in the 1970s. But this kind of success only demonstrated how the locus of global youth culture had shifted away from the UK and back to the US: Haight Asbury, San Francisco, had taken over from the Kings Road, Chelsea, as its epicentre. It was certainly of no comfort to a

British film industry facing the catastrophic effects of the withdrawal of American financing. Their bubble truly had burst.

Although the deflating dome in *The Touchables* might be read in terms of moral guardian Mary Whitehouse's idea of Britain being in a state of 'moral collapse', we might equally read it as a bursting of the bubble of a particular moment of possibility in post-war British culture, the utopian potential of the 1960s 'cultural revolution', however ridiculous some of its cultural relics may appear with hindsight.<sup>64</sup> It did not lead to an extensive film career for Freeman who made only one further feature, *Secret World* (1969), co-directed with Paul Feyder, and then returned to his original trade of photography thereafter.<sup>65</sup> The collapsing membrane of a pumped-up, precarious structure acted as a perfect metaphor for the end of British cinema's good times and the extravagant death throes of a studio system which had bankrolled it. Although not a popular film at the time with audiences or critics, and hardly visible since except as a cult item, *The Touchables* is nonetheless profoundly expressive, both in its on-screen (in)action and in its off-screen woes, of a moment of cinematic neo-decadence, a beautiful haphazard 'monstrosity' fragrant with the tradition's 'special, sweet savor of incipient decay', and as such worthy of interest.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Susan Sontag, 'Fascinating fascism', *New York Review of Books*, 6 February 1975, 23–30.

<sup>3</sup> Anon, 'The Touchables', *Box Office*, 11 November 1968, p. 94. M. H. Abrams, *Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th edn (New York: Harcourt, 1992), p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> *Box Office*, 11 November 1968, p. 94. Available on DVD from only one vendor that we know of (see 'Photo Credits' to this issue) and not available at all on Blu-Ray or VOD (reflecting its marginal place within film canons, in spite of a minor cult following), there is nonetheless currently a version of the entire film uploaded onto YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1eBz2eaqtNY> [accessed 19 December 2019]. The film has never been shown on UK television.

<sup>5</sup> Announcement in *Variety*, 9 October 1968, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Nick Freeman, 'Permissive Paradise: The Fiction of Swinging London', in *Decadences: Morality and Aesthetics in British Literature*, ed. by Paul Fox (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2014), pp. 349–74 (pp. 351–52).

<sup>7</sup> Aubrey Solomon, *Twentieth Century-Fox: A Corporate and Financial History* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2002), p. 161.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew Kennedy *Roadshow: The Fall of Film Musicals in the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> See Barry Miles, *The British Invasion* (New York and London: Sterling, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> See Tino Balio, *United Artists: The Company that Changed the Film Industry* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1987).

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Peter Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex 'n' Drugs 'n' Rock 'n' Roll Generation Saved Hollywood* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> For an account of the end of the PCA (replaced by a new MPAA ratings system in 1968), see Leonard J. Leff and Jerrold L. Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship, and the Production Code* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001). This is also covered in Paul Monaco, *The Sixties, 1960–1969, The History of American Cinema*, ed. by Charles Musser, 10 vols, VIII (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). The British films benefitted from the freedoms granted by the British Board of Film Classification's increasingly liberal regime under John Trevelyan, 1958–1971. See Anthony Aldgate, *Censorship and the Permissive Society: British Cinema and Theatre, 1955–1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> MGM's decision to go ahead minus a PCA seal is seen as a watershed moment in the making of a new Hollywood, consolidated by the release of the home-grown sex and violence of *Bonnie and Clyde* in 1967 (Jonathan Kirshner, and Jon Lewis, *When the Movies Mattered: The New Hollywood Revisited* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2019)).

<sup>14</sup> Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*, p. 22.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Freeman quoted in John Ware, 'Production-wise', *Daily Cinema*, 6 December 1967, p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Freeman, 'Touch of Eros', *Films and Filming*, May 1968, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> There are some interesting moments of Hitchcockian borrowing in the film, however: the girls' disguise as nuns for the purposes of abduction owes something to *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) while the shot from below of Twyning (James Villiers) dragging Busbee across a transparent glass floor is indebted to a similar shot in *The Lodger* (1926).

<sup>18</sup> Anon., 'Bob Freeman to direct *Touchables*', *Daily Cinema*, 11 August 1967, p. 8. Anon., 'The *Touchables*', *Films and Filming*, May 1968, p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> *Box Office*, 11 November 1968, p. 94.

<sup>20</sup> Twentieth Century Fox advertisement, *The Daily Cinema*, 1 November 1967.

<sup>21</sup> Mike Sarne, quoted in Wheeler Winston Dixon, *Cinema at the Margins* (London: Anthem Press, 2013), p. 199. This may have been the moment that sealed the deal but there is footage of producer David Cammell in phone conversation with an unknown party trying to set up in the production in *Go go go said the bird*, the Associated Rediffusion television documentary about swinging London's movers and shakers broadcast on 26 October 1966. The fact remains that Twentieth Century Fox was prepared to finance *The Touchables* to the tune of £295,125 in return for distribution rights. See Film Finances Archive: *The Touchables* – contract between Film Finances Limited and Twentieth Century Fox, 1 September 1967. Whilst this was not a huge budget by contemporary standards (and not the million dollars Sarne mentions), neither was it insignificant. It represented a sizeable investment given that Robert Freeman was directing his first feature.

<sup>22</sup> Lesley Jackson, *The Sixties: Decade of Design Revolution* (London: Phaidon, 1998), pp. 206–07.

<sup>23</sup> Chris Snodgrass, 'Beardsley Scholarship at His Centennial: Tethering or Untethering a Victorian Icon?', *English Literature in Transition*, 42 (1999), 363–99 (p. 366). David Bowman, 'Scenarios for the revolution in Pepperland', *Journal of Popular Film*, 1 (1972), 173–84 (p. 175).

<sup>24</sup> Prime movers in this were the London-based design houses Hapshash and the Coloured Coat and The Fool which produced fashions as well as posters, paintings, furnishings and *objets d'art*. The Fool was famously the in-house designer for The Beatles' short-lived Apple boutique. In the US context, the artist Peter Max was also a significant exponent of the style.

<sup>25</sup> Melanie Williams, 'Production design', in *Transformation and Tradition in 1960s British Cinema*, ed. by Richard Farmer, Laura Mayne, Duncan Petrie, and Melanie Williams (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 214–15.

<sup>26</sup> Anon., 'Beardsley drawings seized', *Guardian*, 10 August 1966, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> The Cammells' screenplay work was based on an original idea from Robert Freeman and was then finalized in screenplay form by Ian La Frenais, better known latterly as a television comedy writer with partner Dick Clement, but who had at that point had a recent film success with the screenplay for the swinging London caper film *The Jokers* (1967).

<sup>28</sup> One damning review slated the film's 'astonishing vacuity' and 'abysmal acting'. Anon., 'Murder's a relative thing', *Kensington Post*, 31 October 1969, p. 48. But Robert Freeman had been intent on casting his leads according predominantly for their looks: an open call was placed in *London Life*, seeking 'a totally unknown girl, aged between 18 and 21, hair length and colour unimportant, but she should be between 5ft. 6in. and 5ft. 8in. She should move well and be the sort of girl who stands out in a crowd'. Sarah Drummond, 'Talking fashion', *London Life*, 6 August 1966, p. 31. NB. this article claims that the producer would be Walter Shenson and names the film *The Patchables* (a possible typo).

<sup>29</sup> Renata Adler, 'Mod flavor dominates "The Touchables"', *New York Times*, 21 November 1968, p. 41. The film does also feature actors with greater experience and performative skills such as James Villiers, Harry Baird (gay wrestler Lillywhite), and John Ronane (pop manager Kasher), but they are mostly peripheral rather than central to the narrative.

<sup>30</sup> For more on the origins and impact of these much-debated magazines, see Richard Farmer, 'Supplemental Income: British newspaper colour supplements in the 1960s', *Media History*, 25 (2019), 371–86.

<sup>31</sup> Laura Katz Rizzo, "'Gold-dust': Ricki Starr's ironic performances of the queer commodity in popular entertainment', in *Performance and Professional Wrestling*, ed. by Broderick Chow, Eero Laine, and Calire Warden (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 127–39 (p. 130). John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (1972; London: Penguin, 2008), p. 140.

- <sup>32</sup> This hypothesis is supported by information supplied on the film location website Reel Streets: <https://www.reelstreets.com/films/touchables-the/> [accessed 19 December 2019].
- <sup>33</sup> Williams, 'Production design', p. 214.
- <sup>34</sup> Film Finances Archive: *The Touchables*: Screenplay (Old), Ian La Frenais, p. 31; Arthur Quarmby, *The Plastics Architect* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1974), p. 99.
- <sup>35</sup> 'Revelations of a Film Fox' (Twentieth Century Fox advertisement), *Variety*, 29 November 1967, p. 12.
- <sup>36</sup> Famously invoked as a wonder-material and a young man's corporate destiny in the opening lines of *The Graduate* (1968).
- <sup>37</sup> For more on this infamous cultural moment, see Simon Wells, *Butterfly on A Wheel: The Great Rolling Stones Drugs Bust* (London: Omnibus Press, 2011). Pop artist Richard Hamilton's collage poster 'Swinging London 67' places that headline about incense and the 'girl in a fur-skin rug' right at the top of his memorable critique of establishment hypocrisy.
- <sup>38</sup> The film's enthusiasm for wrestling relates to this, but also to pop art's fascination with this particular sport, exemplified by the wrestler paintings of Peter Blake. Wrestling was understood at the time as 'cheap and lowbrow light-entertainment'. Benjamin Litherland, 'Selling punches: free markets and professional wrestling in the UK, 1986–1993', *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*, 4 (2012), 578–98 (p. 581). Commercialized forms of professional wrestling in Britain date back to at least the 1920s, but the sport only started to gain widespread popularity in the late 1950s after it began to be broadcast on ITV, with popularity increasing over the next decade. Dan Glenday, 'Professional wrestling as culturally embedded spectacles in five core countries: the USA, Canada, Great Britain, Mexico and Japan', *Revue de recherche en civilisation américaine*, 4 (2013), 1–14 (pp. 4, 7–8).
- <sup>39</sup> Adler, 'Mod flavor dominates "The Touchables"', p. 41.
- <sup>40</sup> Cammell's partner graphic artist Robert Brownjohn created the credit sequences for several early Bond films, including *Goldfinger* (1964). Of the *Touchables* themselves, Judy Huxtable, Esther Anderson, and Kathy Simmonds had each appeared in television or print advertising, or both, with Simmonds having worked previously with Freeman both as a model and as the lead in a short film made with money Freeman had earned making commercials. James Villiers (who played Twynning) had done voiceover work in the sector. Derek Todd, 'Freeman's First', *Kinematograph Weekly*, 4 November 1967, p. 14; Anon., 'Robert Freeman', *Independent Film Journal*, 30 September 1969, p. 36.
- <sup>41</sup> On the relationship between television advertising and cinema in this period, see Richard Farmer, 'Film and Television Advertising', in *Transformation and Tradition in 1960s British Cinema*, pp. 303–26.
- <sup>42</sup> Anon., Review of *The Touchables*, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, January 1969, pp. 271–72 (p. 272). Adler, 'Mod flavor dominates "The Touchables"', p. 41.
- <sup>43</sup> Anon., review, *Independent Film Journal*, 12 November 1968, p. 12.
- <sup>44</sup> Quoted in John Baxter, *An Appalling Talent: Ken Russell* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973), p. 131.
- <sup>45</sup> See, for example, Francis Williams, *American Invasion* (London: Anthony Blond, 1962), p. 22: 'What British families should be taught to feel and think in order to persuade them to spend, has more and more become the prerogative of American advertising men or their disciples'.
- <sup>46</sup> Eric Fletcher, 5 February 1953, House of Commons debates, 5<sup>th</sup> series, vol. 510, col. 2168. On the lengthy and often heated debates that surrounded advertising in Britain in this period, see Sean Nixon, "'Salesmen of the Will to Want': Advertising and its Critics in Britain 1951–1967", *Contemporary British History*, 24 (2010), 213–33.
- <sup>47</sup> Charles Marowitz, 'The coy, repellent world of the ads', *Campaign*, 11 September 1970, p. 23.
- <sup>48</sup> Aneurin Bevan quoted in Anon., 'Modern advertising attacked by Mr Bevan', *Manchester Guardian*, 2 May 1953, p. 2.
- <sup>49</sup> Lawrence Black, 'The Impression of Affluence: Political Culture in the 1950s and 1960s', in *An Affluent Society?: Britain's Post-War 'Golden Age' Revisited*, ed. by Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 85–106 (p. 86).
- <sup>50</sup> Martin Francis, 'Tears, Tantrums, and Bared Teeth: The Emotional Economy of Three Conservative Prime Ministers, 1951–1963', *Journal of British Studies*, 41 (2002), 354–87 (p. 384).
- <sup>51</sup> Anon., 'The look ahead from 20<sup>th</sup>!', *Variety*, 1 November 1967, p. 18. In the same advertisement, Christian is said to have 'never had it so good ... and so often'.
- <sup>52</sup> 'The Touchables', *Variety*, 6 November 1968, p. 6. Their topline summary of the film was 'Inept, forced. No names. Dull'.
- <sup>53</sup> Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature [À Rebours]*, trans. by Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 114.
- <sup>54</sup> 'The look ahead from 20<sup>th</sup>!', in Christopher Booker, *The Neophiliacs: Revolution in English Life in the Fifties and Sixties* (London: Pimlico, 1992), p. 13.
- <sup>55</sup> Adler, 'Mod flavor dominates "The Touchables"', p. 41.
- <sup>56</sup> Quarmby, *Plastics Architect*, p. 99.
- <sup>57</sup> Indeed, concerns about the weather and the spiralling cost of using the dome persuaded the producers to switch location shooting from a site in the Lake District to meteorologically calmer Surrey.

<sup>58</sup> Producer John Bryan had to write an apologetic letter to Robert Garrett of Film Finances, the completion guarantee company, which began ‘Dear Bobbie, I am afraid I have to report a further disaster to the dome’. Letter in Film Finances Archive: *The Touchables*: John Bryan to Robert Garrett, 12 November 1967.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Financial information taken from Film Finances Archive: *The Touchables*.

<sup>61</sup> Quarmby, *Plastics Architect*, p. 99.

<sup>62</sup> As of late March 1971, *The Touchables* had gross receipts of \$499,289.80, or less than half of its negative cost. Film Finances Archive: *The Touchables*: Statement of Participation for period ended 27 March 1971.

<sup>63</sup> David A. Cook, *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam, 1970–1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 10, 12. *The Sound of Music* may have helped Fox out of the hole created by the expensive failure of *Cleopatra* (1962) but it couldn’t rescue them from the impact of their later over-stretch. See Stephen M. Silverman, *The Fox That Got Away: The Last Days of the Zanuck Dynasty at Twentieth Century-Fox* (Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart, 1988), p. 327.

<sup>64</sup> Mary Whitehouse, *Whatever Happened to Sex?* (Hove: Wayland, 1977), p. 309. The phrase ‘cultural revolution’ is historian Arthur Marwick’s. See Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958–c.1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Others question how many people were directly affected by this supposed ‘revolution’: in its narrowest, almost self-parodic sense, swinging London, in Jonathan Aitken’s phrase, constituted perhaps ‘a few hundred exhibitionists with a flair for self-promotion’. Aitken, *The Young Meteors* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1967), p. 10. See also Nick Freeman, ‘Permissive Paradise: The Fiction of Swinging London’, p. 368: ‘Realistically speaking, very few Romans could have experiences like those recounted in the *Satyricon*: two thousand years later, the horizons of Swinging London seemed similarly circumscribed’. Marwick’s counterargument suggests the longer-term shift in attitudes that the sixties set in train.

<sup>65</sup> See Adam Sweeting, ‘Obituary: Robert Freeman’, *The Guardian*, 19 November 2019.

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/nov/19/robert-freeman-obituary> [accessed 19 December 2019].

<sup>66</sup> The first phrase is from critic John Russell Taylor, ‘Just a film to enjoy’, *The Times*, 23 October 1969, p. 13. The second is from the defining features of decadence as set out by Abrams, *Glossary of Literary Terms*, p. 43.