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**“I’m Talking But No-One Is Listening”: How Sound in British Experiential Realist Cinema
Captures Class Dynamics from Tony Blair to Brexit**

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Thesis Abstract

This Ph.D. dissertation investigates how sound in British experiential realist film captures changing class dynamics felt in the United Kingdom from the resignation of Tony Blair through the Brexit referendum. The films in this project are part of the experiential realist genre, or a form of social realism in which aesthetic liberties are used in cinematography, editing, and sound design to represent the perceptual and emotional reactions of individuals through certain political and social turmoil. This project looks specifically at the role of sound design and examines how the sounds heard are changing for characters. This study prioritises the affect – that is the perceptual and sensory reactions of these characters – in order to understand how their reactions to the worlds around them (and, their awareness of their class identity) change over time. It looks at fifteen films over the course of five chapters, and studies various aspects of the cinematic soundscape. This includes: the mixing of sounds, the construction of silence, the use of diegetic and non-diegetic music, the composition of noise, and the volume levels of dialogue. To demonstrate how these films represent the actual experiences of individuals, this analysis is paired with sociological studies of class; musicology and sound studies; and other anthropological and geographical works.

The conclusion that this project reaches is that the sense of silence and voicelessness is increasing in recent decades amongst characters in recent British experiential realist films. Although characters interact with their soundscapes by creating noise, listening to music, and attempting to become dominant over their soundscape in a variety of ways, members of all the classes lose their ability to communicate with one another, and thus are subsequently deprived of their agency to act in their social spheres. It suggests that this is a common theme that must be

studied, in order to assess what the future of the classed British character is. These feelings of voicelessness arise due to uncertainty over what one's class identity is, and the uncertainty of whether they can ever be meaningfully heard by others around them.

This dissertation not only benefits studies of recent British film, but it suggests a method to connect sociological studies of class and sound with that of film. It also provides a new methodology to the research of Blairism and Brexit that prioritises the experiences of individuals. It suggests that feelings of dread surrounding Brexit can be meaningfully studied and the marginalisation of oppressed individuals can be measured. This project comes at a crucial moment in British history and provides a new approach to the study of class and Brexit in the future.

Lay Summary

Since 2007, Britain has experienced a multitude of life-altering political events. These include: the tumultuous period after Tony Blair's resignation, the deprivation of social welfare enacted in Prime Minister David Cameron's austerity measures, and the Brexit referendum. This dissertation looks at how these changes are present and felt in everyday life, through the context of recent British cinema. More specifically, this project studies a new genre of "experiential realism," or, the cinema that represents the sensations and reactions individuals have and suggests that these reactions are a key method to study how political and social change is felt by individuals.

In this project, fifteen films are studied over the course of five chapters. It observes films that represent the experiences of the upper, middle, and working classes, as well as films that display inter-class communication between these groups. The first three chapters survey the period that stretches from resignation of Tony Blair through the era of austerity politics. In its first chapter, it studies the worlds of silence that the upper-class build in films like *Archipelago* (2010) and *45 Years* (2015). In its second chapter, it examines how music assists individuals in creating a fantasy of middle class belonging, in films like *Lovers Rock* (2020). In its third chapter, this project studies the working class, and how films like *I, Daniel Blake* (2016) capture noise and silence. The fourth and fifth chapters survey the current era of Brexit and use the sound design of films like *Bait* (2019) and *Ali and Ava* (2022) to show how marginalised characters experience difficulty in using their voice to recognise their class identity and connect with others. In summary, this dissertation assesses how much each classed character is afforded a voice, and how much agency they are able to possess in a constantly changing social landscape. It looks at

who ultimately has the power to speak, who can act to silence others, who lives within a noisy and unfamiliar soundscape, and who has the ability to be heard.

This project is highly relevant at this moment, as further changes such as the cost-of-living crisis, cuts to immigration, and continuing debates surrounding the future of Brexit are occurring. What this project ultimately provides is a way to study how these changes are being captured. It suggests that the study of Brexit should not be limited to politicians and social scientists, but made more accessible through the study of film.

Introduction: Britain in the Past Two Decades and Experiential Realist Cinema

I. Two Examples of Voicelessness in Contemporary British Media

When one thinks of the state of contemporary Britain, one tends to think of how voiceless many of its people are. For example, in the film *I, Daniel Blake* (2016), the protagonist, Daniel (Dave Johns), is often voiceless against a soundtrack of overwhelming noise. As the audience watches Daniel go about his tasks day after day, they must hear the noises of the world he lives in - when he wakes up, they hear the noise of children yelling as they play in an area nearby. When he goes to the welfare office in Newcastle's city centre, they hear the noises of traffic and the conversation of the several people walking around. When he returns home at the end of the day, they hear his neighbours yelling through the walls, as well as the noise from the motorway nearby. As the film continues, Daniel continues to feel overwhelmed by noise. Daniel's only method to try to combat this overwhelming noise is to connect with others through his voice about the struggles he faces, finding some sort of solidarity in uniting his voice with others against the various noisy institutions (such as the job centre and his doctor's office) that overwhelm him. This is occasionally successful, as he forges connections with others in positions of poverty and feels empowered as if he can talk back against those who aim to oppress him. This is seen in moments such as when he is at a seminar on how to create a resume, where he and other people in poverty talk back to the presenters over stereotypical views they hold of the working class. But this all changes when Daniel is denied access to secure employment, benefits, and basic necessities he needs in order to survive. He dies, and the film's characters, without Daniel, are unable to speak, unsure how to communicate with each other and how to get on in a society where they are increasingly unable to eke out a living and speak against a government that is unfair. This example represents how voiceless people are becoming.

Yet, these media representations of voicelessness are not solely based in the fictitious realm. Although *I, Daniel Blake* is an imagined narrative, its use of sound is particularly poignant in a post-Brexit atmosphere. The notion that many were voiceless as they were headed into a future with an uncertain social and political outlook is not an uncommon emotion. To probe at how this voicelessness appears elsewhere, let us look at another representation of voicelessness: this time a media example based in reality. On June 24th, 2016, presenter David Dimbleby was on BBC News ready to provide the final tally of the Brexit referendum to viewers. In almost all the BBC coverage of the final day of referendum, panellists and presenters filled airtime speaking their mind about the effects of this vote. They also reached out to the public, where many voices were all united in sharing their opinions on the matter – from unions of rail workers sharing their thoughts on the effects of Brexit, to groups sitting in pubs discussing their votes, to individuals calling in to agree or disagree with what is being said by certain pundits. Many voices were coming together to discuss, creating a united voice to agree or disagree with a given issue. In reviewing the footage of this evening, there is only one moment that stands out amidst this busy soundtrack. This moment is at 4:39AM. Even though the results were predicted earlier that evening, Dimbleby was taken aback as he announced the final 52%-48% tally. He then paused for a moment as he looked at the graphic in disbelief. After four seconds of complete silence from him and the panel of guests, he then continued to say “we’re out” with incredulity and read the effects of this decision on the autocue albeit in a disconcerted manner (BBC, 2016). Even though the panellists eventually responded, the rest of the news coverage did not fill up with sounds as it once did, with minimal call-ins, and no voices uniting in a common experience. This sudden silence seemingly represented the voicelessness that the entire country was experiencing at this moment.

Through looking at these two examples it is clear that, just as Daniel feels his voice dissipating in the face of overwhelming social change, so did the British public. In both examples, individuals who were represented as having a strong and loud voice were rendered voiceless by a changing of the social tide in British society – they were unsure of what the future would hold and felt unable to speak about what it could be. More so, the soundtracks capture how individuals react and are voiceless against the social realities they are within. This silence that both characters mourning Daniel and the BBC panellists encounter was neither entirely a lack of words to say in grief, nor shock from a sudden unpredicted result. Rather, it is reflective of a larger social problem that is currently looming over Britain. Even though these two examples are from different parts of mass media, they both convey the changing social tide in contemporary Britain: social events that are so drastic and life-altering that they leave people speechless, isolated, and unsure of how to move forward.

The similarity between these two examples is where this project takes its root. Even though the characters within *I, Daniel Blake* are fictional, the situation they experience is based in the inequalities in welfare that the British government present to people of lower income. It is also based on the danger that people face once the impacts of Brexit begin to wreak havoc on the British social and economic structure, and systems of support begin to disappear. As we compare the examples of *I, Daniel Blake* and the announcement of the Brexit vote results, it is compelling to question why sensory and emotional reactions become the prominent way that British individuals are represented to process these sudden events. It is also worth asking if there is any value in studying where exactly these silences come from, and how they are reflective of certain power dynamics between individuals. Other questions we ask at the same time include - what social change is occurring in Britain and how is film unique in capturing it? How do the

representations of silence and voicelessness reflect real concerns of the British people? How can we establish a framework to study how representations of cultural dynamics will change in the Brexit era?

II. Outlining the Goals of this Project

This project will survey the soundtracks across British fictional media that privileges such reactions to a changing socio-political situation. In surveying how these changes are represented in the tumultuous past ten years in British politics, it will become clear that the representation of perceptions, vocality, and musicality of characters in British realist films are key to understanding how changes in the political sphere are felt by average British individuals. These divides exist throughout Britain and the silences between groups are felt in many different ways (such as the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, the increasing discrimination of transgender individuals, and the continuing debates over who the Equality Act of 2010 serves to protect). While all are deserving of academic attention, this dissertation will focus on the social classes, as the topic of wealth and access to resources is a key issue to many at present. In addition, the class system has been evolving in the past decade as greater numbers of people are at risk of falling into poverty, and a greater sense of silence between the classes is developing to the point where inter-class communication is seemingly starting to disappear.

This dissertation will look specifically at the time past the resignation of Tony Blair, through austerity, to the Brexit movement in the present day. Why this time? It is obvious that this has been a tumultuous time in British politics, but I argue that a study of this period is especially necessary at this moment as studies of the films produced in this period are few, and that Blair's resignation presents a marked change in British politics. Blair represented a period of "a new dawn" in British politics, and appeared to be a politician in favour of "classless society"

amongst the British people (Tyler, 2013: 13). His resignation ushered in a time of “distrust” amongst people where politicians were seen as “elites” and where there were “one set of policies for the rich, another for the poor [and where] [t]his polarisation becomes even greater” after 2007 (Seidler, 2017: 36). In this time, “people wanted to see a transformation in the conditions of their everyday lives and relationships” to politics and politicians (Seidler, 2017: xxii). In short, the answer to the question “why this time?” is because this is a period in which people began to distrust that change was possible and began to feel a sudden sense of voicelessness against institutions designed to protect them. Thus, this dissertation will study how these reactions become more intense, more polarised, and indeed, quieter, over a period of time.

As this project studies the reactions of fictional characters representing actual events, it will utilise many fields of study. This dissertation uses works from film studies, musicology, sociology, and the studies of sensation to present a thorough study of the representations of British class. It suggests how these representations reflect real anxieties of individuals, and to highlight the voices of those who feel they are voiceless against the changing tide of politics in Britain. Before this project delves into this study, it is essential to: establish the historical context in which this study will take place, explain this project’s methodology, and delineate the boundaries of this research. Specifically, the remainder of this introduction will describe the history of class that this project is observing, explain how prioritising the reactions of the British people is crucial to understanding the effects of political turmoil, and introduce the established fields of study to develop a methodology in the study of reactions. It will then describe the goals and limitations that this project will have, then finally, outline the structure of this project. Through providing this context, this introductory chapter will further explain why this study is essential in this turbulent political time.

III. A Brief History of the “Class-Ridden Nation”

To properly examine the cultural moment of growing class divisions, it is essential to understand the development of class up to the present moment. Thus, this section will study the political and historical development of class division, and how different political figures have enacted and responded to class change. It will keep this historical overview brief, as the histories and outlines of the social effects leading up to the Brexit referendum are better detailed elsewhere (such as Seidler, 2017; Kelly, 2018; Adam, 2020; Adam, 2022). To keep focus specifically on the recent development of class in the United Kingdom, this section shall begin with a study of the impact of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and trace this to the present day. This review of recent history shall provide an explanation to why the country remains divided over class lines and give credence to why a study of recent British culture is necessary in this moment.

In his essay on the English cultural identity and its relationship to socialism, George Orwell suggests that England is “the most class-ridden place under the sun. It is a land of snobbery and privilege, ruled largely by the old and the silly” (2001 [1941]: 263). Although Orwell wrote in the earlier half of the twentieth century and was writing against a government in which the House of Lords held what he believed to be a disproportionate amount of power, his observation remains astute. In this essay, Orwell argued that in Britain, social institutions rely too heavily on the feudal class system as a means of indicating who is deserving of social welfare. Sociologists Will Atkinson, Steven Roberts and Mike Savage reflect Orwell’s ideas in their analysis of class structure under austerity in pre-Brexit Britain. They argue that in the present day, “[c]lass is not just about exploitation and economic inequalities, it is now established, but cultural and symbolic domination too; it is not just about life chances and ‘equality of

opportunity', but about self-worth, suffering and denigration as well" (2012: 1). Thus, Orwell's vision of post-World War II order has continued to this day, and the need for marking social divisions along the lines of capital has become so accepted it has now become the norm.

Elsewhere, Atkinson gestures that feudal divisions in class remained in place until a very specific point, in which social inequalities were further ingrained within Britain's social structures and the perception of class becomes apparent. He writes that when Margaret Thatcher was elected prime minister, she "rejected the status quo of the Keynesian approach to economic policy" and instead insisted on neoliberalism (2010: 32). Cultural scholar Eric J. Evans notes that Thatcher's politics consisted of guaranteeing that "the role of government is minimised [and] the state should staunchly defend individual property rights," relying on the people to "naturally follow what they perceive as their own interests" in terms of achieving capital (2013: 3-4).

Atkinson suggests that the government's Smithian and laissez-faire approach to financial prospects changed how the value of the individual is perceived in the social realm, to one where financial success and "hard work" become the markers of those who will succeed, and those who cannot achieve these high goals are responsible for their financial troubles (Atkinson, 2020: 12). In developing these arguments, it is evident that the working class will never be able to access the means of production under this neoliberal economy, never reach the desired goals that would allow them to reap financial and social success that the government has prescribed, and thus always remain in need of government assistance that they will never receive. In defining this change in who holds social power in Britain, Stuart Hall terms this moment the "neoliberal revolution" (2011: 1). Thatcher's government viewed individual contributions to society as indicative of where one's place was in the class hierarchy, and that any income and welfare that an individual achieves is what is deserved by them. As both Atkinson and Hall recognise in their

analyses, social lines were beginning to be drawn around class, and people became divided in their response to what should be done to ease the current tensions. When Thatcher's government refused to react to this cultural shift her popularity fell, and she was eventually ousted. With Thatcher gone, there was a demand by the people of Britain for a social change. They wanted to re-envision the structure of the class system to be something new and more equitable among people. Even if they were divided in their approaches, they were united in the fact that they needed social change and that the lines of class needed to be re-considered.

This idea of re-envisioning class away from Thatcher's re-structuring has been occurring ever since Thatcher's departure. Especially in moments of crisis, politicians regularly attempt to push forth agendas to voters that they desire a future Britain where class becomes irrelevant. For example, when Thatcher's successor John Major made his decree to build a "classless society" when he entered office, he proposed regarding social status as something that does not matter, as people of all classes could achieve upward progress (or "level up,") in their place in society (Cannadine, 1998: 2). This Gramscian imagination of class persisted in the government's mandate and throughout the economic recessions that took place in the second half of the twentieth century.¹ Working-class British people became less enthused with their systems of governance pursuing an agenda to move to a classless and ultimately neoliberal society. They felt as if there were existing inequalities in the way that governments distributed social welfare, and often felt like their concerns were being ignored.

When Tony Blair took office in 1997, he was seen as an advocate for social change and progressive reform. Blair campaigned on a platform of social equality amongst the classes, equal

¹ Such imagination recalls Gramsci's comments on class during his incarceration, where "the fusion of an entire social class under a single leadership which alone is held to be capable of solving an overriding problem of its existence and fending off a mortal danger" would lead to social inequalities rising, as each group's need will continue to remain unaddressed (1971: 211).

opportunity in employment and progressive policy reform. This sentiment was asserted the moment when Blair won the election, when he responded, “a new dawn has broken, has it not?” (Clarke, 2004: 417). However, as cultural historian Peter Clarke notes, Blair’s government did not impose radical policies as he had once promised. He writes, “[i]t is fallacious to suppose that the advent of Blair changed everything in British politics” as he adopted traditional Conservative notions under a banner of New Labour (2004: 412). Clarke explains that Blair “claimed intuitive understanding of the hopes and fears of middle England and sought to identify its professed values” but “coolly appropriated [Conservative traditions in an] exercise that self-consciously mirrored Thatcher’s earlier success” (2004: 412) by adopting neoliberal policies that rewarded those who “worked hard” and punished those who could not find long-lasting employment (Atkinson, 2020: 12). Thus, increasing numbers of working-class people began to feel as if they had been double-crossed by the Blair government – they had voted for him in faith that he would revolutionise the British class structure and change the social welfare system for the better. Yet, as time went on, this “new dawn” that Blair had promised never came to fruition. Hall claims that although “New Labour did initiate very important social reforms, including the minimum wage, shorter waiting times, better health targets, [etc.],” he was too focussed on maintaining the “continuous tension between a strident, Fabian, Benthamite tendency to regulate and manage and the ideology of the market, with its pressure for market access to areas of public life from which it had hitherto been excluded” (Hall, 2011: 20). In other words, Blair was so focussed on the needs of the economy that he did not acknowledge his promises to the British people that he would change the way the class system had been structured. As with the Thatcher era, the notion of an individual being successful and living a comfortable life is directly attached to the income they earn, and the class they are thus attached to. Some praised Blair for his concentration on the

economy and his modernisation in his encouragement of occupations that rely on digital technologies.² Yet, those who were being harmed by his denial of class difference demanded that something be done about their unfavourable working conditions and their lack of benefits. People began to become increasingly divided over their opinions of the prime minister, with little idea of how to acknowledge the other side of the debate.

However, these lines of division remained a relatively small element of public discussion, as Britain was in peacetime and the economy remained relatively successful. The frustration became resentment in 2008, when two damaging news stories surfaced: the first that Blair had misled the British people about the United Kingdom's military involvement in Iraq, and the second that his government refused to punish the responsible financiers for the mismanagement of the 2008 housing crisis and financial recession. The second of these crises hit the working class the hardest, and it became painfully clear that this champion of all classes had left the people to fend off this crisis on their own. This is termed as "disorganised capitalism" by John Harris in his review of Blairism, defined as a lack of political allegiance by politicians to a group of economically disadvantaged people which, in turn, leads to economic crisis (2019: 131). This disorganised capitalism creates a "chaotic, fragmented reality" where working-class people "have spoken very clearly to a set of economic injustices and imbalance" and are ignored (Harris, 2019: 132). Angry at the fact Blair had lied to the British people, members of parliament began calling for Blair's resignation. Blair's time in office perfectly represents how people resent their politicians as they create their utopian views of British society while simultaneously ignoring that class plays a crucial role in how British society is constructed, and thus the needs of working-class people.

² For more on the successes of the Blair government, see Selden, 2004; Dyson, 2009 and Faucher-King and Le Galès, 2010.

The resulting fallout of Blair's time in office saw the gap between classes widen. In Atkinson's words, the economic disparities between classes grew to the point where:

[i]n short, [the working class] suffer[s] most from both the *economic* violence born of neoliberal capitalist orthodoxy and the *symbolic* violence that accompanies the surrendering of the means of attaining, in however limited a way, the forms of recognition legitimated by those with the power to legitimate" (2012: 29).

The people of Britain thus wanted a way to combat this symbolic violence and to reject the societal structures that regularly fought against their needs. They first did this in successfully calling for Blair's resignation, and continued to hold this resentment as Blair's close ally Gordon Brown took office. After the resignation of Tony Blair, the class system was initially left hanging in the air. Gordon Brown had inherited a government in which the financial crash was about to occur, the Iraq war was an ongoing and costly losing cause, and the electorate were doubtful of a change in governmental ideology from that of his predecessor. Brown responded by tackling the situation with an insistence on the maintenance of a status quo set up by the Blair government in order to create a notion of political stability. While he did push for a political term with a set goal of "social justice," he did not achieve these goals due to "the absence of a declaration of ideological intent" (Beech, 2009: 6). His government enacted policies that were said to assist the working class within a "fairness" in employment agenda, but often worked against them, as he simultaneously advocated for more jobs for working-class individuals but refused to tax those who were most affluent (Byrne, 2016: 107). He also encouraged re-skilling in information fields in the welfare-to-work scheme, making it difficult for those who once had steady employment to sustain it (Gannon, 2015: 9, and Summers, 2009). Throughout this slew of promises and failures to make for a just society, those who had already been slighted by the Blair government felt as if their class position was becoming increasingly unstable – they were increasingly unsure of where they belonged and whether any institution thought that their wellbeing mattered. Thus, much like

the current Brexit era, distrust in the government was only growing in Brown's term as Prime Minister, as Brown was seen by many as further tying the Labour Party to the financial sector and continuing the projects that Blair had set out.

After his brief term in government, the Conservatives took power again in the following 2010 election, as they successfully marketed their party as the alternative to Blairism and New Labour. They promised that they would revolutionise the country's economy and make Britain the economic power it once was, promising a "restructuring" of the job market, which would "enhance" and "democratize" the third sector, and ultimately deliver a democratic platform in deciding how to renew the unfair job market that Labour created (Lee and Beech, 2009: 128). This vision of class equality seemed appealing, and thus gave the British people a reason to vote for the successive Prime Minister, David Cameron.

As Cameron's government held office, it continued to enact isolating policies and never delivered on its promise to provide jobs to the working class. Arguably, the largest part of Cameron's legacy is his insistence on austerity as the best method to recover the pound to pre-2008 levels. This multi-pronged approach to government involves a "narrative" being sold to the people that "radically reducing state spending, reforming welfare and increasing the role of the private sector" would bring about a modernised version of Britain where things are fairer for every person (Smith and Jones, 2015: 226). However, state welfare benefits for those under the poverty line became even more minimal, and protests grew under Cameron's leadership, such as the 2011 London riots. As political scholar Dan Bailey acknowledges, the "welfare state is one conduit which allows for progressive redistribution and mediates the growing inequalities in society" (Bailey, 2013). Cameron's denial of it led to more protests, then more violence against those who protest, as Janet Newman notes. She writes that "austerity has not only generated

forms of defensive and adaptive responses, it has also elicited creative responses that offer new social and political possibilities” including “[n]ew nationalist movements” such as the United Kingdom Independence Party (or UKIP), which uses a racist and classist platform to promote the idea that Britain must return to the greatness that it once had (2015). While it would be fallacious to assume that Cameron and austerity is directly responsible for the rise of UKIP (as there are many other factors such as issues surrounding immigration, promotion of diversity in the workplace, and promotion of LGBTQ+ issues in the Western social sphere), UKIP gained nationalist fervour from the Cameron government.

After Cameron resigned, the governments of Theresa May, Boris Johnson, Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak continued the legacy of ignoring the social differences between the classes and instead pushed populist agendas where both elites and foreigners were blamed for social inequalities in Britain. This class deafness was infuriating to the British people who were struggling under austerity measures, felt the strain of the increasingly competitive job market, and were increasingly falling under the poverty line. Having discussed how various prime ministers enacted damaging and exclusionist policies to class, let us turn our attention to the Brexit moment, in which the British public had a chance to vote against the systems that have oppressed them. After decades of the aforementioned politicians doing little to make social affairs better for the working class, the British people of lower socio-economic status who were being most affected by these unjust policies needed to release their frustration. They needed a chance to revolt against the systems that kept them from economic and social success.

On the 23rd of January, 2013, Prime Minister David Cameron announced that he would hold a referendum on the United Kingdom’s relationship with the European Union. While at the time there was not much outcry for the U.K. to leave the E.U. in the media, there was “general

concern” surrounding government policy of economic trade and immigration rules throughout the United Kingdom, and people felt as if they wanted a change in policy (Adam, 2020: 2). However, Cameron’s popularity among the British people was beginning to wane and he needed a strategy to regain favour. In his studies of Cameron’s popularity, Andrew Glencross argues that the reason why Cameron was becoming disliked is that his government represented “the structural divide between cosmopolitan, metropolitan liberals and globalization’s left-behinds in the provinces,” meaning that his policies often assisted financial and political elites, while maintaining austerity politics that often hurt those living under the poverty line (2016: 4). Glencross believes that in order to erase his image as someone who often did not listen to the needs of the less affluent parts of Britain, Cameron chose the tactic to “give the vote to the people” in declaring that the British people could decide how they wanted their relationship with Europe to be structured, in a vote to be held in 2016 (2016: 4). Using this rhetoric, he insisted he was going to honour the democratic process, no matter how the election turned out. In his interviews with a range of British people throughout the United Kingdom, Victor J. Seidler believes that the British people were excited about this opportunity, as they would be able to finally voice their opinions on various issues affecting them, and “reclaim [their] national identities as a counter to a globalised agenda” (2017: 5).

As the referendum date moved closer, two opposing campaigns began to emerge as the frontrunners: the Remain campaign and the Leave campaign. The Remain campaign (backed by Cameron and Scottish National Party Leader Nicola Sturgeon, among others) attempted to persuade people through a strategy of unity, saying that the United Kingdom was economically better off in the European Union and needed to renegotiate their role within it. This campaign believed that freedom of movement between countries would ultimately create jobs and bring

cultural diversity to the country. Meanwhile, the Leave campaign (backed by politicians Boris Johnson, Michael Gove and Nigel Farage) tried to convince people that voting to remain in the E.U. would cause a spike in immigration and would in turn make the job market more competitive, and the healthcare system more fragile. As these campaigns continued, polls seemed to lean in favour of Remain, so Cameron often declared in press events that he was confident that the British people would vote with him, as they were sure their cause was the one echoing the most with the British people.³ However, when the election results were announced in the morning of June 24th, Leave won by a four percent margin. As Seidler notes, there was “the sense that we had woken up in another country” as people “no longer recognised the country as liberal, tolerant and multicultural [...] Suddenly we can feel a more precarious and uneasy sense of belonging, unsure of what the country is becoming” (2017: 34). As Seidler writes, there was a sense of shock and the notion that the British people did not recognise the country they once belonged in, or the people around them who voted against their own interests. This shock that Seidler describes is echoed in both Remainers and Leavers, as they were disgusted by the acts of the other side, and that the opinions of the country were almost split halfway (2017: 36). This shock, Seidler posits, is voiced in “complete silence” (2017: 36). After the election results were announced, there was a sense that something had changed in British society, and no one could voice a cause to how this change happened and where Britain was headed.

The growing class resentment in an economy of neoliberal and globalised capitalism in Britain is the most likely answer in the questions as to why the Brexit tally was so close and why the country is so divided. The British people were fed up with the notion that no matter who the politician in power was, their socio-economic circumstances would not change, and their socially

³ See Glencross, 2016 and Menon and Salter, 2019 for more on the events of the Brexit referendum day and how the public reacted.

designated class would continue to appear as their most important social marker. Seidler argues that the new era of globalised capitalism that Tony Blair had ushered in allowed those who were wealthy to continue accumulating wealth, while leaving those struggling to suffer as they tried to earn living wages in a competitive market. This system, Seidler believes, causes people to feel isolated from British society: “it seemed that there was one law for the rich – for the 1%, as they became identified – and another for everyone else” (2017: 43-4). For many, this was unfair, and “proves that the law was rigged, designed to defend the interests of the rich while making the poor accountable for their actions and making them suffer” (2017: 44). In other terms, the British people were frustrated at an economic system that persisted in failing to evenly distribute capital, and angry at a government that did not regulate this economy. Neither listened to the needs of the working class and continued to address the concerns of the elite. Those who were suffering were exasperated by the fact politicians and financial experts claimed to want to address their social needs but instead tried to sell them on a utopian, post-class society.

This frustration is mostly experienced in how people felt ignored in this time, feeling as if they were speaking and not being heard. Seidler asserts this notion in his discussion of the Conservative Party’s platform when they took office in 2010: “Cameron and [then Chancellor of the Exchequer George] Osborne’s class arrogance and talk of social justice that the Conservative Party had sought to appropriate for itself often meant that people had stopped listening” (2017: 25). He then explains the frustration people increasingly felt, writing that “[s]o many times they had heard politicians, supposedly in a democracy, saying that they needed to listen to what people had to say,” but they had come to realise that “they were never going to be listened to because the politicians did not want to hear what they had to say” (2017: 25-6). Thus, the

government continues to ingrain class difference as a necessary part of the way in which British society is constructed, and that voicelessness is a key way that this dynamic has been felt.

This voicelessness began to further pervade how Brexit was discussed going forward. Glencross writes on the emotions people felt when the tally was announced: “the attempt to overturn the political inequality between governed and governing by resorting to direct democracy worked only momentarily” (2016: 5). In the aftermath of the people’s decision, “the gulf between government and people is just as wide as before and potentially can grow wider” (Glencross, 2016: 5). As Glencross correctly acknowledges, the victorious sentiment of asserting a popular vote was only short-lived, as the British people had to now answer the question of how this social division came about and how they could move forward, further emphasising how voiceless they were, even in post-referendum victory.

A distrust amongst people manifested in several ways, such as nationalism and a hatred of the mantras of globalisation, and a renewed interest in an alternative economic reinvention.⁴ As culture observer David Hare writes, “[a]fter six years of divisive austerity – one set of policies for the rich, another for the poor,” the British people “rightly owed Cameron no favours at all. Immigration may have been the issue, but the collapse of Cameron’s credibility was the cause” (Hare, 2016). In writing this, Hare recognises that through austerity, Cameron’s government continued to assist the rich and keep the values of the elite protected, while preventing those in poverty from ever escaping their circumstances. The division in the Brexit

⁴ Politicians like Johnson, Gove and Farage often employed nationalism in their campaigns and encouraged people to think of the needs of the U.K. above other countries, as seen in the campaign bus that had “We send £350 million to the E.U. each year. Let’s fund our NHS instead” written across it (Douglas-Scott, 2019: 75). Others, such as Valerie Walkerdine, argues that this closeness in tally could be blamed on the media coverage of the Brexit campaign and the atmosphere of post-truth, as it confused its audiences into voting against their own interests (2020: 144). Both authors correctly illustrate is the notion that the British people had grown to increasingly distrust the systems in power, and ultimately voted to leave the E.U. as a means of protest against the systems in power of their social lives. For more details on alternatives to Brexit, see Closs-Stephens, 2019; Bell, 2019; Favell, 2020.

tally can thus represent how divided the British people already were along the lines of class politics, unsure of how to communicate with others around them – they could not be sure who voted for which campaign, and whether others, even those who share their class markings, were operating in the best interests of their socio-economic grouping. Thus, through suspicion and worry for the future, people remained voiceless.

As this project will attest, Brexit is still a long way away from being final. There are still ongoing debates surrounding exact policy between the European Union and the government. After Johnson's term as Prime Minister, former trade minister Liz Truss received the position, then former chancellor Rishi Sunak, and all these parties continue to make division between the classes felt (such as the removal of government assistance for those struggling to pay increasing energy bills, and in promising tax cuts for the wealthier classes in a misguided attempt to stimulate the economy). At the time of writing, these policies surrounding Brexit threaten the lives of the working class, immigrants, and those falling into poverty. In this current moment, these feelings of hatred and uncertainty surrounding the future of Britain is growing amongst the classes. Certainly, all parties have come to feel voiceless against a system that does not prioritise them. As such, studies about the nature of these emotions and reactions are needed. The next section will suggest a way to study how the average British person within each of the classes reacts to these changes.

IV. Affective Reactions to British Politics

From this summary, it is clear that the changes in the British political sphere are being felt by the general public through their political marginalisation, their changing class identities, and their feelings of voicelessness. Although this has been a brief synopsis of the recent history of class in British society, it has become clear that these class resentments are only growing

amongst British people, and more crucially, that *physical sensation* and *emotional resentment* are the ways that class divisions are being felt. Throughout recent history, the perception of, and reaction to, the world that surrounds the British individual is how these political changes are being experienced. As we have seen in the two examples at the beginning of this chapter, vocalisation, silence, and using the language of emotion to describe politics is key to how we are able to understand sudden political change in our daily lives. As sociologist Esther Hitchen notes, the British public have done this throughout Cameron's austerity:

Austerity stretches across multiple everyday sites, such as the food bank (Garthwaite, 2016), the job centre (Patrick, 2017), the Citizens Advice Bureau (Kirwan, 2016), the children's centre (Jupp, 2013). It is also made present through, and shapes, a multiplicity of relations, such as the familial (Hall, 2016; Jupp, 2017), indebted relations (Dewille, 2015; Kirwan, 2016; Stanley, Dewille, & Montgomerie, 2016), and relations with the present and future (Coleman, 2016; Horton, 2016). Importantly, this allows us to understand the ways in which austerity is unevenly experienced as particular groups are disproportionately affected. [...] Conceptualising austerity as lived, then, means to take seriously both its differential and multiple presence. (2021: 297).

In other words, the political changes that affect individuals are widespread. Thus, it is worth acknowledging the emotional responses they incur, and crucially, the way these changes are interpreted. So far in this chapter, I have drawn upon the works of various scholars who study topics of British culture, class, and Brexit. Yet, almost none of these works explain how these class divisions manifest amongst the British people in an everyday sense, and how the spectre of Brexit threatens to make these classes more isolated in the future. They instead view class as collectives of people fighting against each other, each class holding one voice and saying the same thing. This point of view, in an era where several voices are struggling to be heard, is not valid anymore. It is thus worth studying the ways in which individuals are reacting on an everyday level and placing attention on how the British individual is reacting to such changes. As sociologist and historian Terry Eagleton writes "it is in the social recognition of the suffering,

mortal, desiring, needy human body – qualities and limits either ignored or exploited by capitalism – that the solidarities that we call culture flourish” (2000: 111). Thus, through prioritising the emotional reaction, we are able to understand how individuals are reacting through their bodies and how they connect over such issues.

While there remains a large gap in the study of individual reactions to Brexit worth addressing, there are a few other scholars who have done work on the emotional responses of British individuals to changes in British politics. Janet Newman writes that individuals worked through Cameron’s austerity by assessing how much hope they had and understood their need to protest through the level of noise they heard and the anger they felt. As she writes, as individuals react to these ever-frequent changes in the British political sphere their reactions do not come from “a singular, nor even necessarily dominant, affective disposition. People do not hold simple identities but can work between different – and sometimes seemingly incompatible – beliefs and attachments” (2015). In saying this, she posits that individuals from a specific class often do not share one collective view, but each go through many emotions all at once. They can be simultaneously angry at a class system that has abandoned them but be hopeful for a better future in their protest and go between these emotions often. It is important to acknowledge these changing reactions in order to understand the complexities of the British political situation. Political scholar Rebecca Bramall notes that the success of austerity can be measured through “bodies and objects,” or how individuals interpret the objects immediately around them, such as the sounds and images they interpret on the news, or the noisy organisation of their neighbourhoods (2016: 8). She attaches Cameron’s austerity with cultural scholar Lauren Berlant’s ideas of “cruel optimism,” or the idea that “something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing,” and where “the fantasy of the good life” is halted by consistent and never-

ending struggles caused by capitalism, but individuals choose to push forward anyway as this hope can never be fully extinguished (2016: 9). As Bramall notes in her own study, these “[d]esires that were sustained by the post-war social contract can be conceived as a politically valuable supplement” (Bramall 2016: 3). While it necessary to establish that Berlant has written her piece specifically about the reactions of Americans to then President George W. Bush, her work applies equally to the British context, as Bramall notes; as cruel optimism applies to the “reproduction of life that were laid out by the ‘social democratic promise’ of the post-war period in the United States and Europe” and both geographic areas have felt the “retraction of this promise” (2016: 3). These studies of emotions in a British context are useful, as they help shape a methodology through which to track emotional reaction to a given social-political moment.

Prioritising the emotion in the way suggested by Berlant’s cruel optimism provides a way to understand how individuals react to strife. In adopting a methodology such as the one proposed by these scholars, that studies the complexities of emotional reactions to a political event, this project not only is able to track how emotions change over time but views the individual’s reaction in a complete way. It acknowledges all the ways in which the individual’s mind changes as they learn about their circumstances. Not only do we study how an individual reacts to a specific policy at a specific time, but we track the feelings individuals have about these policies throughout years of political tumult, understanding how their sensations change after these policies are enacted, and how their relationships with others around them change when they experience similar or differing reactions. It perceives this process as changing and developing over time rather than static and felt unilaterally across a specific group of people. From the work of Newman, Bramall and Berlant, we are able to create a study of how the British person reacts to politics in an everyday sense – through prioritising the full journey of

individuals' perceptions and emotions (and understanding that they change over time), we are able to see how policies have come to affect people in a personal sense. It is necessary to understand the changing sensations that individuals experience, in order to understand how they have come to be impacted by social changes. But how are we able to prioritise both the individual sensation, and how they are able to connect to others based on these sensations? And how can we pursue this study while simultaneously acknowledging the similarities and differences that are sensed between individuals?

To solve this issue that sensation study presents, the field of study known as affect theory becomes a useful tool. Affect theory can be summarised as a study of reaction – moreover, it is a field of study where academics evaluate how a stimulus brings about individual reactions. In turn, attention is brought to the perceptions, sensations, emotional reactions, and affect (experienced, I argue, in this order) of an individual as representative of larger trends felt by many. Many studies apply this methodology with the stimulus of artistic text.⁵ It crucially sees the individual's emotion as a method of empirical study – one that makes the feelings of individuals the main point of study, giving voice to those who often go without the ability to be heard in a privileged academic sphere.

Applying affect theory to the changes in British politics, this project will go about a study of how film is able to capture the developing reactions of British individuals. Yet, there remains an issue with this proposed study. It would be too Herculean a task to assume that this dissertation can be able to track every emotional reaction of every film character over the period of fifteen years. As a film studies scholar, it also becomes difficult to assess emotions that individual characters experience as indisputable factual evidence of a certain political

⁵ See Stephen Ahern's study of melancholic reactions to classic literature (2019) or Roger Matthew Grant's study of how 18th century classical music brings about mania in an individual as they listen (2020).

experience, as they can be subjective and at times difficult to parse (due to choices in editing and cinematography, for example). Thus, this project must focus its attention on one form of reaction, and thus a form of affect, that is universally felt and can act as an indisputable fact. Newman, Bramall, and Berlant have studied the emotional reaction to events in British politics, with focus on particular feelings that an individual is going through (such as hope, depression and ecstasy). In an oversaturation of focus on the emotions felt, there is a gap in studies of perception. This study will not focus on the visual, as studies of sight and vision are especially popular in affect theory and media studies. The field of perception understudied in both fields is that of sound, and specifically, how characters are reacting to the sounds they are perceiving. Sound is a sensation that is noted to bring about “democracy of the senses” and is universally felt, as every individual, even those who are deaf and hard of hearing, has a relationship with sound (Berendt, 1988: 32). The next section of this chapter will look into the study of sound, question its value as a topic of study, then attach it with the study of class and the British political sphere.

V. Using Sound and the Realist Film as a Means to Study this Divide

What is sound, how does it reflect a political landscape? Sound and music scholar Mark Grimshaw-Aagaard writes that studying “auditory culture” (referring to any object or being with the ability to make or interpret sounds) is a new and crucial field of study as we have gone “too long” without questioning “sound’s use and function in culture and society” (2018: 15-6). Sound scholar Steven Feld notes that sounds do not exist in a vacuum. They in their very nature need to be heard by someone, and thus contribute to one’s sense of knowledge of the world around them: “one knows through an ongoing cumulative and interactive process of participation and reflection” (2015: 13-4). To properly consider how political change is occurring, we must take

into account Murray Schafer's idea of the "acoustic ecology," or the notion that the immediate soundscape that surrounds an individual influences the way they understand the world (1994: 3). Yet, Feld notes that this is not a one-way process. This "acoustemology" (or, acoustics plus epistemology,) is not just the way the natural world impacts our understanding of the way things are with no way to comment or act out, but how we relate and interact with the sounds we hear, responding through our voices, our music, and our ability to make sounds (2015: 15). It is relational, where we learn through hearing and noticing sounds, then acting and reacting to them. As sound scholar Johnathan Sterne writes, "sound studies' challenge is to think across sounds, to consider sonic phenomena in relationship to one another – as types of sonic phenomena rather than as things-in-themselves" (2012: 3). This is where this study specifies its methodology – not only will it look at an individual's changing perceptions as Berlant's and Bramall's methodology does, but through assessing how these sounds are sensed by individuals, bring out reactions in them, and the varying ways they are interpreted by other characters, we will be able to understand how political changes affect individuals. In addition, this project will also be assessing in equal measure how sounds are being made by individuals, in order to gain control over their soundscapes – this is specifically seen in how characters silence those who challenge their social standing, to escape their undesirable environment, to speak out against their social strife, or indeed to connect with others about their oppressions.

Now that we understand the relationality of sound, we must consider what types of sounds are worthy of study in this project. It will look at both the study of noise and silence alongside the study of music, all under the umbrella of sound studies. Sound scholars often debate what constitutes sound, as some scholars such as Trevor Pinch (2008) believe that the study of sound should focus strictly on the non-musical, as it comprises the sociological

examination of the sounds within an individual's immediate environment, and not the manufactured production of sound done in a performative manner. Yet, this is a limiting definition, as it forgoes the importance that music plays within a person's daily life, and how it influences the other types of sounds an individual hears. Jacques Attali writes that noise and music are closely linked, as they provoke similar responses in a listener: "[n]oise is violence: it disturbs. To make noise is to interrupt a transmission, to disconnect, to kill [...] Music is a channelization of noise, and therefore a simulacrum of the sacrifice" (1985: 24). It is thus a "sublimation, an exacerbation of the imaginary, at the same time as the creation of a social order and political integration" (1985: 24).

Thus, it is worthy of equal sociological study amongst other sounds, as they equally contribute to the individual's immediate environment. Sound scholar and musicologist Holger Schulze furthers this notion that we should consider music as part of the acoustic environment, as humans have "ongoing contact" with music as it forms part of our "sonic persona" (2018: 123). Schulze defines the sonic persona as the relationship individuals build with the music and sounds around them as "[t]hese sounds constitute a continuous sequence of vibrations and resonances out of which your personality is made: a sequence of tones that [is] turned into your persona" (2018: 189). Schulze recommends the individual to think out the ways in which we tap a table, brush our hair, or hum a melody. Taking Schulze's notion that all sounds are equal and equally contribute to our understanding of who we are and where we stand in the world, this study will consider music, noise, silence and other forms of sound in equal measure. Throughout the next few chapters, this project will assess how the changes in the class system are sonified through the acoustic environments that British characters are placed within, the ways that characters react to

the sounds and music around them, and the ways they produce sounds in the soundscape. But how exactly is the political life around Brexit sonified, and what can this study reveal?

In his study of the politics of noise, Jacques Attali posits that “[f]or twenty-five centuries Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand [that] the world is not for beholding. It is for hearing... Now we must learn to judge a society by its noise” (1985: 1). In this statement, Attali points to the fact that cultural and societal patterns can be studied through the noise they create. As we have seen in the examples from *I, Daniel Blake* and the BBC News coverage of the Brexit referendum, the silence felt by these individuals represents the divisions felt between individuals. Themes of silence, noise, and voice are consistently explored in the academic discussion about what Brexit means, and how these class divisions manifest. But more specifically, the notion of the power of a voice is the key tool to representing the last decade of British politics. As seen in the passages presented within this chapter, scholars studying the Brexit vote have been consistently using sound as a metaphor: to explain how people have expressed their voices during both Blair’s resignation and the Brexit referendum; to describe the silence that manifested on all parties due to the divide in the Brexit results; and to give reason to the vocal noise made in protests against various politicians. However, there has not yet been an in-depth study about sound as a tool to measure the changes that people are experiencing on an everyday basis, and how both these divisions amongst the classes and the changes to one’s voice are felt on an everyday level. Thus, as Attali’s words suggest, it becomes imperative to study the way that auditory circumstances we experience everyday affect the way the British people think about the social environment in the United Kingdom, leading up to the Brexit moment.

If sound and affect theory are used to study sensations of the everyday individual, how can they be used to study large political changes, such as Brexit? There is an academic precedent to studying everyday sound and reaction as a measure of political change. Sound scholars Michael Bull and Les Back have written that, by using sound as a methodology to study social and political movements such as the Brexit debate, “we not only listen to people, but the sound of change, the textures of unfolding life” (2015: 3). As previously discussed, this growing social divide has emerged due to the fact that social inequalities amongst the classes are more and more present. In terms of studying sound within space, Linda O’Keeffe provides a valuable argument to how this methodology assists in studying such cultural shifts. In her study of sounds heard in Smithfield, Dublin, she points to sound and its perception within culturally symbolic space as a key strategy to studying the changing attitudes of the working class. She posits that “the cultural significance of sound in shaping one’s experience of space is as important as the practices and processes, economic and cultural, which take place within space, yet it is an area vastly under-researched in the social sciences thus far” (2017: 217). O’Keeffe maintains that the best way that class can be studied is “empirically” through an in-depth analysis of how sounds and the spaces they are perceived in assist in the creation of an individual’s class identity (2017: 222). Fran Tonkiss adds to this idea, believing that in this type of empirical study of sound, we are able to point to truths about how social markers such as class are perceived by people in an everyday sense, and how these perceptions can be used to perpetuate systems of class-based oppression. She argues “hearing has its own relation to the truth: to testimony, to spoken evidence, to placing trust in words rather than in images, to accepting [social norms] that are promised” (2013: 246). She argues that in acknowledging sound as the truth, we are able to capture “tensions between collective and subjective life,” such as class divisions (2013: 246).

Thus, in following the examples of studies set out by both O’Keefe and Tonkiss, a study of the soundscapes of the U.K. becomes a useful methodology to study how these class divisions manifest and transform throughout social crises such as the resignation of Tony Blair and the Brexit referendum. It would then stand to reason that the best method to study these class divisions is to do a series of field studies, in which creating recordings of as many different types of soundscapes would operate as the corpus of material to study, in order to analyse how these class divisions change over time. However, there remain issues with this approach. If I were to go out and record in various public spaces to understand how these divisions are apparent in the British public, I would have to prioritise certain spaces over others, as it would be too large a task to record every type of public space, which could lead to flawed or biased results. There is also what Paul Moore has termed the “cocktail party problem” where sound researchers “are confronted with a confused mixture of sounds” and cannot make sense of “a meaningless jumble of indecipherable noise” without making assumptions based on cultural biases or favoring some sounds over others (2015: 259). Moore then proposes another technique to study how sounds change within a given space over a period of time: “in a composed soundscape, listened to from a particular point of listening [where] all the sound waves are received in the same phase,” meaning the listener can still interact with the sound they hear, but are able to distinguish their characteristics (2015: 260). This idea, in simpler terms, means that a study in a soundscape that is designed and created by an individual, but still aims to reflect life as it is, is useful as it allows the scholar to study a given social reality as it is interpreted by a specific person, and can study all the sounds heard, rather than a biased select few. Such soundscapes include an art gallery installation that focusses on a lived experience of a group of people, or a film that replicates the sounds heard by an individual in a marginalised position. Back and Bull agree with Moore’s

method, writing that this research “can provide an opportunity for de-tuning, sculpting, amplifying, enhancing and increasing the volume of the background so we can listen to what is contained within it” (2015: 5). Thus, not only do I believe that studying how sounds are heard and perceived in Britain will make for a necessary study of British class systems, but I contend that it is best studied through a composed medium that attempts to mimic the real soundscape as closely as possible. I propose to use the experiential realist film, a subgenre of the social realist film, as a means to study these sounds (specifically the study of diegetic music, dialogue, sound mixing, sound editing and other relevant diegetic sound effects), as they present composed soundscapes based on real life. In so doing we are able to avoid the cocktail party problem and focus in on the felt emotions of individuals within their soundscapes.

Within affect theory, other scholars have argued that realist art can specifically capture how individuals are reacting to socio-political events that are often deemed entirely conceptual and impossible to track over a period of time. As film scholar Eugenie Brinkema describes, affect theory is specifically poised to address issues of how an individual’s reactions may change over time, and studying the affect within art has the potential to “disrupt, interrupt, reinsert, demand, provoke, insist on, remind of, agitate for: the body, sensation, movement, flesh and skin and nerves, the visceral, stressing pains, feral frenzies” (2014: xii). Brinkema thus places importance on the body and its reactions as not singular, but a series of changes that can be studied within art. In choosing to study the art made in the time of social strife, Brinkema argues that affect theory is “always rubbing against” the socio-political changes that are occurring in the works around them (2014: xii). In response, “turning to affect has allowed the humanities to constantly possibly introject any seemingly absent or forgotten dimension of inquiry, to insist that play, the unexpected, and the unthought can always be brought back into the field” (2014:

xii). Thus, this project will study how experiential realism captures how British individuals react to political changes, but it will do so in a way where it becomes possible to track perceptual change over time.

What exactly is an experiential realist film, and why should this project not look at the larger social realist genre? First, let us revisit the goals of social realism in cinema. Social realism is defined as an accurate depiction of reality, or, as film theorist André Bazin describes, a kind of “decal or transfer” which “proceeds [...] to the taking of a veritable luminous impression in light – to a mold. As such it carries with it more than mere resemblance, namely a kind of identity” (Bazin, 2005: 59). In essence, Bazin believes that social realist cinema should show life accurately, as if a photograph, but also leave room for the audiences to locate themselves in the works, usually providing a form of “identity” that their audience can relate to (2005: 59). As Richard Rushton acknowledges in his study of realist film, “natural or representation realism” involves a “distrust of and distaste for spectacle and special effects that are seen to manipulate the real in entertainment cinema” and instead “foreground the apparatuses of cinematic production” to bring about so called real people (individuals, not actors) providing real performances of their lived realities (Rushton, 2011: 9). Jane Stadler adds:

The naturalistic style of social realism is presumed to have the capacity to reveal a more authentic view of the human condition and to reflect more deeply on social and political problems—all things that the spectacle, illusion, fantasy, and entertainment value of blockbusters and genre cinema are thought to obfuscate. (2016: 441)

Thus, natural realism inherently involves a focus on social and political problems that affect real individuals. Film historian Samantha Lay builds on this genre within a British context, writing that the British social realist film does not merely use fictional contexts to represent the current social reality but also to capture the changing views of classes of Britain and their living conditions. The two key characteristics Lay describes that social realist British cinema has in all

its iterations is the changing of perspective “from the public and the social (the working class at work, struggles connected to the wider society or community) to the private and the personal (the focus on family life and problems with little real reference to social, political and economic conditions” and “the demise of the traditional working class and their definition in terms of what they consume rather than what they produce or do” (2002: 118). The social realist film is therefore not studied in this project as a mere decal of reality, but is defined instead as any film or television work that reflects a social landscape physically or psychologically felt by a specific group of people. It uses creative cinematography, and a designed soundtrack to convey the emotions of a specific group of individuals.⁶ The British social realist film expresses much about the current social climate for the classes in Britain, saying that through a focus on “the private and personal” elements of everyday life, these films portray the class “struggles connected to the wider society or community,” such of those related to social, political and economic crises (2002: 86). Julia Hallam further explains that this growing interest in social realism allows these films to re-centre debates around class, as films about the working class are no longer solely focussed on their “labour power,” (or working conditions), but also other social issues such as “family strife” and “community identity” (2000: 105). Thus, social realism as a genre is used in Britain to comment on the social and political circumstances of a given time, by using fictional characters to stand in for the average British individual. It focusses attention on their reactions to larger political events through their personal lives, and tracks them as they change and develop with time. Thus, it is clear that the social realist film in Britain captures the experience of the classes in a collective manner.

⁶ For more on the intricacies of social realism in the United Kingdom, see Lay, 2002; Street, 2009; Nwonka, 2014.

In order to prioritise the *individual* perceptions and experiences of the classes, this project will look specifically at one branch of social realism.⁷ In the past decade, a new branch of social realism has emerged, where new works focus on the physical sensations felt by characters, and how their changes in perception reflect changes in their identity. In this form of social realism, termed here as experiential realism, the world is not cinematically shown exactly as it is, but rather, the world has become aesthetically modified, to emphasise the ways that the individuals react to social events.⁸ It involves a creative use of cinematography (seen in the display of multiple perspectives simultaneously in split screen to convey a multi-person exchange, using fish-eye lens to convey claustrophobia, or a frequent use of close-ups to focus on emotional reactions, for example), editing (such as an oversaturation in colour-correction to display overstimulation) and sound design (in the creation of sound effects, addition of non-diegetic music, and silencing of dialogue to emphasize who is being heard and not heard). This genre is unique, as it “permits [the audience] to look, at the same time, at both the subject and object in the act of perception” (Casebier, 1991: 17). While films in this genre are not limited to creating an engaged political examination of a specific issue, these aesthetic choices are often used in this genre to convey the ways that given social and political labels marginalize or isolate individuals, through viscerally and sensorially representing the ways they experience discrimination or the consequences of socio-political power.

⁷ Yet, it is imperative to acknowledge that social realism does not evolve from one iteration to the next. Rather, it becomes more diverse as it divides into many smaller and more specific genres. Martin Sohn-Rethel studies this diversification of social realism through studying various television shows marked as “social realist” in their production and distribution: “there is no one single realism [...] It is vital to remember that different viewers can read realism and truth differently” (2015: 8). Thus, it is crucial to not acknowledge social realism as one genre that evolves over time, but as a broader genre that contains multiple subgenres.

⁸ This genre is not to be confused with “psychological realism” (a genre is often associated with Hollywood thrillers of the 1970s, such as *Klute* [1971]), which aims to show the horrors of one’s internal state.

Studies of this augmented form of social realism is not unheard of, as it has been previously studied before. David Forrest argues that British realism has been updated in the twenty-first century as new social realist films are now “[u]nmoored from its hitherto narrow confines” as described by scholars like Bazin and Rushton to become “emotionally literate, poignantly and attentively representative of physical and sensory experience, empathetic, and intuitively, inclusively and excitingly ambiguous” (2020: 195-6). There is thus a stronger focus on sensation, and a break from typical expectations of realism (i.e. naturalism, focus on gritty experience, etc.). They are, as Forrest describes it:

bound too by a meticulous, rhythmic poeticism, inculcated through recurring motifs of quotidian sound and imagery, constructing a mode of realism which we might understand as both image-led and attendant to the aural and to other forms of sensory engagement. [...] A rich and multivalent authenticity is also foregrounded at the level of experience [...] Taken together, these features unite a range of seemingly divergent films and filmmakers and point to a redefinition of this most contested and foundational tendency in British film culture (2020: 2).

Forrest identifies a new trend in filmmaking, with an attention to experience of the characters. Although Forrest describes this as “new realism,” looking at how recent cinematic projects diverge from Bazin’s definition in many varying ways, this project privileges sonic and perceptual reactions, so it will look specifically at the use of sound design in experiential realism (2020: 2). To place this notion within a British context, a study of this subgenre allows the audience to sensorially feel a character’s reaction to their class-based marginalization.

But it is also crucial to acknowledge that experiential realist films also take aesthetic liberties in representations of reality, in order to emphasize the process of marginalization. Cultural scholar Felicity Gee observes the ways that cinematic realism changes to be more fantastical during sweeping political changes. She writes that creative abstraction has always had a place in social realism, as she posits the goal of realism is to “interrogate cognitive and

phenomenological apprehension of exterior reality through avant-garde practice, or in non-mainstream, non-conventional modes of representation that focus on becoming or metamorphosing” (2021: 2). In essence, the goal of realism is to be radical in nature, and show the way individuals react to an environment, instead of the environment itself. Experiential realism serves to capture such perceptions. This project will look at the psychological and lived experiences of these characters, to emphasise how their class is felt and sensed in their daily lives. This subgenre has been studied previously, as scholars like Sophie A. Marmaridou believes that it places emphasis on “the cognitive, social, and cultural components” of an individual’s life alongside the physical and material aspects of their lives, such as their jobs, their homes, and the literal environments they interact with (2000: 31). The realism in this subgenre is thus not about showing a physical or material environment as true, but rather to display and emphasise the feelings that they have, in order to reflect how they feel about their social positions. Jane Stadler furthers this definition of experiential realism by arguing that experiential realism “enable[s] audiences to share the sensory, motile, emotional, and introspective experiences of screen characters” and “approaches realism in a subjective, visceral, heuristic manner rather than as a naturalistic record of phenomena” (2016: 440). It also uses all sorts of sounds, including music, to indicate meaning, as Michel Chion notes: “it is an important means of expression” that “influences perception” and is more concerned with “rendering the truth than merely representing it” (2019: 107). Thus, within this subgenre, the goal is to represent experiences to an audience who may connect with such experiences.

The number of films that use this branch of social realism is increasing, as this project will suggest. And films that project an experience to an audience that comes at a certain political time are common, as Vivian Sobchack writes: “a film is an act of seeing that makes itself seen,

an act of hearing that makes itself heard, an act of physical and reflective movement that makes itself reflexively felt and understood” (1992: 3-4). It allows audiences to understand the experiences of being in a certain class position and allows viewers to “reflect [on] the universality of specific scopes of experience” (Sobchack, 1992: 6).

Works in the experiential realist genre are not only popular in Britain (as this project will explore), but also seen worldwide. In European films such as *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (dir. Cristian Mungiu, 2007), *Lorna’s Silence* (dir. Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, 2008), political tensions surrounding abortion and drug abuse are visually framed around individual perspectives of their main characters, while the overwhelming sound design reflects how these characters cannot be heard. A similar trend is noted in international films as well, where films like *Rustic Oracle* (dir. Sonia Bonspille-Boileau, 2019) [from Québec], *Atlantics* (dir. Mati Diop, 2019) [from Senegal] and *Cousins* (dir. Ainsley Gardiner, 2021) [from New Zealand], use non-diegetic music to convey issues surrounding Indigenous sovereignty, racial discrimination and working conditions in physical labour.

Thus, in adopting experiential realism as the subgenre it studies, this project will focus on how this one specific branch of social realism is growing during this political tumult and explore how representations of the ways in which class is felt and embodied by characters. As Sobchack notes, “the cinema transposes what would otherwise be invisible, individual and intrasubjective privacy of direct experience as it is embodied into the visible, public an intersubjective sociality of a direct embodied experience” (1992: 11). She furthers these thoughts by noting that “a film presents and represents acts of seeing, hearing and moving as both the original structures of existential being and mediating the structures of language” (Sobchack, 1992: 11). Language refers to the political world that these characters inhabit. Through performing this study, this

project will bring attention to how certain processes of changing sensations and voicelessness are occurring across the experiential realist genre in a British context, and how these experiences are directly attached to class.

This branch of social realism has a large place within the history of British film, as David Forrest writes. He acknowledges that “the filmmaker perform[s] a reflective function [and] assumes a focus that illuminates a hitherto unseen or unspoken social reality, and in so doing, seeks to engage the political and/or social consciousness of its viewer” (2013: 2). They speak “about the nation and its problems” and “challenge our socio-political perceptions of the social sphere,” not “merely a cinema of mimesis, nor one of leftist propaganda” (2013: 2-3). This subgenre tracks what is felt by an individual as changing and developing, but also encourages the viewer to consider their own reactions as they watch. As Forrest suggests, “[i]n response to a fragmentation of Britain’s traditional social boundaries, we have seen a greater fluidity in the notion of what constitutes appropriate subject matter for the social realist film” (2013: 201). Thus, during the Brexit referendum, this research in the ways that social realism has branched out into the experiential realist subgenre becomes more pertinent to perform.

Because of this focus on class and reactions, experiential realist films become an ideal tool to study the reactions of British people. There is an argument against considering social realism as a tool to study reality, however. Some critics (such as Angulo, 1995; Hegerfeldt, 2005; Danermark and Ekström, 2019; Malik, 2019) criticise social realism as they believe it exists in the realm of the creative, as it involves a mediation and an aestheticisation of reality, and thus, represents lived experiences of actual individuals inaccurately. These scholars argue that considering a narrative as representative of reality discourages the voices of real people experiencing oppression and marginalisation to be heard. These arguments dismiss experiential

realism unfairly, as not all experiential realist films involve the alteration of reality to fit an aesthetic or entertainment purpose. British directors, such as Ken Loach and Clio Barnard, perform extensive research in developing their films to ensure that the lived experiences of the characters are mediated in a way that gives voice to communities who often go underrepresented.⁹ The argument that experiential realism is merely an aesthetic exploration also devalues the purpose it serves for the general public. This genre serves an important function as it encourages the individual to consider their own social circumstances as they watch. As Gregory Singh notes, “[t]he question of thinking through what it is we do when we go to see a movie is, as I see it, a negative dialectic that works in retrospect to unpack what it is we imagine we are watching and doing” (2014: 9). Singh argues that going to see a film is not a passive activity, as it encourages viewers to think about the worlds within the cinema, and how these compare to the world in which they live: “[c]inema in this respect becomes a thing we do, rather than (merely) a thing we view” (2014: 9-10). Thus, assessing the trajectories of experiential realist films that do the research to accurately represent individuals is a valuable study, as it assists in examining the journeys that characters go through as political events come to affect them. It is also worth noting that this project will not dismiss the voices of those individuals who are being oppressed and marginalised, as it will pair studies of these films with sociological studies that feature these voices, in order to further the notion that these events are based on real and lived experiences of British individuals. As these films encourage the viewer to consider their own circumstances, this project will track the reactions of the British individual as they go about their everyday lives.

⁹ For more information on how the production process of social and experiential realist films serve to represent marginalised communities, see McKnight, 1997; Cocker, 2007; Chambers, 2014.

Now we have assessed what the experiential realist film is, and the type of sounds that this project will study, it is important to provide a brief note on the importance on studying the sound design in experiential realist films, as they pay attention to the power the voice has against a certain environment with certain sound markers. Filmmakers such as Robert Bresson implore for a use of the voice as an “instrument” of showing power dynamics between people and their environments (1975: 30). Not only has Bresson inspired filmmakers included in this project,¹⁰ but the films studied in this project take this notion into account, by placing importance on the character’s voice as a marker against their environments. Sound scholar and film artist Tim Harrison notes that the goal of sound design is to shift “different audible elements” so that “we can uncover layers of [human experience] and by changing the context – time, place, in motion or stationary” and that the audience “can draw comparisons within our own experiences” (2021: 19). The films across this study use the experiential realist genre to shift the audience’s attention, most specifically on how the voice of each character is placed within a class hierarchy, and is heard accordingly. A similar argument is made by Michel Chion in the study of the voice in film, as he notes that many consider sound design as everything but voice: “[t]here are voices, and then everything else. In other words, in every audio mix, the presence of a human voice instantly sets up a hierarchy of perception” (1982: 5). However, Chion notes that the goal in cinema is the “taking of voices,” as “[s]peech, shouts, sighs or whispers, the voice hierarchizes everything around it” (1982: 6). As such, the goal of sound design is to capture human experiences, and reflect how voices mesh, go above, or are stifled by their environments. This project takes into account the voice as part of this sound design, and is invested in studying how the voice works as a means to represent social hierarchies.

¹⁰ Such as Joanna Hogg (Porton and Hogg, 2019: 4), Lynne Ramsay (Andrew, 2002), and Mark Jenkin (Weir, 2023).

There is a timeliness and significance to complete this study of the sound of these films, as so often, the images of British social realism are re-appropriated and re-contextualised. For example, scenes from *Kes* (1969), *The Loneliness of The Long Distance Runner* (1962), and the television series *Skins* (Channel 4, 2007-2013) were used in the background of a celebration of music and Britishness in the 2012 London Olympic Opening Ceremony. They were deprived of their original sounds – scenes where characters criticize their poverty, vocalise their loneliness away from their working-class community, and speak about how they are surveilled by police – and replaced with the music of iconic British bands like Blur and Queen. This effect is also seen in a 2022 promotional video created to celebrate 100 years of the BBC, in which a scene from *EastEnders* is edited to reinforce the memorable villainy of character Dennis Watts. Yet, this clip omits the voice of his wife, Angie, who is reacting out of fear she will fall into poverty without access to her husband's income. There becomes an urgent need to listen to the voices of characters so often omitted in the imagination of the British image, and understand how the iconic image of Britishness shifts once these voices are also included in the audio-visual frame. Crucially, we must understand how these voices speak to class, as class is still very much an omnipresent theme within work designed to reflect the British people.

I thus maintain that the best tool to track how these social divisions manifest is through an in-depth study of how characters are depicted to react to the sounds they hear and produce within the British experiential realist film. Using the study of sound in experiential realist filmmaking in the past decade, my project will suggest a new practice to track the social changes in cinematic depictions of class and, through this, will establish a methodology to study how film represents these changes in the future. In terms of tracking how these social divisions along the lines class manifested and developed over the period of time from Blair's departure from office

to the Brexit moment, I believe that selecting a corpus of films produced in this period in time will enable me to track the changes that occur within the cinematic soundscapes, and thus, the changes that occurred within the everyday worlds of the classes. Thus, this project will assess how the composed soundscapes of the British experiential realist film are reflecting the changes felt in reality, using affect theory and sound studies to assist in understanding how these changes are affecting individuals.

VI. Laying Out the Structure of This Project

Before I lay out what the following chapters contain, it is worth assessing a few boundaries and limitations to this project. The first amongst these is that we must acknowledge is what constitutes as “British” within this project. Although the legal and often accepted definition of what “British” is involves the blending of all four nations of the United Kingdom (thus combining English, Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish identities), this project looks more specifically at English works that stand in for the wider sentiments about class anxiety and class divisions felt across the United Kingdom. As Alisa Henderson et. al note, “too often a 'whole of Britain' (or ‘Anglo-Britain’) approach is adopted by default rather than as a considered choice - dominated by English data, without ever analysing England as such” (Henderson et al., 2017: 3). There is a problematic trend in British studies where scholars think that English political and social issues dominate the United Kingdom so severely that it is worth combining all four nations together. Yet, there is a way to study English cultural projects as representative of British sentiments. These scholars continue in writing that “Britain can be a valid unit of analysis; if it is carefully considered and specified on a basis that reflects diversity across the island” (Henderson et al., 2017: 3). This diversity is reflected within this project, as it studies female characters, characters of colour, queer characters, characters who are recent immigrants to the country,

characters with a disability, and characters living under poverty. It also looks at different geographies across the country, from films set in rural areas, films set in urban areas, films set in the North, and films set in the South. Thus, diversity will be present, even if English works take a larger place within this project. It is worth noting that there are interesting works worth assessment from Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, but they also contend with other issues within their devolved nations in equal amounts. Thus, even though these films are mostly English, the experiential realist films studied within this project focus on class issues that are felt across the United Kingdom.

The second object to note is that this project is interested in representations of how the British individual is reacting to changes in their class and national perceptions. It includes many political and sociological sources to explore what a given moment in film represents, but it cannot provide any definite answers to such questions surrounding the political future of Brexit. As the fifth chapter of this project will explore, such answers are uncertain, and this project can only insist on a methodology to study these divisions going forward. Instead of rigorous political discussion, this project will highlight other resources throughout on where to read more about certain political topics.

The final object to acknowledge is that this project takes inspiration and builds upon the work of Paul Dave, who has previously written about class in contemporary English cinema. His book, *Visions Of England: Class and Culture in Contemporary England* (2006), surveys how popular film shows different realities for different classes. This is a project with similar goals to my project, as it adopts comparable class boundaries (that the upper class are those who hold land and positions of economic power, that the middle class is a fantasy of belonging, and that the working class are those who struggle to find work), but with some key differences in

methodology, context, and approach to this topic. While Dave's text also utilises important sociological texts on class on Britain (such as the texts written by Ellen Meiksins Wood [2002]) and uses a similar structure by devoting chapters by class, the corpus of films covered in Dave's analysis only range from the 1960s to the early 2000s, mainly studies the role of English filmmaking as representative of issues within England, and often relies on visual elements as points of analysis. This project will update and further the study that Dave has created by bringing into the present era and using sound as a point of study. His Marxist approach is valuable to consider as I develop my own argument, but these differences will make these projects different in its finality. Using cinematic soundscapes and recent political events across the broader United Kingdom, my project will update older works such as Dave's and posit a new method in order to study class difference.

In the following chapters, I shall study the growing division amongst the classes through the role that music, noise, and silence play within the contemporary British experiential realist film, and how these sounds demonstrate this increasing polarisation of the social classes. The first three chapters will look at each of the classes individually from the resignation of Tony Blair to the later Cameron years before the Brexit referendum, to establish how the classes were divided before the Brexit referendum occurred. The last two chapters will survey all the classes together alongside the Brexit referendum and assess how these divisions are increasing. More specifically, the chapters will be broken down as such:

The first chapter will observe the role of silence in films about the upper class, and how their wealth isolates them from living in a world where they are fully able to realise an identity for themselves, resulting in characters permanent dissatisfaction with themselves. It will look specifically at the role that sensory gating plays, especially in their relationships with the

working class. It will look at feature films *Archipelago* (dir. Joanna Hogg, 2010) and *45 Years* (dir. Andrew Haigh, 2015), as well as the short film *Swimmer* (dir. Lynne Ramsay, 2012).

The second chapter will debate the existence of the middle class through an analysis of the effectiveness of music as a form of escapism. It will look at films set in another era that comment on the issues and worries of the modern era. Specifically, it will study *Blinded By The Light* (dir. Gurinder Chadha, 2017), as well as televisual works, in the series *In My Skin* (BBC1, 2019-) and the *Lovers Rock* film from the *Small Axe* series of works (BBC1, 2020).

The third chapter will look at the use of noise and the individual's voice in films about the working class and argue that they will never have the privilege to be able to be heard by institutions around them or be able to control their soundscapes in any meaningful way. It will look at the films *Fish Tank* (dir. Andrea Arnold, 2009), *The Selfish Giant* (dir. Clio Barnard, 2013), *I, Daniel Blake* (dir. Ken Loach, 2016) and *Rocks* (dir. Sarah Gavron, 2020).

The fourth chapter will evaluate the research done in the first three chapters and posit that although scholars may believe the future of Brexit is uncertain, the cinematic soundscapes in contemporary British experiential realist films point to the conclusion that there are increasing divisions amongst people, growing to a concerning trend where communication amongst the classes becomes impossible. It will look at more recent films, specifically *God's Own Country* (dir. Francis Lee, 2017), *Bait* (dir. Mark Jenkin, 2019), *Mogul Mowgli* (dir. Bassam Tariq, 2020) and *Limbo* (dir. Ben Sharrock, 2020).

The fifth and final chapter of this project will assess how these films are capturing the future of British experiential realism, and British society. It will assess a recent example to question where the British experiential realist film is headed. This film is *Ali & Ava* (dir. Clio Barnard, 2022).

Historian and sociologist Mike Savage writes on the interpretation of class in Britain in a twenty-first century context and how these labels matter to British individuals: “[c]lass is important not as much as an overt badge (when people feel proud to belong to a class), but more in the way that it prompts moral and emotional reactions” (2015: 366-7). What this project does is study how film serves as a mirror to British society, thus using film studies and affect theory to provide a sociological analysis. It will contemplate why similar reactions amongst the classes exist, and can be seen so widely, such as the examples of *I, Daniel Blake* and the BBC Brexit referendum coverage. As this introduction has already discussed, these class divisions are ever present and are at threat of growing as the aftermath of Brexit is unfolding. In studying the soundscapes present in the contemporary British experiential realist film, we are able to understand how social events have changed the way the British people understand class. As James Foley notes when writing on the state of the British dramatic film:

British cinema is drowning in sociology – how people speak, everyone is so self-conscious. In this story it is clear: one is working class, one isn’t. That goes without saying, it’s no big deal. Let’s now concentrate on the story and the psychology, let’s make it universal and slightly abstract (Foley, 2004, cited in Forrest 2013: 36).

The following first chapter of this project assesses the sonic reactions to social changes through the cinema of the upper class, starting from the resignation of Tony Blair to the current day. In writing about the sonic persona, Holger Schulze writes that there always exists an “apparent desire to come closer by means of research in understanding humanoids’ bodies and how they act and react, sense and sound” (2018: 123). Through a study of how sound is used to represent the classed spaces people inhabit every day, we are able to comprehend how these spaces become polarised by class, and finally how these people are becoming so divided amongst themselves.

Chapter 1: Silence And The Upper Class

I. Capturing the Upper Class on Film

With the contextual history of class, an explanation of British film, and the detailing of this project's goals now established, this project can begin its study of the experiential realist film. It will begin with a study of the representations of the upper class in contemporary British experiential realist films. When we think of the upper-class British film, we often think of certain characteristics. They are usually set in the past, where the wealthy characters are often presented as individuals living as a family unit in luxurious mansions with excessive amounts of wealth. They interact minimally with the classes beneath them, instead performing a routine of leisure, seen in examples such as *Upstairs Downstairs* (ITV, 1971-1975), *Brideshead Revisited* (2008), *Gosford Park* (2001), or the *Downton Abbey* series of films and televisual works (ITV, 2010-). Some works critique this existence, through a use of props and scenery, emphasising the moral implications of their social lives on those who cannot afford to live as they do. Other works use cinematography and sound design to portray their failure to claim responsibility over their wealth and focus on their eventual decline. Whether critical or not, the films mentioned here continue to be popular and are often awarded in film festivals such as the British Film Institute's London Film Festival. Since Tony Blair's departure, this genre has flourished with audiences of all class backgrounds, with "the diversity and complexity of identities, responses and viewing positions" as audiences in any background become invested in stories of the rich (Monk, 2011: 180). These audiences have different reasons for wanting to watch these films, but many claim enjoyment from the affectual pleasures they receive while watching, in which the audience is invited to see the wealthy estates and fashions of the upper class, to taste their luxurious foods and to sense the

tactility of their possessions. In terms of sonic representation, we tend to believe that the soundscapes of the upper class are ones of peaceful silences, sometimes populated by classical music, in which upper-class characters are able to enjoy the music they want to hear as they want to hear it. But this imagined peace is only one fraction of the soundscapes heard in films about the upper class. In recent experiential realist works, many films are getting into questions of the voicelessness of such characters, and how their sensory world is changing in the contemporary era. It is worth questioning what these affectual enjoyments are, and how universally this “peaceful pleasure” of the upper class is presented and depicted. In order to study this affectual enjoyment, this chapter will observe how the soundscapes of the upper class are interpreted in two subgenres of recent British filmmaking. There is the commercially popular heritage film (or, the genre of the dramatic and realist film invested in the lives of the wealthy in the past), in which characters enjoy affectual and sensory pleasures, and the more recent “new wealth” film (a sub-genre which I have termed within the experiential realist film), that builds on the structure and tropes of the heritage film but questions the power of the voice and silence of characters. In the study of this new genre and how the upper class is represented, this chapter will contest that the pleasure of silence is not entirely enjoyable to upper class characters.

II. The Heritage Film and the Projection of a British Image

In order to discuss how the new upper class is represented, it is worth understanding what the heritage film is and why it plays such a large role in the public imagination of the wealthiest class in the United Kingdom. Although its exact definition has been debated amongst British film scholars, the heritage film can be defined here as scholar Andrew Higson describes it - as the cycle of costume-dramas first appearing in the 1980s and continuing to the current era (Higson, 2010: 136). They are typically set in a recognisable period of British history, such as

the Elizabethan era, the Victorian era, or the Edwardian era. The plots of these heritage works often centre on the personal and romantic lives of the aristocracy in England. They often use these historical periods to revisit the social structures of the past. They can include both adaptations of existing texts such as *The Remains of the Day* (1993) and *Sense and Sensibility* (BBC, 2008) as well as original works such as *Elizabeth* (1998), *The Duchess* (2008), and *The King's Speech* (2010). Their glamourisation of this period encourages their audiences to “respond to a loss of genuine social values [such as a respect for the law, chivalry in romance, etc. and] a caring, ordered society” and often persuade the audience to “search for a more ethical state in an increasingly unethical world” (Higson, 2010: 134). Some scholars, such as Patrick Wright and Robert Hewison, argue that the heritage film works to preserve traditional and deterministic conservative values by portraying the past as an idyllic time. In their articles, they posit that the existing class structure was necessary to keep society in a correct order.¹¹ These debates aside, the element that most scholars agree upon is that one key characteristic that the heritage film contains is its focus on the affect, through a focus on viscerally demonstrating what the upper class sees, feels tactilely, tastes, and most importantly, hears.

Higson maintains that such films have a heightened spectacle of the “private property, the culture and values” of the upper class (such as their manors, their furniture, their attention to etiquette and tradition) and how characters interact with their traditional and material spheres of wealth (Higson, 2010: 134). Even if the heritage film can present progressive versions of the past, Higson observes that these positive representations only go so far. He argues that these films hesitate to critique the upper class by neglecting to portray the social damage their existence necessitates. Although many have disagreed with Higson, as he correctly points out a

¹¹ For more on the representation of the social order in heritage films, see Hewison, 1987; Wright, 2009.

gap in academic discussion of the heritage film, I believe his opinion is worth further exploration.¹² What Higson correctly gestures to is that there is an emphasis on the affect within these heritage films.

As Keith Gandal writes, studying the role of sensation is key to watching fictional adaptations of the upper class, as “the upper classes have an active and tortured fantasy life [where their fear of poverty] seems to play a role in their psychic equilibrium” (2007: 5). In other words, they constantly reflect on their own wealth and their fear of losing it through sensorially interacting with the physical evidence of wealth around them. These films follow these psychological processes of upper-class characters as they go about, using “sentimental” and “sensational” film cues (such as the use of props, changes in lighting, and changes in soundtrack) to show how the upper class contemplate their own wealth and their fears over losing their wealth and social status (2007: 7). Due to the success of this market internationally, the image of Britain that is most recognisable within global cinema culture is linked to the history and iconography of order and prestige, thus making “*classed* heritage into the national heritage” (Higson, 2010: 117. Emphasis original). Thus, Higson posits that the heritage film gives audiences an inaccurate version of Britain, where they understand class hierarchies in Britain as an intrinsic part of the country’s social fabric. They also begin to feel the same sensations and emotions of the upper-class characters, as they are literally aligned with them, in an attempt to make them sympathetic.

But how exactly is this sympathy accomplished? And how are audiences of all backgrounds made to feel sympathetic for a class that is already so privileged? This is where texts in affect theory become useful. Affect theorist Brian Massumi notes that as we watch films,

¹² For critiques on Higson’s approach to the heritage film, see Kemp, 2003; Harper, 2004; Monk, 2011.

we see characters go about several sensory processes indicate their place in society. Through watching this, he attests, we are able to sympathise with a certain character, and their goals. Specifically, they “embody [the] ideology” of the lifestyle they desire (2002: 3). Thus, when we see an upper-class character interact with the world they are within, we literally sense their goals, and are made to sympathise with them. Media scholar Anahid Kassabian agrees with this notion, as she writes: “[i]dentity is a position left behind by the work of affect [...] Affect happens over microsecond intervals, moving on and leaving traces behind before we can even feel its presence. Affect both conditions and enacts identities” (2013: 29). As characters move through upper-class spaces, they sense what is around them, and go through what Brian Massumi describes as the “isolation, defamiliarization, distancing, or decontextualization” of sensual experience, until a given character recognises their comforts, then do anything in their power to keep “recognizability [and] sameness” (or, do anything to maintain their privileged social status) (Massumi, 2002: 84). Although Massumi does not write specifically on the upper class but rather characters more broadly, his comments apply to this study. As audiences watch upper-class characters interact with the world around them, we understand their goals, and the identity they form, and often, are made to sympathise with them as they protect a comfortable sensed environment. This focus on sensation works to create a sense of purpose for audiences of any class background to connect with this experience, Claire Monk argues, as audiences enjoy watching these contemplations. Audiences engage in the “aesthetic pleasure” of interpreting these cinematic details, specifically their “visual enjoyment” as a means to understand how these classes live their lives (2011: 124).

Sociologist Diana Kendall provides a useful study that traces the media representations of the upper class throughout recent history, and suggests why audiences continue to be drawn

towards them. In her examination of the relationship between narratives of the upper class and American media companies (such as news corporations, television networks and film studios), Kendall notes that media companies have always historically relied on fictional narratives of the upper class, as they “provide a window through which [lower] class individuals can vicariously participate in the comings and goings of the wealthy and the famous” (2011: 28). Even though they may appear so far divorced from their own socio-economic realities, Kendall proposes that lower class Americans enjoy this type of sensory-based escapism. Yet, in her account, media companies do not only create these works with the intention to offer lower class Americans with an escape to the lives of the wealthy. As her study reaches the present moment in narrative media creation, Kendall contends that recent works are created in a calculated manner to avoid discussions of contemporary capitalism. She writes that the audience are often encouraged to remain enraptured in this sensory escapism and not critique the systems that permitted the characters on screen to become so wealthy. She calls this trend “consensus framing,” then explains that in displaying individual quirky habits such as visually depicting “the wealthy dining on meatloaf” with specific attention to the sensory, audiences are guided to “ignore larger social realities about the exploitative nature of capitalism” through shifting attention to aesthetics (2011: 50). There is also a focus on emotion (and thus, the affect) within these works, where showing an upper-class character having a melancholic moment encourages the audience to sympathise with their plight. Kendall’s consensus framing of the upper class is common within American dramatic and realist works, where critiques of class systems are set aside in favour of focusing on the personal journeys of certain characters, rendered in an aesthetically fascinating fashion (such as *The Wolf of Wall Street* [2013] *Native Son* [2019], or either of the recent HBO series *Succession* [2018-2023] and *The White Lotus* [2020-]). Even if the approach to these

media is satirical, where the wealthy characters are the target of critique, the systems they function within (such as large companies and families of inherited wealth) are never made out to be questioned. Thus, consensus framing works to shift blame onto unique individuals with wealth, rather than the systems ensuring they remain wealthy. Yet, it is not just American media that use consensus framing. It appears in equal amounts in the British heritage work.

In her essay on enterprise and British heritage film, Tana Wollen further explains how this spectacle of class becomes accepted as national imagery for its domestic audiences, and how this class spectacle makes a film about the upper class into a heritage film. She believes that through a focus on bourgeois spectacle, heritage works made in times of crisis (such as the Falklands War, the Miners' Strike, and other political turmoil associated with the Thatcherite era) perform a "wider enterprise," or, a commercially based endeavour, of "the reconstruction of national identity" (1991: 178). In employing this type of collective re-imagination, the spaces of the upper class consequently permit a "disavowal of the coercion used [by Thatcher] to forge national unity" by replacing it with something more palatable to the average British viewer – a lower-to-middle class person (Wollen, 1991: 178). Wollen thus posits that these films assist in the creation of how "the nation is constructed and projected" through its revisitations of the past as a place of bourgeois spectacle that become desirable to the viewer (1991: 189). Thus, a focus on the past acts to distract audiences from contemporary crises by showing a glamourised vision of it, to strategically deploy the sensory to encourage audiences to enjoy the spectacle of class and to re-interpret their ideas of what Britain is, and what it can be.

In summary, the heritage film is a genre that focusses on the past, uses the sensory elements to show how characters understand and contemplate their wealth, and are released to distract audiences from distressing contemporary events that further divide class lines. Many

studies of have already critiqued the various problematic elements of the heritage film industry in Britain, yet this study will present another version of critique, through an examination of how the British heritage film has evolved in the contemporary era.¹³ While the traditional heritage film continues to exist, the heritage film is also evolving in the present to become what I have termed the “new wealth film.”¹⁴ New wealth films are no longer set in the past, but in the present and focus on the contemporary wealthy. They use some of these established heritage film tropes (such as the focus on the sensory and the psychological processes of the wealthy), but also adapt how the sensory is used and presented, specifically in the use of sound, to comment on how the wealthy have changed in the past few decades – and more crucially – how they come to gate their wealth in a dangerous manner.

III. The “New Wealth Film”: Filming The British Upper Class In The Contemporary Era

In order to comment on how this genre is adapting in the present day, it is worth another examination of the wealthy characters it represents. It is evident that the wealthy classes in Britain are not exclusively stuck in the past. Like the genre of the heritage film, they have evolved into something new. It is valuable to deconstruct and reassemble who the contemporary upper class is and use affect theory to observe how audiences are encouraged to participate and feel sympathy in narratives of the upper class.

While there are still many lords and other aristocratic individuals throughout Britain who have earned their wealth through familial connections and inherited land ownership, the understanding of who constitutes the wealthiest classes in Britain has changed in recent years. Historian David Cannadine notes that the image of heritage Britain “becomes ever more that of a

¹³ For more studies on the problematic nature of the representations of whiteness and gender politics in the heritage film, see Monk, 1995; Vincendeau, 2001; Sargeant, 2002.

¹⁴ Other heritage works include *Vanity Fair* (ITV, 2018) *Bridgerton* (Netflix, 2020-), *Belgravia* (ITV, 2020-), for example.

Ruritanian theme park, a contrived fantasy of hype” as the upper class no longer lives in stately manors completely detached from British society, but in cities where they are able to flaunt their wealth but still gate themselves away from the public (2022: 242). Scholars like Stewart Lansley believe there has been an “unravelling of the single-track society” in the job market (2022: 157), where Anne E. Green and David Owen state that “flexible employment relationships” in employment dynamics emerge (1996: 65). They continue, writing that:

[t]hese processes were instrumental in increasing *polarisation* in the structure of the labour market between *the privileged* on the one hand - mainly working in high wage non-manual jobs; and *the underprivileged* rest on the other - engaged in part-time, generally low wage jobs, or unemployed (1996: 265. Emphasis original).

As a result, as Lansley argues, the upper class accumulated “runaway fortunes too often unrelated to the productive economy, and via their impact on jobs, wages and opportunities, [created] significant cost to those on lower incomes” (2022: 159). It is most useful to consider them as the upper crust of what remains of the middle class – they are not just billionaires, or members of the aristocracy, but those who have sufficient wealth to afford land, and extraneous leisure activities. They work in offices where they no longer regularly engage with their employees, and their class is dictated by wealth accrued over generations rather than their individual income bracket. This “division” between who earns a fair income and who does not “shall certainly remain” for the next few decades, as sociologists Sam Friedman and Daniel Lauriston posit, (2019: 185). Through having the privilege of a network of other privileged individuals to help them achieve their place in the upper-class job market, they can avoid having to cavort with the other classes. These networks, or “helping hands,” work to keep them largely hidden from public view – they operate as invisible hands, helping to propel some and simultaneously disadvantage others” (2019: 211). As Paul Dave acknowledges, films about the contemporary upper class borrow tropes of the heritage film, such as “mise-en-scene and milieu”

but crucially shift these to a contemporary era to “show the privileges of property” of a present-day group of characters and their “obsession with possession” without the presence of “the state/institution” (2006: 43). While heritage films of the upper class often represent how these characters embody the state, the films about the contemporary upper class show their social power as divided from political establishments. It about those who have the means to live affluently (through inherited wealth or occupational position), where royal titles, discussions of business, or mentions of policy and governance are absent. It crucially shows their desires to hold onto the privileges of wealth, though remain invisible to larger society. Thus, the networks of the contemporary upper class are somewhat invisible, as they are not simply the aristocrats of the past, but individuals who work in jobs where they are often unseen by the average worker.¹⁵ Thus, it is imperative to understand the ways in which the British upper class is not its stereotypical construction in cinema, who is often presented to be very concerned with their visual and audible appearances. They must be reconstructed and re-interpreted for who they are in the contemporary era – individuals who have made their wealth through having the privilege of being connected to other wealthy individuals and, on an affectual level, become increasingly quiet and invisible to those around them as they remain within their wealthy spheres. Thus, using Dave’s construction of class in British cinema, while the middle class consists of those who are ultimately fantasizing of a life of comfort where their class status becomes irrelevant, the upper class desperately wants to hold onto their classed status and remain invisible to the larger society around them.

If these individuals are silent and invisible in actuality, how are they adapted cinematically? These characters are present, still engaging in psychological processes through

¹⁵ For more on policies on the wealthy post-Blair, see Chwiero and Walter, 2019; Hick and Lanau, 2019; Blundell et al, 2021. For more on the incoming cost-of-living crisis and economic recession, see Carr, 2022; Milas, 2022.

sensory communication. There are two versions of the new wealth film that exists – one, which was popular in the 1990s and 2000s that places heritage tropes in the present and aims to show how cool and attractive the lives of the upper class are, and the more recent one, from the past decade which criticises their existence. The first version of the “new wealth film” uses consensus framing to make the characters within the new wealth film sympathetic. Film scholar Paul Dave speaks to the “cool Britannia” cycle of films of the 1990s and 2000s, where a focus on the wealthy and their possessions serves to glamourise a return to what he calls “Old England” (Dave, 2006: 32). This notion is seen in the way that characters in the present day often speak to the importance of etiquette, deal with traditional props such as dinnerware or fashion, and contemplate their correct place in society. Such concerns are present in films like *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (dir. Mike Newell, 1994) and *Notting Hill* (dir. Roger Michell, 1999). There is indeed a emphasized prominence on physical wealth, as they celebrate such traditionally “grotesque” British symbols “carried forth in uniforms, furniture and wigs” but updated to the modern era (Dave, 2006: 33). Since 1990, we see this trend grow as there is a “recasting [of heritage Englishness] as an updated, stylish accompaniment to, rather than evasion of, neo-liberal capitalism” (Dave, 2006: 33). Englishness was re-designed as a set of tropes to be sold to international audiences as charming and desirable, and the class system was to be just another quirk of the English (Dave, 2006: 34). Dave contends that these films encouraged audiences to view the worlds of the British upper class as desirable, and thus conservative social values and traditions as something to be achieved. In addition, the upper-class characters within these works are often framed as idiosyncratic and odd, making them seem charming rather than exploitative. Higson argues that this first version of the new wealth film has “also ironically in various ways participated in the rebranding of [contemporary] Britain as a modern and vibrant place” (Higson,

2010: 193). Both Higson and Dave associate this first version of the new wealth film as part of the Blairite project, as Blair also rebranded Thatcherite neoliberalism to appear modern and desirable. Thus, following Dave's analysis, the wave of the "new wealth film" recalls Kendall's notion of consensus framing as a means to celebrate such conservative traditions, making the wealthier classes seem much more advanced and divided from the other classes than before.

As the heritage film evolves, it takes on more qualities of an experiential realist film, using realist interpretations of the sonic environment to demonstrate the isolation felt in the upper class. As their efforts to become invisible and inaudible create violent divisions between themselves and the lower classes, this isolation becomes present in their sonic atmospheres. In recent years, films such as *Archipelago* (2010); *Swimmer*, (2012); and *45 Years* (2016) use heritage tropes, through an exploration of the daily lives of the upper class, as each of their storylines explore their personal entanglements and relationship dynamics. But the new wealth experiential realist film also crucially adapts a few of these tropes, to comment on how this wealth gap has become deeply isolating, where upper-class characters are trapped in silent soundscapes, feeling protective of their wealth, but also isolated in their wealth. All of these films accomplish this in different ways, but all reach the same conclusion. While there is still a focus on materiality and the psychological process that wealthy characters have in debating their wealth, the use of consensus framing through a narrative of voicelessness disappears, as characters remain without a voice, plunged into total silence as they seem to endlessly debate their wealth, losing social connections. An analysis of the constructed soundscapes within recent films about the British upper class reveals a presentation of upper-class life as they try to make themselves as invisible and inaudible as possible, and as a result, they become lonely and isolated. These films about the contemporary upper class use two forms of silence – through

quieting others and choosing to not acknowledge certain topics, to comment on how the upper-class character isolates themselves into their wealthy sphere.

Before we delve into the study of these films, it is worth studying what exactly silence is, and how it relates to class divisions. Silence, in its crudest definition, refers to the lack of any sound within an environment, or the choice between individuals to withhold speech and the production of sound. While it is usually impossible to achieve total silence in any environment (as ambient sounds produced by nature, machinery or even human breathing tends to be audible), sound scholar Ana María Ochoa Gautier provides a useful definition of what the core sensation of silence is – an “uncomfortable” experience of “sensory deprivation” in which an expected “sense of self is lost” (2015: 183). Silence is the point in which “language meets a taboo,” or more specifically, the act “where we cease the enunciation of our thoughts” as we have reached “a sense of boundaries that should not be crossed” (Rutherford, 2013: 88). It thus represents a loss, or the changing of what it is expected and what is comfortable. It arises for many reasons, but this chapter is concerned with interpretation of silence as a social and political boundary that should not be crossed.

Silence appears because of institutional injustice, or more specifically, the feeling of being unable to change the social systems on an individual level, as sociologists Amy Jo Murray and Kevin Durrheim argue. They suggest that silence is often not spontaneous, as it “is produced by individuals, but always in interactional contexts and in concrete situations, and its roots and effects are in institutions, ideologies, and other broad social systems” (Murray and Durrheim, 2019: 11). Ochoa Gautier also speaks to the political dimension of silence, as she contends that silence is “used in political language” and implies “an active politics of domination and nonparticipation” (2015: 183-4). In other words, silence is about realising that the privileged

group is dominant in terms of political power and chooses to not participate in order to keep their privileges, and from confronting injustices in the wealth gap.

The next section of this project will study how the experiential realist film interacts with the “new wealth” genre to capture this silence as an act of power dynamics. It will interrogate how silence appears in these works – more specifically – how characters refuse to acknowledge each other (sometimes to the point of literally quieting each other) as they cannot acknowledge how their privilege exists, and the inequality of their privileged life. Silence in these recent experiential realist works is represented as a lack of words to say between characters, and a violent way to negate the experiences of the underprivileged and working class other.

Sociologists Sam Schulz and Iain Hay write “the bestowal of unearned privileges [such as silence] are often so natural as to be invisible to ruling class individuals themselves” (2016: 163). These films suggest that physical barriers (such as gates, walls, and closed off communities) and taboos (not talking about wealth or income inequalities) create silence, and this silence in turns “produce[s] elite subjectivity in highly regulated ways [in which] social institutions, such as the law, are mobilized to reinforce widely observed silences, and to ensure that elite wealth remains celebrated, but not interrogated” (Schulz and Hay, 2016: 153). These characters have isolated themselves within their wealth, acting aggressively towards anyone who threatens their positions. They desire to remain the invisible and inaudible upper class, and do not want anyone to threaten this wealth, but they also feel isolated within their silent spaces. As a result, they become increasingly unsure of how to communicate with each other. Thus, the use of silence in these films does not only represent that the characters are unable to talk about their personal circumstances, but also the fact that the class systems have begun to isolate people from each other in a damaging manner. Not only are these upper-class characters dividing from the classes

below them, but also between each other. They establish what Pierre Macherey terms the “eloquent silences,” or more specifically, the silences that emerge from taboos of wealth and upper-class status (1978: 94). More simply put, we must interrogate how fictional works represent the social order of the upper class, and how silence does not represent their comfort, but the disorder of their own experience. In analysing the soundscapes of *Archipelago*, *Swimmer* and *45 Years*, we are able to understand how the classes are becoming increasingly divided and isolated.

1. Keeping Up Appearances in *Archipelago* (2010)

The plot of *Archipelago* (directed and written by Joanna Hogg) surrounds a family gathering for a holiday retreat away from the south of England to the isles of Scilly. The family is comprised of a single mother Patricia (Kate Fahy), and her two grown up children Cynthia (Lydia Leonard) and Edward (Tom Hiddleston). The events of the film surround the family as they attempt to reconnect, as this holiday is the first time they are reunited in years. The soundscapes in *Archipelago* initially seem idyllic, as the film relies heavily on presenting natural and outdoor sounds in a seemingly relaxing manner. Yet, there is something wrong with these soundscapes upon closer examination. The silence between the family that was initially representative of awkwardness and uncertainty becomes violent and acts to assert distinct class boundaries that cannot be broken. Even with the whooshes of the ocean breeze and twittering bird sounds that regularly feature on the film’s soundtrack, what *Archipelago* does so frequently is remind its audiences that there is something they are not hearing – the sounds of wealth and class disparity in its main characters.

First, it is valuable to acknowledge the development of the film, especially in regards to sound design and how it captures communication. This is Hogg’s second feature film, and the

second in which she represents a wealthy British family avoiding discussions of their wealth (the first being *Unrelated* [2007]). Her works to this date involve then little-known and non-professional actors, where improvisation is encouraged. Her films often focus on a select number of characters, most notably the family unit and focuses on the awkwardness or broken intimacy in their conversations. As David Forrest notes, these works often capture British class dynamics, but in a very subtle manner. He writes that “Hogg’s realist [films] adopt narrationally loose and ambiguous formal and aesthetic strategies to utilise space, place and landscape as signifiers of contemporary isolation” (2014: 65). Thus, Hogg’s film uses the audio-visual medium to capture the ways that characters are unable to communicate about the social, political and cultural experiences they have. In terms of the sound design, Hogg’s films often centre around quiet conversations between individuals. While Hogg wrote the dialogue and encouraged a intimate direction of the way that it was recorded, the film’s sound design was created by Jovan Adjer. Hogg notes in an interview that all the dialogue was recorded by hidden lapel microphones: “I also wanted the sound to be recorded up close, while the camera keeps a distance, again to give a greater feeling of intimacy” (Kino Lorber, 2010). Adjer also notes that in his process of developing the film’s soundscape, he wanted to forgo the use of incidental music, and instead focus on the natural harmony in the place they were shooting: “I wanted to explore the idea of birdsong and communication. When the Leighton family are not talking to each other, birds can be heard chattering outside” (Kino Lorber, 2010). Thus, the sound design inherently focuses on what is being said, and what is not being said by its main characters.

The film uses a soundtrack of idyllic noises, mixed loudly to draw attention to the viewer that this holiday retreat on an island is a peaceful place for only the upper class to inhabit. In nearly every scene, the film foregrounds the sounds from the outdoors (bird calls, ocean waves,

leaves shaking in the wind) that become louder between the silences in the family members' conversation. It is as if these sounds are there to remind the audience that this is a peaceful retreat, and there is no need to get upset over any awkwardness between them, as they are in such a peaceful environment, reserved and gated from any outside community. This notion is evident in the film's opening scene (from 1:10-3:00), where a helicopter lands on a pad nearby the retreat showing Edward leaving the flight to greet his family. The sound of a helicopter is traditionally understood as overwhelmingly loud, or disturbing to a landscape, but the sounds of bird chirps and wave sounds are heard equally, in rhythm to the chopping blades of the helicopter. The film immediately suggests that even the most disturbing noises can be made peaceful when one is able to afford residence in an idyllic island. It indicates that the affective experience of being an upper-class person is one of comfort, where the sounds around oneself will adjust to be heard as comfortable.

Even though the natural sounds are inherently quite soothing, the audience cannot help but notice the lack of conversation happening between the characters who have just reunited and sense the strain that exists between the family members. As the family settles into the cottage, there are sudden sparks of loudness amongst silent conversation. This is seen in Cynthia loudly complaining that her room is not a private building apart from the holiday retreat (at 4:21), or Patricia gasping as she expects her wine to be brought to her by the cooks she assumes to be maids (at 7:32), or both Patricia and Cynthia later joking together about the unanticipated small size of their rooms at the dinner table (at 1:05:35). These sudden loud events in these scenes are awkward, as they not only disrupt the quiet activity in the film's soundtrack, but they serve to make it clear that they are used to a life of luxury, and expect certain privileges without voicing what they desire, and are out of pace with the lives that Edward and the other hired help live.

Edward is typically the character who regulates the conversation and returns the volumes back to a normal and comfortable level. In these three examples mentioned, Edward is the one to regulate the conversation through changing the subject or interrupting his mother's classist thoughts. While this can initially be assumed to be the family settling into a cottage with a slight degree of difficulty, it becomes clear that this foregrounding of vocal excess caused by Patricia and Cynthia are more than just a discomfort, but a symbol that they have a vision of what being an upper-class individual involves that Edward does not share.

Archipelago is not about one family member easing awkward tensions, but rather a film about how the insistence of appearing as upper class threatens communication between upper-class individuals. Through the sound design in scenes where the family is painting and rambling, the film aligns itself with Edward's perspective, where the audience senses how loud his family are being in their instructions to their hired help (such as at 24:27), and how they vocalise their expectations of what is deserved by them (such as when Patricia comments on the lack of good food in the restaurant at 46:31 or when Cynthia comments on how the house is not as weather-proof as she would like at 40:23). In all these instances, their needs halt all conversation – Edward only joins in the conversation if someone has directly asked him a question, and the hired help are silenced through the loud dialogue.

Even though Edward is from this upper-class family, it is revealed that he wants to separate himself from his inherited wealth, and make it on his own, denying his own inheritance. Through focussing the sound design on his and the hired help's perspectives, the film frames how the working class interact with the upper class, and how they are forced to remain silent, while the wealthy gate (and thus isolate) themselves in a certain perspective. This is seen in Edward's discussions with Rose (Amy Lloyd), a cook that Patricia has hired to assist in the

family's meals (at 18:46, 39:12, or 44:30, for example). They speak at the same level, taking equal times to speak, as if Edward is seeing her as more than just an assistant for their family, and part of the same social class. Patricia and Cynthia notice that Edward is straying from the social circle he was born within, and interrupt conversations they have by talking loudly, or making noise to prevent them from talking (heard when they throw rocks at a sea sculpture at 30:52, or when Patricia physically halts Edward from speaking and loudly reminds to let the hired help do all the work at 1:06:40). In Patricia's view, Edward should not be speaking to someone who is of a different class and should expect Rose to clean up after them. This difference in perspective only increases when the family goes for a picnic (at 26:00). Friendly discussion turns to silent glares as Edward begins to talk about his plans to take a year off and move to Africa to get involved in charity work. His mother and sister loudly interrupt him, saying that they believe Edward's pursuit is a "lost cause" and do not understand why he would want to leave his home country. After they make this remark, Edward sits and finishes his meal in silence. The natural sounds of the waves hitting the beach they are sitting on become excruciating to listen to, as it goes on for another minute after Cynthia's and Patricia's interruptions and serves to highlight the unsaid tensions between the family over how they perceive their class boundaries.

A rift emerges between Edward and his family, and a silence begins as they feel they cannot communicate with each other over their perceived differences. Philosopher Haig Khatchadourian debates the type of silence Edward is experiencing in his book on how the mind processes and perpetuates silence, especially regarding social issues such as class. He writes that there are two types of ethics to people's willingness to speak out about things that are bothering them – there are those who believe that they possess a "duty to speak up [about socially

uncomfortable topics] if and when [they] ha[ve] a special obligation to do so,” (2015: 136) and those who feel they are “only responsible for [their] own ‘projects,’” not also for the projects of others, including those into which we are drawn by coercion or other circumstances beyond our control” (2015: 138). Khatchadourian maintains that when these two types of people meet, there comes an “analog” of silence, as both people are fundamentally unable to understand how the other’s thinking process plays out, and that they must agree that the only way to communicate and maintain their relationship is to not communicate at all. In these scenes, it is clear that Edward is the former type of person that Khatchadourian elaborates on, and Patricia and Cynthia are the latter. Edward’s silence therefore emerges as he does not want to risk losing his family and isolating himself further. He retreats to silence as a means of avoiding having a difficult conversation about the differences in privilege that he and his family have become accustomed to. Although Patricia and Cynthia try to silence Edward, Rose, and the other hired help, they too are stuck in this dynamic, as they cannot effectively communicate that their lifestyle is the best and are isolating themselves in their privileged perspective.

These tensions further develop as Edward decides to keep away from his family, as he does not want to mediate his discomforts over how they should behave. Patricia and Cynthia feel threatened by this, feeling as if Edward is inviting the lower classes into their upper-class space. They ignore Rose when she joins them on their remaining family excursions (at 1:01:27), seeing her only as an assistant to their leisure, and eventually scold Edward when he invites her to the dinner table (at 44:30). Adam Jaworski posits that this awkward silence occurs when the upper class confronts social injustice in wealth distribution, stating that it is “normal” for the upper class to act in this way, as they understand that it is acceptable for injustice to exist (1993: 109). They acknowledge that there is nothing they can do to change the status quo of their comfortable

existence, where they self-perpetuate a silence that is “particularly well suited for political manipulation of others, on a personal level, as well as on a societal level” (1993: 109). This presents itself in this context through upper-class characters using enclosures and gates to keep the noise of the other classes outside, as to keep up the appearance of their domestic bliss. As a result, the fact that the family members lose their ability to communicate with each other on a personal level is not just due to the fact that there are strains on their personal relationship. Rather, this tension occurs because of the barriers that exist in terms of class which make it difficult for them to acknowledge the isolation they experience as a result of their social stratification. This strain continues throughout the film, as Edward reveals that this mistreatment of those who are of a lower class than them is a regular event within his family, as they did not permit his working-class girlfriend to join this family retreat because they did not approve of her “lifestyle” and “look” (at 1:11:37). Patricia and Cynthia attempt a form of sonic gating, by telling Rose and all other assistants to leave the room as this is a “family matter” (when they ultimately do not want Edward to have any support in his argument when he confronts them), then loudly asserting that his girlfriend is “not family” and would not enjoy the activities they were doing together. Although these may appear vague criticisms of Edward’s choice in partner, the film emphasises that these tensions are about class differences, through the ways in which Cynthia and Patricia control the soundscape. They speak loudly, they clink their glasses as they drink, and bang their feet on the floor. The only noise Edward is able to make is through his eating, scraping his cutlery against the plate to create an uncomfortable sonic resistance to their talking. It is his only defence against this sea of noise.

The following dinner scene shows Edward and his family giving up any attempt at communication entirely, as they all use their cutlery to make noise, and cut each other off when

they try to speak about their uncertainty over class – when Edward speaks of not knowing his place in the upper class, he is interrupted by Cynthia’s complaints over food quality, then Edward silences Cynthia through squeaking his chair uncomfortably (at 1:15:51). They each realise that communication on this topic is futile, and resort to silencing each other’s voices, then leave when they cannot be heard. This is further reinforced by the camera remaining steady, and where their muttering becomes further inaudible as each of them leave. In the following day, the nature sounds dominate the soundtrack as they all go about their days doing their planned activities alone.

In this scene, the film is establishing that if each character were to recognise these class differences and begin a conversation about Edward’s desires to live outside of the world of his privilege, they would need to begin to understand the worlds that are outside their wealth, and the social consequences of their way of being. Much in a similar way that Khatchadourian has described, the best way to keep a line of communication is to decide to stay silent on specific topics, such as class. The way that Patricia and Cynthia are behaving is expected of their class status, as sociologists Harriet Bradley and Gail Hebson posit. In their definition of what class is, they write that “[c]lass is not a property of an individual; nor should it be seen as a category into which an individual can be allocated. Rather, class should be viewed as a nexus of relations from social arrangements by which societies organise” (1999: 196). Thus, the boundaries of what constitutes an upper-class existence comes through what social relations are made (through a financial privilege) and the maintenance of a way of social life. They write that the upper class use a type of social “force field” between themselves and the lower classes, where inequalities are meant to remain unacknowledged and unspoken by all upper-class individuals, so they appear unaware of all inequalities, while they maintain their activities that allow for inequalities

to exist (1999: 197). This force field works also works as a form of sensory gating, in which the upper class (represented here by Cynthia and Patricia) use silence to avoid any discussion of how their existence perpetuates the exclusion of others from living a life of happiness. When Edward struggles to accept their way of being, they cannot acknowledge it and risk losing their way of life, so they remain silent. Thus, within this film, the decision to remain silent about the existing differences in class perspectives is not just to keep the family from separating, but also about keeping those who do not conform to the expected upper-class lifestyle (where privilege remains unspoken and unacknowledged) silent.

Although the film ends with the family eventually apologising to each other, silence continues to be used as a means to highlight the wealth gap and how the family do not understand the worlds outside their own privilege. They each leave the island individually, not speaking to one another as they leave. The film ends as it begins, through highlighting natural sounds with a helicopter taking off (at 1:48:05). In this helicopter scene, the sounds of the helicopter become loud and uncomfortable to listen to, as they are now out of rhythm with the natural sounds, where the loud chopping of the blades drowns out the sense of harmony of the birds chirping and the waves crashing. It is clear that the natural harmony between the family (and, indeed, the upper class) has been disrupted. The use of an uncomfortable silence continues throughout this film to its very last shot, as this unbreakable “force field” of silence must be maintained by Cynthia and Patricia, and each family member does not know how to go forward knowing their lifestyle has been challenged.

In *Archipelago*'s use of silence, it is clear that all lines of communication between family members have been severed and that the characters' differing perspectives on class relationships are responsible. *Archipelago* demonstrates an evolution of the British upper class, where the

tropes of the heritage film are reinterpreted for the modern era, putting the role of silence at the forefront of a class issue. Like the heritage film, there is a focus on the personal dynamics between family members who all have massive amounts of wealth. But this film updates this for the contemporary upper class, captures and questions consensus framing, by making characters who are not to be sympathised with, as they perpetuate the force field of silence to ensure that their wealth will never be questioned.

2. The Subtle Class Dynamics Of *Swimmer* (2012)

Swimmer is a short film, directed by Lynne Ramsay, with a simple plot: a young and unnamed swimmer (Tom Litten) goes for an endurance swim in an idyllic area in Britain and observes the lives of the people around him as he continues his journey to the end. The film has very little dialogue and often uses experimental sound effects to reflect the inner experiences of the person on-screen. It is also shot in black and white, and features costuming from Victorian, Edwardian, and modern eras. Due to this approach, this film may appear to have nothing to do with class politics and could be argued to be too experimental to reveal any accurate portrayal of reality. Yet, I contend that *Swimmer* fits into the genre of experiential realism as the use of sound in this film demonstrates the difference felt between the classes. This class antagonism is especially heard in how the film's soundscapes reflect the hostility of the upper class on those who want to intrude on the serenity of their spheres. Like *Archipelago*, it shows what happens when individuals attempt to break the force fields of silence in a literal manner. In the next section, I examine *Swimmer*'s sound design and its contribution to the theme of voicelessness between the upper and working classes.

Before we delve into how the sound design is constructed, it is worth assessing how *Swimmer* was produced, and how it asserts its place in the British realist film canon, despite its

experimental façade. First, it is worth noting that this is the only short within this project, and it is the only film to not name any of its characters. It was not designed to be a narrative film with a grander message about class dynamics, but a short film designed to promote a vision of Britain on an international stage, as it was one of four films co-commissioned by BBC Films, Film4, and the Organising Committee of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games and shown on BBC television before the Olympic opening ceremony. As it is described, this film is a “poetic exploration” of a “journey framed by a soundtrack of seminal British music, combined with a sound tapestry of hydrophonic recordings and snippets of bankside conversations” to give a “real feel for the diversity of landscape and people of Britain” (Brydon, 2021: 153). It was directed by Lynne Ramsay, a director most known for her work in Scotland, such as *Ratcatcher* (1999) and *Morvern Callar* (2002) as well as Hollywood co-productions like *We Need To Talk About Kevin* and *You Were Never Really Here* (2017). Her films often do not delve with class, but rather individual psychology to “explore notions of displaced identity” and “nostalgia for one’s past,” whether it is a woman assuming her deceased lover’s identity and rejecting her Scottish home in *Morvern Callar*, or a boy being thrown out of his home due to his family’s poverty in *Ratcatcher* (Chick, 2016: 2). These films often use first-person perspectives, showing a individual character’s “stream-of consciousness” as they process traumatic events. In *Swimmer*, this stream-of-consciousness is rendered literally, as its protagonist swims across a land and takes in his environment, and uses the first person perspective many times to indicate his reflections. Its sound design was composed by Paul Davies, who composed the sound design for this film based on a list of British songs suggested by Lynne Ramsay. As cinematographer Natasha Braier notes, “the treatment [of the film] was a piece of art in itself, with poetry and links to click so [the cinematographer and sound designer] could listen to these British songs [Lynne Ramsay] wanted

to use. This was quite impressionistic, based on feelings of Britishness” (British Cinematographer, 2012). It is thus a film that was funded as a type of exploration of the British figure, but, as we will see through its sound design, makes a comment on how the upper class has a great deal of control over who is heard and not heard in British society.

Most of the film is shot from the point of view of the swimmer himself, bobbing above and below the surface of the water. There is barely any ambient sound in its most traditional sense of being a quiet track that accompanies the dialogue and consists of expected sounds heard in a recognisable environment played at a realistic level. The sounds heard in the soundtrack are instead mixed to be louder than usual, which in turn, encourages the audience to take up subject position with the swimmer. For example, he begins in a wetlands-like area (at 0:05), weaving his way through the weeds. The sounds of the film are diegetic and recognisable – such as water rippling as the swimmer does a front stroke and the wind blowing against his face. Yet, these sounds are mixed rather loudly, challenging what is familiar to the audience. We are placed within the perspective of this individual character, who serves as the working-class British person who is very observant of his social circumstances around him.

The film makes commentary on the political and the social events in Britain through its use of dialogue and music. The sound design of this film is especially worth noting, as it often borrows sound clips from critically canonised British social realist works. For example, when the swimmer enters a cave (at 8:05), he hears a woman saying “I’m sorry to bother you. We’re lost.” This is not just merely dialogue, but an inserted audio clip from the film *Walkabout* (1971). Such clips return when the swimmer is walking by himself through a carnival (at 10:43), where a sound clip plays almost as if it were mimicking his internal dialogue: “It’s hard to understand. All I know is that you’ve got to run, run without knowing why, through fields and woods. And

the winning post's no end, even though barmy crowds might be cheering themselves daft. That's what the loneliness of the long-distance runner feels like." This is a clip from *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* (dir. Tony Richardson, 1962). While these are just two examples, small musical clips from *Billy Liar* (dir. John Schlesinger, 1963) are heard, (at 9:07) as well as drumbeats from *Lord of the Flies* (dir. Peter Brook, 1963) (at 0:43). Within the film, most of the dialogue comprises inserts from other films, with only a few passing exchanges of original dialogue. Thus, from these sound design choices, it is clear that the swimmer is debating his place amongst the British landscape but is also placed directly into the cyclical nature of the social realist British film – that class is fixed, and working-class characters who transpose boundaries will remain alone and in poverty. There is a sense that the people he is encountering are classed, just as the characters in the films whose dialogue the film is copying are. More crucially, they are living in a cyclical world in which new dialogue becomes impossible. This makes it clear that the swimmer is a working-class character, working through the same challenges as the echoed characters he is encountering.

While the use of borrowed sound is fascinating and worthy of studying, this notion of politics becomes especially evident in the exchanges the swimmer has with others around him. The swimmer sees a man fishing in the river as he listens to a radio (at 4:13). He makes no comment of the swimmer, but a distorted version of the English patriotic hymn "I Vow to Thee My Country," is heard as he fishes. As the swimmer progresses on his expedition, it becomes clear that not only is this film about the relationships between British people, but also about the idea that the British upper-class desires to isolate themselves from the world around them, creating idyllic spaces of silence protected by a social system of enclosure.

This type of enclosure becomes evident in the following shots, as the swimmer enters an idyllic territory inhabited by boys who are meant to represent the upper class. The scene begins as the swimmer enters a clearing in the body of water which appears to be in the middle of a forest (at 5:57). The water is much calmer than it was in the previous wetlands. He moves forward, with the sounds of the waves and the bird calls surrounding him, creating a comforting audio experience for the first time in the film. Yet, like *Archipelago*, there is something much more sinister about how the film captures nature – specifically in the dark and contrasted cinematography, but also natural soundscapes, as they represent the privileges of the upper class. The notion of class makes its next appearance through its representation of those who are inhabiting the area. While the people he initially encountered saw him in the noisy wetlands but ignored him, those who inhabit these peaceful natural spaces see him as an outside threat. As the swimmer advances, a group of boys dressed in tuxedos and flashy badges appear wandering through the forested area at the same pace. They are first presented wandering and looking intensely at the area as if they know it intimately (at 6:29). As these boys hear bird calls, they respond to them and begin a sort of conversation with the birds, expecting the environment around them to appear a certain way. In this action, they are surveying the area as if it belongs to them. Thus, it is apparent that as landowners (or, the entitled children of landowners) they are meant to represent the upper class who want to keep their areas to themselves. While the swimmer takes in the soothing sound of the bird calls, the film highlights that the swimmer is not part of this social grouping of the upper class. The swimmer is making splashing noises as he swims along (heard at 6:38), which makes the bird calls more difficult to understand and differentiate. The film cuts to a series of close-ups of each of the boys as they stare at him, the sounds of splashes becoming more intense. As these splashes get louder, the boys look confused

as to why the swimmer has passed into their territory. He is marked as not being part of the class that the boys belong to as he is not wearing their flashy accessories, and making noise in an environment in an area that they deem as silent, and theirs. They slam down sticks in the ground as they mark their territory, and the swimmer clearly is taking advantage of their property. Thus, the swimmer is marked as a working-class character as he is not one of them. The swimmer slows his pace, enjoying the atmosphere around him, but is continuing to make noise. The sound begins to shift to an uncomfortable high-pitch frequency (akin to a distorted tinnitus) as the swimmer meets the gaze of the boys around him (at 6:55). One of the boys points a bow and arrow and starts shooting at him. The distorted noise becomes more aggressive as more of the boys follow suit and shoot their arrows at him and the screams of the children become progressively louder. Eventually, the swimmer moves towards the other side of this area and escapes (at 7:53). Then, a wide shot of the swimmer reveals he is leaving the area behind him, the shot becomes bright, as if artificial lights have been turned on, as the boys continue to survey the area as before.

What this scene demonstrates is how the lands owned by the upper class are fiercely protected in the name of serenity. Sociologist Ellen Meiksins Wood terms this type of protection “enclosure” and writes that it means that the upper class make their properties exactly to their likings, and create well-protected boundaries so they are “not only private, but *exclusive*” (2002: 108. Emphasis original). This in turn suggests that enclosure is “not simply a physical fencing of land but the extinction of common and customary use rights on which many people depend for their livelihood” (2002: 108). Wood believes that this type of enclosure is unique to the English upper class, as there is a “clearer separation between the political, coercive powers of the state and the exploitative powers of the propertied classes” in England, where the property owners are

difficult to hold to account for their actions. Using Wood's ideas, it is clear that the boys enclosed the areas they have cultivated as their own and want to eliminate anyone who is tempted to threaten this serenity. Looking specifically at the soundscape of this scene, the film is indicating that the upper class constructs social barriers around their areas and defend their right to enjoy their territory at any cost necessary. When the swimmer retreats to a dark and uncertain territory, only then does harmony return to the area.

The final theme worth acknowledging in this film is how the soundtrack highlights the sensual dangers of living as a perceived stranger in Britain, and how the upper class will, through sensory gating, make the individual feel as if they are unwelcome. After the swimmer leaves the comfortable area, the soundtrack is composed of an orchestration that is mostly non-harmonious (a synthesizer hitting random chords at random moments), and by splashes as he thrashes in the water, swimming in an uncontrolled manner (at 8:12-10:40). The cacophony of these sounds together displays that the swimmer is worrying that he is disruptive to the regular flow of society. He encounters various individuals in a city area, who all stare at him and gesture him to leave as he is causing disruption in their lives by being too loud. This notion of an unwelcoming upper class is seen in a couple in designer clothing who are sharing an intimate moment, hear the swimmer entering their area, then yell at him inaudibly to leave as the score becomes multiple violins enter, playing discordantly. He is not welcome by any upper-class figure (such as the ones who scowl at him at 4:30 or at 8:30), and his only hope is to press forward and hope for a place he can be welcomed, and his sensations return to normal. He never achieves this sensation, always hearing dissonant sounds that cannot be interpreted as peaceful. The swimmer comes to understand that he now has no meaningful way to connect with those around him and thus no way to fit himself into the social tapestry around him. He is rejected from properties outside his

class status, he becomes unsure of himself to the point in which he cannot meaningfully connect, or even experience a comfortable audible sensation, with any other atmosphere or social circle. Like *Archipelago*, this film starts with the idyllic sounds of British nature, to convey the expected peace that the upper class has. But they also end in the disruption of natural soundscapes, indicating how the upper class gates and protects their spaces so fiercely, that they are willing to attack and silence anyone who wants to claim space within it. Thus, the sounds heard in *Swimmer* establish that in Britain, the lands occupied by the upper class have become so protected and hostile to intruders, that they are becoming isolated from others.

3. The End of Romance or The Beginning of Class Tension? Reviewing *45 Years* (2016)

Directed and written by Andrew Haigh in 2016, *45 Years* surrounds the married life of Geoff (Tom Courtenay) and Kate Mercer (Charlotte Rampling), an older couple living in a small village in Norfolk. They are about to make plans to celebrate their forty-fifth wedding anniversary, when they receive a letter declaring that the body of Geoff's former lover, Katya, who disappeared in 1962, has been found. The rest of the film follows Geoff as he returns to his past as a youth involved in working-class causes and the fervently upper-class Kate as she learns more about Geoff's previous life and wonders who he actually is. This is Andrew Haigh's second feature film (after *Weekend* [2011]), where he further develops his style of "observational realism" which Andrew Moor argues is Haigh's unique combining of natural realism with attention to emotional and sensory reactions (2018: 5). This is Haigh's method of "captur[ing] everyday lives in ways that 'feel authentic. Though the governing aesthetic is naturalistic, they are [...] inscribed within them various reactions that comment on the process of image creation and on the significance of subcultural heritage" (Moor, 2018: 5). This observational realism is thus much like experiential realism, and is especially evident in the soundtrack of *45 Years*. The

film often uses sound as a means of storytelling, as key sounds are employed as means of revealing what is going on in the minds of the film's main characters. Writing in *Sight & Sound*, journalist Roger Clarke notes that *45 Years* plunges the audience into an "aural landscape" representing the worlds of Geoff and Kate, and emphasises the key moments in the film's plot: "from the opening noise of a slide projector working in the darkness [...] to the hummed tune of *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes* as she takes the fateful letter from the postman, all the sounds make for subtle emotional influence" (2017). The film's sound design was composed by Joakim Sundström, who chose not to include any score, but included many love songs (such as The Turtles' "Happy Together," and the Moody Blues' "Go Now,") being played in uncomfortable ways (through skipping record players, out-of-tune humming, and static on the radio. The use of sound is inherently tied with that of emotion, and thus, the affect becomes a primary way to understand how these differences in perspectives between Geoff and Kate are manifested. This effect is made manifest through shots that often hold on the facial emotions of the actors, and the minimal use of props throughout the films. While this film uses sounds in key moments to emphasise what is occurring in the lives of the characters, the film strategically and simultaneously employs silence to emphasise the breakdown in communication between Geoff and Kate, and how their perceived differences in class will never permit them to repair it.

Although Geoff and Kate never speak in direct terms about their differences in class, it is evident that this allows their relationship to be driven apart. While this could be understood as a failure in communication over a sudden stressful event in Geoff and Kate's romantic relationship, the film continues to explore how Geoff and Kate's differences are not only due to a previous intimate connection but arise from the fact that Geoff and Kate possess fundamentally different values and exist in two different class spheres. Adam Jaworski discusses how the

breakdown of communication between two people can not only be a conscious choice made between two individuals but is often representative of larger societal tensions. In his introduction to silence as a concept, he writes “it is possible to identify situations in which silence allows keeping the channel of communication open for future encounters between two or more people, while speech may be felt to endanger the continuation of a relationship” (1993: 50). As in *Archipelago*, refusing to communicate with a person from another class causes the upper-class character to feel as if they can maintain stability. In a later chapter, he implies that this conscious choice to be silent operates as a response to “the ambiguous state of individuals,” or as a reaction to a previously unperceived otherness (1993: 153). He explains that “[t]he more different another person appears to be from one's self, the more profound will be the silence of puzzlement, embarrassment, or anticipation of disambiguation of the situation” (1993: 135). Thus, Jaworski believes that, when people are confronted with differences in social perceptions (such as class), silences emerge as a result of the inability to understand what the other is. If this difference appears in the middle of an existing relationship, the two people may choose to remain silent and avoid talking about their perceived differences to save their relationship. As will become clear, this choice of silence is first a conscious decision taken by Geoff and Kate to maintain the status quo of normality, but quickly becomes isolating for both. It becomes evident that Kate is accustomed to the busy social spheres of leisure and relaxation of the upper class, while Geoff possesses working-class heritage that he displaced when he married Kate. Thus, in studying how class-based silence plays a role in Geoff and Kate’s relationship, we are able to see how the upper-class character chooses to be silent to create a boundary of safety, but at the same time, violently denies the existence of working-class experiences.

After being reminded of Katya, Geoff re-explores his previous relationship with her with the items left behind from their relationship, and other items from his youth. This includes a vinyl rock record and books he forgot he owned (seen and heard at 14:15), as well as perfume she wore (such as at 1:12:19). Through interacting with these items, he shifts his stance, going from being quiet and reserved to be louder and more outspoken. The beginning of the strife seeps in sonically when Geoff is listening to a rock record at a loud volume when he is home alone (in the scene starting at 14:31). Kate is confused as this is noise she is not used to. She sees Geoff listening to this record and tries to connect by asking why Geoff is acting so “out of the ordinary,” but Geoff does not respond in a kind manner and yells back at Kate she would “not understand” the type of music he is listening to. Kate looks at him surprised that he would behave in this way, as he typically enjoys the same quiet classical music she enjoys. This sonic strife continues later in the film (at 27:35), when Geoff discusses what he has learned about climate change (from one of the books Katya gave him) as they drive. The shot is of the outside of the car, where the focus is on neither of them, but rather the silence between them as Geoff tries hard to relate his thoughts. As Geoff relates the book to proletarian thinking, the shot awkwardly acknowledges Kate’s silence, feeling unable to connect to these thoughts. Eventually, she interrupts, dismisses Geoff’s thoughts as nonsense, then changes the topic of conversation.

In these two examples, there is silence on both sides of the partnership. Even though Geoff is playing music too loudly, he responds to Kate by silencing her as he feels she would not enjoy the type of sounds he likes to engage with, and thus it is not worth explaining it to her. When he eventually reaches out to Kate about his book, it becomes clear that the silence that Kate employs is signalling she is not just upset at Geoff for his sudden interest in the items of his former partner, but she is also confused that he is interested in items that she does not

understand. To Kate, the rock record is too loud for her taste, and Geoff's rambling about climate change ideas are not applicable to her ideals. She feels that Geoff is now from another world – or more specifically – from another class. The silence that manifests here highlights not only the differences between Geoff and Kate as they realise that their interests do not match, and that their life experiences are much different than they previously anticipated. Yet, this is only the first instance of Geoff and Kate's distance. This rift continues as Geoff becomes more involved in his previous life and Kate learns more about who Geoff was before they married.

While there are many examples of Kate feeling distanced from Geoff, there is an equal number of instances in which Geoff feels at a distance from Kate. When Kate schedules a lunch at a lavish café with Geoff and her family friends in an attempt to lure him back to his usual upper-class interests (in the scene starting at 29:13), Geoff begins to realise that he does not belong in such a lifestyle. While Kate and their friends talk about expensive leisure activities, Geoff does not respond. While their conversations first sound normal, the voice tracks begin to overlap (as if time was being displaced) as Geoff looks away from the table. From this sound cue, it is clear that their conversations have become overwhelming to listen to, and he can no longer find any meaningful connection with it. He does not recognise what time it is anymore, nor who he is in a confident way. Eventually, the sounds become unbearable to listen to, as the camera focuses in on Geoff's expression of ambivalence, much in the same fashion that Kate did not respond to the book about climate change. The overlapping voices begin to fade out as a sound of a strong wind is then heard. While this is the first use of the sound in the film, it becomes representative of Geoff's mental process, as he wants to disconnect from this upper-class existence and return to his previous lower-class life. Like Edward in *Archipelago*, Geoff has a crisis related to his identity and wants to imagine himself elsewhere, away from the spheres

of the upper class. After a few seconds of the wind sounds, the soundtrack goes to complete silence as Geoff's face continues to look bored. The camera then pans over to Kate, who notices that Geoff is bored with the discussion, and the rift continues to grow. She does not want to start a fight in front of their friends, keep up the appearance that all is well in their relationship, and not disturb the quiet bliss of their upper-class lives, so she remains silent. Geoff begins to stop communicating with Kate altogether, as seen when a friend informs Kate of Geoff's retreat from their lunches together (at 54:23), or when he becomes a no-show at a charity gala (at 44:18). Geoff opts to remain silent over his disinterest in maintaining an upper-class lifestyle and retreats, instead of discussing these tensions with his life partner.

As Anne Rutherford notes, speech between two individuals with different experience is "marked by dissociation" and silence represents a forced "lack of understanding" (2013: 88). She continues to posit that "the repression or protective blocking of affect— can strike the sensitive listener/viewer with a sense of that absence— of the sucking in of energy around the abyss" (2013: 88). Thus, to apply this process to this example, the discussion of class has become a taboo that can never be mentioned. They both block their affective responses to each other, choosing to remain in silence rather than discuss their issues. Again, by remaining silent, the film confirms that both characters no longer recognise the other, and thus refuse to emotionally relate to each other.

But these silences are not just to maintain a romantic relationship. In the final quarter of the film, they act as boundaries as Kate and Geoff's relationship turns aggressive. When Kate takes Geoff to a meeting of his union heads at the factory where he previously worked, they barely speak in the car, apart from Geoff talking about how excited he is to see some of his socialist friends (at 53:02). Even though the sounds are mixed rather quietly, Kate is

overwhelmed by the noise of the machinery around her as she approaches the factory. She does not feel comfortable around the factory and feels as if she is no longer in control of what she is listening to. She feels as if Geoff is plunging her into sensations she does not want, and this is a form of aggression. After Geoff leaves, she expresses this frustration by loudly playing classical music at home (at 54:54). This is an aggression that goes both ways in the argument, as in a later scene where they are in the car (at 1:04:11), Geoff complains about the slipping standards of union solidarity, and how labour has become more dangerous since he was working, thus blocking out Kate's radio program. Annoyed with Geoff's complaints, Kate vents her frustrations by turning on the radio and turns up the classical music to an uncomfortable level, tuning Geoff out. Thus, Kate uses noise as a means to silence Geoff and the causes she does not understand or want to hear about. She wants to instead listen to the sounds she is used to – sounds of the upper-class worlds she understands and finds more comfort in. Thus, the silence between them becomes more pronounced and is used as an aggressive tactic to assert that the class status they identify with as the most correct. As heard in *Swimmer*, sound as violence is used to silence those who disrupt the peaceful harmony of an upper-class environment. The conscious decision they took to keep their silences has now become overwhelming, as they use silence as a weapon against each other.

This aggression between the two has become representative of the aggression that the upper class has towards those who attempt to dissuade them of their lifestyles. The use of sound and silence in the film's final scene is extremely telling of the foregone conclusion that the differences in class perspective have become irreparable. In the film's ending shots, Geoff and Kate are dancing at their anniversary party (in the scene starting at 1:24:38). Though the music is playing quite loudly, the film highlights the lack of communication between them. As the song

finishes, it becomes more reverberated in its quality, making the lyrics difficult to understand (at 1:28:42). The song becomes more echoed as Kate pulls her hand away in repulsion, overwhelmed by the difference she realises in the man she is dancing with. The film's final shot is of Kate's face as the song fades out to complete silence. Here, it is clear that Kate and Geoff's relationship is doomed, as the song reflects Kate's inability to connect with the man (and, indeed, the love song) she once connected so strongly to. As the film has previously highlighted, this decision to remain silent about their class differences was initially one to keep the status quo and maintain the image of a happy relationship. Yet, this choice to remain silent has become too isolating and uncomfortable to remain in for Kate as she feels alone in a world without the upper-class version of Geoff she once knew. Through its final shot showing Kate upset and alone, listening to a distorted version of a song she once connected so deeply with, the film reveals the emptiness of the upper-class spheres once communications have ceased with those from other social circles.

Thus, in a similar way to *Archipelago* and *Swimmer*, the use of sound in *45 Years* represents how the upper class have become so divided from the other classes. From the use of sound in this film, it is clear that the dissolution of Geoff and Kate's relationship represents something much larger than the end of a romantic affair. This film represents how class difference isolates individuals from those they are closest to, to the point where communications end and silence dominates the conversation.

IV. Conclusion: The Silence Of The Upper Class

From this summary, it is clear that the heritage film has developed into questioning exactly what the classed heritage of Britain is. It is now developing into a subgenre of the experiential realist new wealth film, where sound design is used to reflect who is given the

privilege to speak, how these characters work to silence others, and question why these characters choose to remain isolated and silent. These films emphasise the perception of silence to demonstrate that the material wealth of the upper-class worlds is not attractive. They also do not glamourise the lifestyles of the characters within these environments. As an audience, we no longer get to experience the aesthetic pleasures of being wealthy as, in the most contemporary version of the experiential realist new wealth genre, the soundscapes are being used to question whether the lives of wealthy individuals are desirable. Consensus framing is no longer present, as this genre uses sound and affect to ponder how much we are able to sympathise with characters who gate their wealth and choose isolation rather than active communication with others in their communities. Usually, silence is represented in cinematic worlds as a luxury for powerful characters, as it demonstrates that they have complete control over the soundscapes they are in. In terms of class, the upper class often achieves this silence by exercising their privilege to silence the world around them. Yet, in analysing the soundscapes present in these three experiential realist works, it is clear to see that the silence is no longer a luxury, but rather a condition of their isolation from the rest of society. In order to protect their wealth, they must gate themselves off, but in turn, they have no one left to communicate with. The upper class enacts silence in two ways – they both violently ensure that anyone who threatens their way of being will be quiet, and they also silence their own voices to ensure that no one challenges their way of being.

When listening to the soundscapes of *Archipelago*, *Swimmer*, and *45 Years*, silence is operating in a much larger way to reflect how the upper class has become isolated in their own worlds. Silence has then come to reflect how the upper class is moving further away from other social worlds and are becoming increasingly unable to communicate, becoming only more

violent over time. Schulz and Hay describe that the upper class is becoming invisible and inaudible in the contemporary era to avoid confronting the taboo of their wealth. And such is the case for these characters, who render themselves and those around them silent so the topic may never be discussed. In analysing the sounds heard (and not heard) in these works, it is clear that these worlds are increasingly uninhabitable, as the lines of communication are beginning to cease in a violent manner. Thus, all these characters are rendered voiceless, with no hope of revived communication.

Chapter 2: Music and The Middle Class

I. Capturing The Middle Class On Film

British film scholars have discussed three primary modes of popular filmmaking when it comes to studying the class system: the upper class is predominantly represented by the heritage film (as discussed in the previous chapter); and the working class is most frequently represented in gritty kitchen sink dramas (as will be discussed in the next chapter). There is a third genre, which uses dramatic narratives to survey the suburban lives of the British middle class, who fit in neither of these categories. While the first two of these filmmaking modes attract sizeable audiences, films about the middle class have also maintained a sense of popularity, even if they are not advertised as such. Film historian Amanda J. Field contends that “middle-class values [have become] inseparable from notions of Britishness,” as they have become a dominant part of the national imagination and their perceived economic stability has come to represent the health of the nation altogether (2015: 1). In these films, the social ladder becomes climbable, as they usually depict how working-class characters could (in adapting their behaviours and doing a small amount of extra labour) work to achieve a sense of financial comfort and the notion that they have a place within British society. Through these character arcs, these films encourage their audiences to learn the “indecorum of the speech, behaviour, actions and manners of those of a lower social rank” and come to accept that the social conduct of the working-class is inferior, and that one must strive to be a part of the upper class through adopting their behaviours (Neale and Krutnik, 1990: 86). These films about working-class characters achieving entrance to the middle class gained its popularity among movie-goers to the degree that it became its own genre. This genre began in the 1930s, with dramatic works such as *The Chance of a Night Time* (1931), or *Forget Me Not* (1936), which both frame characters adapting their behaviours to suit upper-

class social events. It can also include more overtly propagandic films such as *Listen to Britain* (1942), which use sound to demonstrate how, with good work and perseverance, a working-class individual could become middle class. This trend continues through the next decades, through the 1950s in films such as *Room At The Top* (1959), in the 1980s in films like *Educating Rita* (1983) and more recently in *Billy Elliot* (2000).¹⁶

As this genre developed, it represented not just the pleasures that come with financial stability, but also this process of social mobility. These films presented the social reality of Britain as a country that allowed its working class to remain upwardly mobile, always permitting its people to achieve higher social status with a certain degree of hard work. Because of this, film scholar Jeffrey Richards argues that these working-class audiences were “being programmed to accept the concepts of propriety and decorum that prevailed amid the lace curtains and porcelain teacups of suburbia” (1984: 106). As these plots remained popular in cinema, they began to borrow cinematographic traits from the social realist genre, as they attempted to present “real” working-class individuals and their environments, while still using these narratives of upward social mobility (Field, 2015: 6).

Thus, cinema about the middle class was established in Britain as a genre that celebrated those who laboured hard enough in etiquette and other traditional social values to achieve a higher-class status than they were originally born with. In fact, this version of middle-class cinema has become so dominant that it is now omnipresent, and its appealing status has become a status quo, where upward mobility is not glorified, but expected. Film scholar Paul Dave adds

¹⁶ Although, it should be acknowledged that there is a counter-tradition to such middle-class works. British New Wave films such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960) or *Billy Liar* (1963) critique the middle class through emphasising the routine and mundanity of their activities. There are also films that interrogate whether inclusion into a comfortable middle class is ever possible, seen in films like *Look Back in Anger* (1959) or *The Servant* (1963), which both feature characters who cannot fully acclimatise to the needs of the middle class.

to this discussion, when talking about how the cycle of Hollywood co-productions made in the 1990s and early 2000s reflect a “fairy tale” vision of England, where social mobility was possible for an individual so long as individuals ignored the collective needs of the working class (2006: 45). He posits that films about the middle class, such as *Sliding Doors* (1998) and *Bridget Jones’ Diary* (2001), portray the “fairy tale” of neo-liberal capitalism, showcasing the benefits of ignoring the collective need for better labour standards in the working class, the climbing of the social ladder through hard work, and the enjoyment of individualised professional success (2006: 45). As Roger Bromley notes in his essay on class in British cinema “The Theme That Dare Not Speak Its Name,” the middle class has become so ubiquitous in contemporary film that it becomes “almost entirely invisible” (2000: 53). In other words, middle-class ideology inherently requires that this class becomes normative, and part of a status quo. Bromley notes that, “although only in its decorative role, [...] part of the achievement of this bloc has been its ability to slip through the prevailing currencies – visual and narrative – of identity and representation” (2000: 53). As this image of middle-classness becomes so ubiquitous, it is worth assessing who exactly the middle class is, and to what degree this “fairy tale” still exists in the contemporary era of inequality post-Blair. This chapter will now review and define what the middle class is, suggest that it exists as a state of mind that individuals want to strive towards, then look at three examples from the experiential realist genre in which characters use music to control their affectual experiences of middle classness.

II. Defining The British Middle Class

Locating the middle class in Britain is nearly an impossible task, as class is always susceptible to change. Over the past few centuries, it came to existence, prospered, then its mere existence became the topic of debate. Looking to the late Victorian period, it is possible to see

the burgeoning of the middle class as a group who were not physical labourers, but also were not landowners or part of the factory managing elite.¹⁷ We are also able to observe an increased prosperity in workers as World War II came to an end and consumerism became a regular way of being.¹⁸ Today, the question of whether the middle class exists is a constantly debated topic in academic spheres, as the increasing wealth gap propelled by late capitalism and the technological revolution increasingly divides society between those who possess wealth and those who do not.¹⁹ In another sphere, academics have always debated how the middle class evolved in the contemporary social landscape. In this academic discourse, I believe there are two sides of this debate that are worth discussion. On the one hand, some historians believe that the middle class is a group of people who have established themselves historically and should be studied as economically and socially separate from the upper and working class. On the other hand, some sociologists posit that the middle class is not defined by income, but rather fashioned itself as a normative social set of goals which people want to adopt. To comprehend the middle class more fully, it is worth assessing both sides of this debate.

In order to understand the position of the former, let us examine the historical perspective of how the middle class was established as separate from the other classes. Historians like John Seed believe that the middle class is “distinguished from the landed aristocracy and the gentry by their need to generate an income from some kind of active occupation” (Seed, 1993: 36). Further, “they were distinguished from the labouring majority by their possession of property...and by their exemption from manual labour” (Seed, 1993: 36). While Seed’s analysis often focusses on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, historians Simon Gunn and Rachel Bell take Seed’s

¹⁷ For more on the development of the middle class in the Victorian period, see Adelman, 1984.

¹⁸ For more on how the middle class changed post-war, see Dechter and Elder, 2004.

¹⁹ For a further discussion of the wealth gap, discrimination and how it appears in contemporary employment, see Meghji, 2019; Standing, 2016; Mckenzie, 2015.

argument to the period of Thatcher and New Labour, where they posit that this is a class who earns a median income, and represents the “fixtures and fittings of English life” such as those who work in occupations in “parliament, the civil service [and] the grammar schools” (2002: 1). This vision is often defined as “middle England,” borrowing the term once used by Prime Minister John Major (2011: 1). Over the past two centuries, the social system becomes more equipped to serve the average person, and no longer just the landowning elite that benefitted so greatly in the pre-Victorian era. Gunn and Bell argue that the middle class does not necessarily exist as a group of people who have always had the same economic status, but that Britain’s social institutions have evolved through time to become tailored towards the needs of the imagined average income earner. In summary, what these historians suggest is that the middle class is established in history, and that, even if they are not always definable as a separate economic group, their influence in modern thought should at least allow them to be considered as a separate social class.

There are several academics that disagree with the notion that the middle class should be considered as a separate group of people who have a different status. Sociologists such as Diane Reay, Gill Crozier, and David James argue that, in the current environment, being a part of the middle class is more the need to adopt a set of social values to be part of the norm, rather than a concrete caste of social status. They write that “middle-classness is seen to be embedded in a range of virtues and positive attributes such as ambition, sense of entitlement, educational excellence, confidence, competitive-ness, hard work and deferred gratification” (2011: 12). As sociologist Martin Ravallion acknowledges, the middle class is an appealing label to have in terms of economic status, as one is not too rich to be seen as snotty and obnoxious, yet not too poor to be living on a shortage of essential supplies. He acknowledges in his sociological study

of economic brackets that “the premise that middle-class living standards begin where poverty ends” is becoming the dominant way people tend to imagine the middle class, as they maintain a goal of keeping up an appearance of a desired living standard, free of distasteful luxury or survivalism (2010). Thus, being middle class does not refer to an amount of income or a social status, but rather it is a combination of values that one can assume, no matter what social background they come from. It has become a feeling that people can relate to and ascribe to themselves regardless of what is happening to their occupations and their incomes.

While it is important to comprehend the historical basis upon which the middle class has been established in Britain, it is equally important to consider how the middle class has been established as a set of social principles. In order to define how the middle class is currently imagined in Britain, it is valuable to combine both definitions. Seed, Gunn and Bell provide a useful line of reasoning in the argument that we must examine the group of people who have developed outside the two opposing poles of class hierarchy, but Reay, Crozier, James and Ravaillon add the valuable argument that class is determined and material, but is internalised by the individual as they are confronted by these material determinants of class, where the individual is left to imagine themselves as belonging to the social class. Thus, I propose that we picture the middle class as a group of people who: engage with the hegemonic perception of comfort; imagine themselves as separate from the two opposing classes; but also feed into this growing need to define themselves as separate, influenced on how social institutions service and respond to them (such as providing adequate healthcare, responding to their banking needs, etc.). In his study of how Black people fit into the middle class, Ali Meghji takes this notion further, in stating that the middle class is an “economic location with rules for cultural membership” (2019: 4). Those who want to define themselves as middle class will always need to show the ways by

which they have earned this title – either through excessive work, or through knowing the cultural values that are held by a certain group of individuals. Much like how British cinema imagines it, the middle class emerges through people adjusting their thoughts and behaviours to those of a higher social class, so that they may advance their social status into becoming another. It is about adjusting their immediate sensations — their music, their foods, the environments that they inhabit — to fit in with a certain label of economic comfort. In adopting this definition of the British middle class, we are able to surmise that the middle class is a group of people who desire the comforts that the upper class receives, yet do not experience these luxuries, as their incomes, their occupations, and their cultural backgrounds prevent them from the easy upward mobility they desire. To avoid confusion with other definitions of the middle class, this interpretation of the middle class will hereafter be called the “middle-class fantasy”.

With this definition now established, it is worth asking how the middle-class fantasy persists — especially in a world in which inequality is further separating incomes. This is in part due to the persisting belief in neoliberalism. Many scholars have already written about the failings of the neoliberal work ethic in Britain, yet politicians and authors suggest that there is always the possibility for anyone to climb up the social ladder.²⁰ David Harvey explains that neoliberalism thrives in Britain through the state emphasising private property rights, traditions, and a “common sense” attitude in the public sphere (through education, the media, and the elimination of social programs) where “[i]ndividualism, freedom and liberty [are] depicted as opposed to the stifling bureaucratic ineptitude of the state apparatus and oppressive trade union

²⁰ See Harvey, 2007; Hall, 2011; Hoggett, 2017 for further discussion of neoliberalism in Britain. See Prime Ministers Tony Blair (in his 1997 campaign promises and a 2004 Commons speech), Gordon Brown (in his 2010 campaign promises) and David Cameron (in his 2015 election victory speech) have each spoken about how social mobility continues to be possible in Britain. See Gunn and Bell, 2002; Edwards et al., 2012; Mills, 2017 for further discussion on the possibility of social mobility.

power” (Harvey, 2007: 56-7). He then argues that “Thatcher forged consent through the cultivation of a middle class that relished the joys of home ownership, private property, individualism, and the liberation of entrepreneurial opportunities.” (2007: 61). Because of this, the working class are encouraged to feel less solidarity and to pursue extraneous labour to protect themselves and their families financially. It is about an individual working overtime to achieve their own sense of this dream. If they do work — specifically by locating a dream, engaging in traditionally “middle class” interests (such as being well read in literature, being able to recognise music, and have a diverse knowledge in various subjects, etc.), and doing enough labour in these areas, they should be able to gain entry. They want to appear as cultured and well-versed, but not so much so that they are deemed overly intellectual or snobbish like the upper class.

But it is not just political speeches and academic texts in which neoliberalism is celebrated. As we have studied before, the cinema is a means for people to engage with narratives of social mobility, and as they are reinforced with the notions that upward mobility is achievable, they begin to get involved in class escapism. This chapter will look at one specific type of sensual experience that people often rely upon to go about their middle-class fantasies. While the first chapter investigated how characters exercised silence as a means of avoiding conversations about wealth, or to maintain their privileges, this chapter will focus on the role of music. Specifically, it will return to the genre of British film about the middle class, but look at how recent experiential realist films comment on them, and assess how much they are able to achieve the middle-class fantasy through using their music. But before we can examine how music is used by characters in film, we must first assess the relationship between class and music, then how it influences the affectual understandings of the world of the listener.

III. Music And The Re-Imaginations of Class

As the social circumstances of their labour become increasingly difficult to handle, a key way for individuals to engage with the middle-class fantasy is to imagine their way into a life of comfort, sensorially enclosing themselves within their dreams of achieving social mobility.

Roland Barthes notes this idea in his study of the author Jules Verne and how his writings encourage escapism:

Imagination corresponds in Verne to an exploration of closure [...] *L'Île mystérieuse*, in which the [individual] re-invents the world, fills it, closes it, shuts himself up in it, and crowns this encyclopaedic effort with the bourgeois posture of appropriation: slippers, pipe and fireside, while outside the storm, that is, the infinite, rages in vain. (2014: 65)

Building on this notion, Barthes argues that the act of becoming bourgeois (or, the definition of the middle-class fantasy established earlier in this chapter) involves the appropriation of visual symbols manifested in the imagination, where the individual envisions comfort through imagining a hypothetical material world that makes them happy. It is an affectual experience of class, where class is entirely felt, not based on social markers like income. Even though Barthes originally wrote this thought in 1957, it still holds true today. Barthes is describing here the reimagination of a space through using a piece of cultural material. Edward J. Lawler writes about a similar process in his essays about the affect's relation to the philosophical debate of what we owe to each other, applying it to all sensations. Lawler describes the "affect theory of social exchange" or how the individual regularly considers their sensual experience, and connects it to their position within social groups, such as their class statuses (2001: 322). Lawler argues that this regular consideration can often lead to an individual doing acts of good to others to earn a place of belonging in a group they desire (such as a teenager questioning their sexuality doing acts of good with a queer community group to achieve belonging), but can also lead to the "objectification of relations and groups," where the

individual comes to believe that they deserve to experience certain sensations, or belong to a certain class based on their actions (2001: 322). The reciprocal gesture is not an individual doing acts of good to experience belonging, but rather turning to the imagination to attempt to sensualise what they think they deserve.

It then becomes possible to attach the middle-class fantasy with Lawler's notions of the affect theory of social exchange. This study is accomplished through an examination of how music assists in class re-imagination. Thus, it is valuable to assess how music is used to imagine oneself in other social positions. There have been ample studies of music's impact on our emotions and our understandings of our social identity. Scholars like Michael Bull (2000; 2007), Shuhei Hosokawa (1984) and Jonathan Sterne (2012) have written about the power that music technology has to assist the individual in reimagining their current environments to better suit the moods of the individual listener. But the use of music in specific environments is not just mere mood adjustment for when the world becomes uncomfortable, but this process is about taking authority over sensations to re-imagine oneself as what one desires to be.

Tia DeNora writes about the everyday presence of music, and how it influences the individual's imagination of the world around them. She argues that "music is in dynamic relation with social life, helping to invoke, stabilise and change the parameters of agency, collective and individual" specifically in regard to their "feeling[s], perception[s], cognition[s] and consciousness, identit[ies], energ[ies], perceived situation[s] and scene[s], embodied conduct and comportment" (2000: 20). Thus, music operates as a form of agency for individuals, where they are able to adjust the uncomfortable parts of their everyday life to be more in line with what they desire. She adds that, "if music can affect the shape of social agency, then control over music in social settings is a source of social power; it is an opportunity to structure the parameters of

action” (2000: 20). As a result, “music is a resource to which actors can be seen to turn for the project of constituting the self, and for the emotional, memory and biographical work that such a project entails” (DeNora, 2000: 45). Thus, it is clear from DeNora’s studies that music can be used to create the affect that the individual needs, specifically the re-imaginings of themselves. This is evident in cinematic examples such as Helen’s listening to “Use the Force” by Jamiroquai in *Sliding Doors* (dir. Peter Howitt, 1998) to visualise who she wants to become in making herself over physically while she comes up with the idea for her public relations firm. As she abandons tatty clothing and puts on makeup (at 27:33), lyrics such as “I must believe / I can do anything / I can heal anyone / I must believe / I know I'm gonna get myself together / Use the force / I know I'm gonna work it out” populate Helen’s environment. It is clear the music is helping her fuel her fantasy of looking like, and earning the income of, a person in the middle class. Lyrics such as these tell Helen to be who she wants to be, but normative ideology of success causes her to interpret these as the normative version of success – an office manager. Thus, from reading the opinions of scholars such as Barthes, Lawler, and De Nora, the imagination is needed to fuel the middle-class fantasy, and music helps to create the “objectification of relations and groups” through the individual expressing some agency over their own perceptions (Lawler, 2001: 322).

If one can re-imagine their social identity, is it possible for them to re-imagine their own class status, and use music to live out the middle-class fantasy in their realities? This chapter ultimately argues that even though the consumption of music allows one to locate their desired emotions and class status, that such social mobility remains entirely within the imaginary. The intervention that this chapter makes is to critically evaluate the model of agency and question the amount of choice that exists in the character’s imaginary. One of the most popular theories

surrounding how music can be used to change class status is the one brought forth by Pierre Bourdieu. In his study of the music of the middle class, Bourdieu posits that there are two ways working-class people can enter the middle class. There are “industrialists” (or, those who want to gain professional experience to rise up the social ladder) and “intellectuals,” (or, those who get involved in the “aesthetic of ‘conspicuous consumption’ of lavish display, repudiating everyday experience by embracing the leisurely luxurious”) (Bourdieu, cited in Tony Bennett et al., 2009: 179). Bourdieu believes that individuals can mark their middle-class status through their cultural tastes: “nothing more clearly affirms one’s ‘class’, nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music” (1984: 18). In his investigation of music and class distinctions, Bourdieu argues that it is common that one will present themselves as belonging to the class they aspire to be with their music choices. In his own study, he provides an example of people from the working class listening to high culture such as classical music (1984: 43). Thus, according to Bourdieu, music is a key way that one can identify their desired class status, and begin to adapt their social behaviours to perform as the class they aspire to become.

Yet, it is crucial that we expand Bourdieu’s interpretation of how music influences the imagination of the classes. Bourdieu’s thought process has been interpreted as problematic, as he views both the classes and their engagement with culture as static, where the working class is described in stereotypical terms, or, as physical labourers, and high culture is only described as “wine, art and table manners” (Rancière, 2004: 185). Jacques Rancière critiques Bourdieu’s interpretation of high culture, claiming: “Bourdieu’s critique will show that taste is always the opposite of distaste, referring in so doing to the opposition between ‘the taste of freedom’ specific to persons of leisure and ‘taste of necessity’ specific to workers of reproduction” (2004: 185). In doing so, Bourdieu’s critique “elevat[es] classant solid artisans and demot[es] déclassant

shadowmakers,” where the latter represents those who create lesser-respected forms of art, such as photography, graffiti, or rap music (2004: 203). Thus, Bourdieu’s analysis thus not only takes on a view of class as simple and unchanging, but also assumes that there is a strict division between higher and lower culture where the former is more socially valuable than the latter, and that class identity can only be formed along these restrictive specifications.

In order to acknowledge Bourdieu’s theories of music and class and properly acknowledge their problematic elements, it is useful to examine contemporary criticism written about Bourdieu, and how music culture has changed in the twenty-first century. Rancière believes that in the study of how the social classes use music to affirm their class status, there must be a “reduction of the ideal figures of the best attributes of social subjects [such as the absolutes presented in Bourdieu’s study], and the re-opening of the gap in which existence lets itself be compared to essence” (2004: 212). In simpler terms, we must understand that the ways the classes experience music are “infinite work[s] of construction,” where they are consistently trying to change their listening experiences to help fuel their imaginations of who they want to be (2004: 213). To take the attributes of Bourdieu’s work of using music to engage in the middle-class fantasy, but acknowledge this infinite work of construction, music scholar Nick Prior offers a solution. He contends with the problematic elements of Bourdieu’s original study through an extensive examination of which of his claims hold truth in a contemporary way, specifically examining the sociological relationship between class, music, and listeners in the era of digital music listening. He writes that we must now contend that scholars must shift “the level of examination from a general sociology *of* music to a specific sociology of people doing things *with* music; from the idea of constraining social structures to the constitutive effects of musical meanings” (2013: 189). Prior suggests that we must examine how music allows the individual to

have a personalised sonic experience and permits them to transform their daily lives through the ways in which they engage with their chosen music.

Thus, according to Prior, we can no longer assign class values based on how music itself may fit into one social class or another, but how individuals choose to consume music, how they are able to construct individualised relationships with their chosen music, and ultimately, how they develop their identities and their perspectives of their worlds around them. Though it must be acknowledged that these consumptions are mediated through normative values of the middle-class fantasy, the agency that one gets to exercise in the development of their middle-class fantasy is limited. In terms of class, this involves the notion that one would change their behaviours around the music they are consuming to attempt to assume another class identity. They change the sensorial experiences of the world around them, using music to tune out the uncomfortable sounds they experience in their working-class lives. They also change their affectual experiences in this process, as they replace the sounds that they find displeasing or upsetting with music of artists they aspire to become, lyrics that speak to the comforts of a middle-class lifestyle, or sounds that they study to simulate the appearance of an upper-class individual. Thus, through creating an individualised listening experience of certain tracks, the listener is able to engage in class-based escapist fantasies and find ways to attempt to change their class identity to one they would rather be within.

Now that we have understood how the middle-class fantasy occurs and how music is used to assist their fantasy, it is worth assessing whether the listener can successfully change their sensual and affectual experience so completely, that they are able to change class status. To do this, let us return once again to the British film. Paul Dave explains that British films about the middle class use a “fairy tale” narrative, as they are a group that lives in a “highly crafted

construction of public space” in which “challenges in the social world” such as classism, racism, and sexism are not real (2007: 66). He cites examples such as *Notting Hill* (1999), *About a Boy* (2002), and *Wimbledon* (2004), to argue that each of these characters live in a fairy tale world in which they do not face social challenges such as economic marginalisation or social oppression, but they desire to rise in the social ranks (and ultimately do, through their making social connections with other upper-middle-class individuals). Their ability to go from working class to middle class is entirely due to their desirable personalities – they are smart enough, creative enough, and resourceful enough to push through any barrier they face and always achieve their goals. The characters use music to help them gain confidence to show these skills. For example, in *Wimbledon*, Lizzie listens to Avril Lavigne’s “Mobile” as she lies to the upper-class Peter about her position in the tennis club (at 40:29), using lyrics such as “Everything's changing / When I turn around / Start back at this life / Stretch myself back into the vibe / I'm waking up to say I've tried / Instead of waking up to another TV guide / Life's a mobile” to change her image of herself, and make herself confident that she is deserving of her middle-class position, as she comes to believe that life, and her class, is mobile. Characters such as Lizzie are able to successfully bring fantasies of belonging to the higher classes through listening to music and proving their talent and merit to higher class groups. But Dave is talking about films from before the financial crisis of 2008. As we have seen, income inequality is rising to a point where a middle earner who is able to live comfortably increasingly does not exist. It is worth questioning whether the “fairy tale” version of the middle-class film still exists, in which the protagonist is able to live out their middle-class fantasies through listening to music. While there are plenty of examples of dramatic and comedy films that show this fairy tale world in a recent setting (such as *Daphne* [dir. Peter Mackie Burns, 2017], *Last Christmas* [dir. Paul Feig, 2019], and *Herself*

[dir. Phyllida Lloyd, 2020]), recent British experiential realist cinema has begun to comment on this trend, suggesting that music can temporarily change the sensorial and affectual environment around them, but prevents them from bringing their fantasies to the real world.

Before we examine specific examples of how these films represent the disillusionment of the middle-class fantasy, let us understand why these fantasies fall apart. In their studies of music and culture, scholars Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin study how the enjoyment people receive from popular music is not one of complete individual agency, but manipulation as it encourages a hegemonic view of what society should be. Both believe that these fantasies have a definite endpoint, as music cannot help an individual change their identity, but rather just affirm to an individual what the status quo is, and what hegemonic values should be attained. Adorno writes on how the over-commodification of the music industry halts its listeners from claiming agency over the music they listen to. He believes that music has become too omnipresent in a listener's life, that it starts to influence how the listener perceives themselves and the reactions to the world around them:

[Popular music] aims at standardized reactions, and its success – notably its adherents' fierce aversion to anything different – proves that it has gained its end. It is not only the interested parties, the producers and distributors of pop music, who manipulate the way it will be heard; it is the music itself, so to speak, its immanent character. It sets up a system of conditioned reflexes in its victim, and the crux is not even the antithesis of primitivity and differentiation. (Adorno, 1976: 29).

In simpler terms, Adorno believes that even if the listener is initially able to seek some enjoyment from popular music, the forces of capital are so present in the production of popular music, that the individual's enjoyment is ultimately hindered. Adorno correctly addresses that music compels the listener to have the same positive response, no matter what their background, their experiences, their listening environment, or their reason for listening. While it is unfair to assume that all music is the same, his idea of over-commodification and conditioning responses

holds true. Although scholars like Michael Bull (2000; 2007) and Shuhei Hosokawa (1984) believe that music allows individuals to be connected to these dream worlds without much consequence, Adorno believes that the impulse of the music industry is to manipulate the listener into believing that they can attach themselves to the same fantasy of success as often propelled by the music industry. To achieve the same positive response every time with every listener is unrealistic.

To attach these ideas to class, it is worth assessing Benjamin's description of the "wish image," or the fantasy of sensorially escaping using music: "in [the wish image] the collective seeks both to overcome and to transfigure the immaturity of the social product and the inadequacies in the social organization of production" (Benjamin, 1935, cited in Buck-Morss, 1989: 4). In other words, they turn to music to dream and to escape the exhaustive world of production. As Benjamin notes, this is done to displace themselves temporally, to bring about "elements of a classless society" (Benjamin, 1935, cited in Buck-Morss, 1989: 4). In Benjamin's line of reasoning, music consumption is designed to assist listeners in overcoming the daily exhaustion they experience from capitalist production. They use music to forget about the labour they must produce and imagine themselves in a world where such labour and class labels do not exist. But this always remains a "wish," as their circumstances bleed into their realities (Benjamin, 1935, cited in Buck-Morss, 1989: 4). Thus, they cannot use music to re-imagine their class status, or bring their middle-class fantasies into real life. Because of the capitalist intentions in production and the brief temporality of the listening experience, both Adorno and Benjamin suggest that music cannot allow these fantasies to be sustained and developed over a longer period. David P. Rando brings Adorno and Benjamin's work to the current era, in his adaptation of the wish image to the contemporary moment. He writes "there is a special confluence between

the wish image and music precisely because of music's affective qualities and its association with feelings of liberation" and that there is "the desire for social utopia" listeners use when engaging with music, because "not only do they express the desire for collectivity, but they also can convey something like the very feeling of our own liberation from an antiquated and failing system" (2017: 9). From these writings, it becomes evident that the person becomes worn out by such prolonged listening. It is then possible to surmise a chain of events for when an individual listens to music to escape oppression into their middle-class fantasy. The act of listening to music becomes one where the oppressed person first realises their dreams of escaping such oppression, then uses it as a way to defy those who say they cannot belong in a certain class, to the point where they eventually become worn out, and realise that music cannot provide them a prolonged escape from their social circumstances. Such a process of listening is defined by Robin James in her study of neoliberalism's impact on music, where she argues that:

As neoliberalism re-imagines markets as systems of free competition (not exchange), conquest and assimilation also get upgraded into intensification or investment. In a truly "free," competitive market, the story goes, everyone is supposedly in competition with everyone else, so we can get ahead only to the extent that we invest in ourselves, individually and collectively. Because competition is so stiff, it is imperative that we capitalize on every resource we have available—we must be resilient (2015: 45-6).

Thus, from Adorno's, Benjamin's, Rando's and James' notions, the body cannot remain resilient when it has been oppressed for so long. Now we have a grasp on how music brings about the disillusionment of the middle-class fantasy, let us survey how the contemporary British experiential realist film presents how this middle-class fantasy ultimately ceases. The remainder of this chapter will survey how the consumption of music changes over time, where characters become increasingly disillusioned with class fantasies. This analysis will in turn question how representations of the middle class have changed in the period from Blair's resignation as Prime Minister to the Brexit moment. This chapter will look at examples of young working-class

characters in contemporary British experiential realist films, who are coming of age and discovering the social oppressions of their working-class identity and use music to gain agency over their uncomfortable circumstances, tuning out stressful working-class circumstances and imagining the opportunities afforded to them. Music, at first, becomes a tool of escapism for these characters. They each use music to sensorially and affectually change their perceptions when their working-class experiences become stressful. But this is not as long lasting as authors such as De Nora, Bourdieu and Bull assume. These characters all hit a blockade in their imagined fantasies where they feel that they cannot continue due to various reasons – whether it is the noise of the working-class environments bleeding through as they listen to music, the inability to ignore the oppressions that they and their families face, or being shut out from upper-class spaces in a violent manner.

The following examples are set throughout time yet all focus on the struggles of adjusting to the middle class in the present moment: *Blinded By The Light* (2017), and *In My Skin* (BBC1, 2018), and *Lover's Rock* (from the BBC1 *Small Axe* series, 2020).

1. Bruce Springsteen And Imagined Class Mobility In *Blinded by the Light* (2017)

Blinded by the Light follows the teenage Javed (Viviek Kalra), a British-Pakistani sixth-former living in Luton in the 1980s. This film uses the era of Thatcherism and the racist and classist violence associated with it to discuss how these issues are re-appearing in the more recent British context. This is seen in the appearance of Skinheads and the National Front throughout this film constantly terrorising Javed and his family, telling them to leave their community and to “stop taking jobs” from “well-deserving” British people. Director Gurinder Chadha speaks to the timing of the film, stating that the social environment of the film represents contemporary Britain, and that the “parallels” in xenophobia and classism felt both in 1987 and

the Brexit referendum debate is “intentional” to show the conflicted “impact that [music] was having on kids [who are marginalised]” (Trakin, 2019). This film is not the only one of Chadha’s works that explore such topics, as her films *Bhaji On The Beach* (1999) and *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) also tell stories of British-Indian youth who feel pressured by the weight of their hybrid identity, in communities where racists regularly discriminate against them. This is reflected in the film’s sound design, which was made collaboratively by British sound editor Glenn Freemantle and Indian musician A.R. Rahman (who had previously worked on Bollywood films). The film follows Javed as he uses the music of Bruce Springsteen to escape his working-class status, as well as the abuse and economic marginalisation he experiences on account of his race. He uses the music specifically to imagine himself as part of a middle class that accepts people of colour like him.

The film establishes the world from which Javed is trying to escape, and his music highlights the lack of resources he has. The opening credits are accompanied by the sounds of traffic (from 0:02-0:43), mixed to be quite loud and hard for the listener to take in. Even before the visuals begin, the film establishes that the living conditions of the characters will be loud and unfavourable. Javed admits through voiceover (at 1:32) that he sees Luton as “too noisy and boring” as he walks down the motorway. This voiceover is mixed softly, as we hear the same sounds of traffic, the sounds of chatter through the architecture, as well as loud punk music from the stereos of Skinheads. The environment is overwhelming, and Javed has a lack of resources to escape this environment. The colours of this scene are also predominantly grey and brown, further emphasizing the lack of joy he finds in the world around him. In the next few scenes, we see a slightly older Javed, who finds himself listening to his popular music on his Walkman constantly. While he walks the halls of his sixth form and gets visually judged by other students

(at 10:11), he is accompanied by “Lessons In Love” by Level 42. As he bikes through the streets of Luton and sees the long lines of unemployed people, he listens to “It’s a Sin” by the Pet Shop Boys (at 2:45). When he walks home and gets followed by a Skinhead, he insists on playing “The Sun Always Shines on TV” by a-Ha (at 8:01). He also listens to an unnamed song while his father loudly tells him to get a well-paying job (at 8:26). It is clear that Javed uses music as a way to block out the uncomfortable noises he experiences, as well as ignore the social isolation he is experiencing. However, these sounds are filled with static, suggesting the wear on the cassette tapes from how often he plays them. It is quiet and the sounds of his outside environment often bleed through. It is evident that his environment is unbearable, and he tries to escape as often as possible. Javed’s music is low quality and does not give him the ability to fully escape the noisy world where bullies and his father’s vocalised expectations of him dominate the soundtrack. Thus, the film highlights that Javed wants to find another way to enter a comfortable middle class. For the moment, his music is all he has.

Yet, through listening to the music of Bruce Springsteen, Javed finds a way to develop a middle-class fantasy, and briefly uses the music to drown out all the sounds of oppression around him. For Javed, this escape is not merely temporary and done to adjust mood, as Bull and Hosokawa describe, but is about the need to escape his stressful life as a racialised person in the working class and become someone else who has financial stability. The utopian world and self-image that Springsteen describes becomes desirable for Javed, and he begins to mould his identity on it. On the second occasion where Javed listens to Springsteen in his room (at 26:46), it becomes clear that this escape is inherently tied to class. He uses the music to imagine he and his family living the “promised life” of financial success that Springsteen describes. After he ignores his sister, he listens to “Promised Land.” He dances through the house and sees his

parents doing copious amounts of labour. As the chorus crescendos and the chords change from E minor and A minor to G and C major for the first time, Javed mouths “no” as he feels confident that he can enter the world of financial comforts with the rebellious spirit that Springsteen describes. The world also becomes more colourful, with bright blues and reds becoming the most predominant colour of each shot. He does not want to enter the middle class through copious work like his parents are trying to, feeling that his music gives him enough self-assurance to fight against those who tell him to do manual labour. He thus decides to reject the typical expectations of someone with his race and class status and focus on building his artistic career. He steps in time to the film’s 4/4 beat, and mimics the snare drum beats with his hand. The power and conviction, and rebelliousness he feels in his middle-class status causes him to dance confidently in places where Skinheads were previously shown to meet. Feeling as if he has conquered his neighbourhood (at 28:36), he then yells the last three lines of the song’s chorus: “If I could take one moment into my hands / Mister, I ain’t a boy, no, I’m a man / and I believe in a promised land.” He then goes back to his room and writes a promise to himself - receiving a well-earning career in writing. Judging from these scenes, it is clear that Javed wants to enter the middle class and relies on music to give him a sense of empowerment as he pursues them.

While Javed’s father, Malik (Kulvinder Ghir), sees the amount of labour needed to ascend to the middle class, Javed sees a utopian opportunity made actualised by music. He hears the stories of an oppressed white working-class man who succeeds in struggle to enter middle class. The backing music and lyrics to “Promised Land” inspire Javed, who feels the affectual power of Springsteen’s music, and believes that it is possible for anyone who is oppressed to find their “promised land” or the place in which they will not face oppression and find confidence in their own identities. The affect thus plays an important role in this scene, as it connects Javed to

his entry to the middle class. As Brian Massumi notes, “affect is a pre-personal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act” (Massumi, cited in Deleuze and Guattari, 2013: xvii), and music serves to act as a means for this experiential state to occur. As Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle note, music has the ability to bring about an affectual state that leads the individual to consider the limitations of their positions. They write that music and affect “has been about divesting the body of something, about taking away and abstracting, generalising and making autonomous what the body imagines as its own” (2014: 13). Music causes an affectual reaction, which in turn “dislodge[es] discourses about ‘attachment,’ ‘value, or ‘belonging from their Euclidean moorings” and causes the listener to “rethink [their] relation to labour, bodies, political institutions and neoliberal capital” (2014: 14). Thus, Javed is not ascribing to his father’s vision of Black middle classness. He is rather inspired by the equitable world that Springsteen’s music describes in his lyrics and finds that moving around to the beat of the song helps him to gain confidence to achieve the goals that he describes.

Javed’s moulding into Springsteen is evident in how he changes his attitudes and worldviews throughout the film’s second act. When he and Roops meet up at a mall to discuss Springsteen’s discography (at 39:40), they get attacked by a group of white middle-class boys (dressed in flashy designer clothing) who bully Javed and Roops out of their seats and tell them to get out of the mall where they “don’t belong”. After thinking of “Badlands,” Javed gains confidence by tapping out the beat on the table and humming the saxophone solo. He then returns to them and cites the lyrics “I want the heart, I want the soul, I want control right now / You better listen to me baby / Badlands, you gotta live it everyday / Let the broken hearts stand as the price you've gotta pay / We'll keep pushin' till it's understood / And these badlands start

treating us good” as a way to indicate to them that he believes he deserves a seat in the mall just as much as they do. He goes around town looking for jobs (at 37:54), listening to Badlands once again as he gathers the confidence to apply for positions, finding solace in the chorus with rising chords (played in E major, A major and B Major) and lyrics such as “Talk about a dream / Trying to make it real / You wake up every night / The fear is so real / You spend your life waiting for a moment that just don’t come.” He hunches, then plays the music on his Walkman, then straightens his posture as he applies for these positions. The film shows his many rejections, either due to a lack of work available, or people looking at his appearance and being turned off due to racism (as an office worker says he “doesn’t look like they type of person our customers like”) or classism (as a high-end department store manager looks at his clothes and haircut before saying no). His consistent return to music, however, reflects that Javed truly believes that he can get a job, as he confesses that his music convinces him that “something has to happen.” This music works to some extent, as he eventually gets a job as a mover, and is able to sell some poetry to the local newspaper. He also uses this music to alter his appearance, which he admits in an earlier scene is “dodgy” and “ugly,” as he wears old hand-me-down clothing. In order to counter this image of a lower-class person who accepts his oppression, he begins to use his money to dress like Springsteen (someone who sings for a better future for the working class), and eventually feels more physically attractive and “more like everyone else,” meaning a part of the middle class.

It is clear from these scenes that whenever Javed is reminded that he is working-class, he uses music to reimagine the space around him to be more in accordance with the person he wants to become – a member of the middle class who is totally confident with his appearance and his status. This idea culminates when Javed and Roops break into school to play Springsteen’s

“Born To Run” on the student radio (at 58:12). The group eventually all leave the school and run through the streets of Luton, stopping traffic in their way. Roops and Javed’s singing is mixed to be much louder than Bruce’s voice and the traffic, emphasising that they are no longer feeling silenced. He changes his dance moves along with the tempo of the song, moving quickly with the choruses, then doing slow, ballroom-style moves when the bridge and instrumental solo plays. At this exact point in the film, it seems that Javed’s utopian vision is indeed possible. The music has assisted him in gaining confidence and helps him rebuke those who deem that he does not deserve to escape the working class. Yet, it then becomes clear that Javed cannot rely on this type of fantastical escapism permanently and must acknowledge the fundamental difference separating his two cultures (and, potentially a third culture of Springsteen’s Americanised music) and the socio-political class expectations that divide him and his family.

As the song reaches its loud and almost victorious final chorus (at 1:02:33), it is revealed that only Javed and Roops are dancing to what is now low-quality music, as if it were being played through a nearby radio. It is also revealed that they are right next to a National Front march, where their mosque has just been vandalised. Roops sees this and quickly leaves, while Javed is left alone in his state of euphoria, singing in the street. Malik walks over to Javed and scolds him for his looking foolish in the street and getting too involved in the music of Western people. Because of this, Malik argues, Javed could have gotten hurt as he was distracted while violent racists were nearby. According to Malik, these are the dangers of following the escapism offered by popular music.

As this scene indicates, Javed cannot exist in this euphoria for a sustained period. He must acknowledge the fact that his music will cause him to be isolated, even distracted. This scene becomes paralleled later in the film when Javed’s cousin is getting married, and he makes

a quick departure to get tickets to a Springsteen concert (at 1:21:13). While he pushes people in line at job centres out of the way and zig-zags down the streets, “Cover Me” plays in the background which frames Javed’s journey as an adventure, because he must get back in time. As the song changes key from major to minor, Javed pushes two people out of his way. When it changes back to major, he knocks over a bin next to a queue outside the job centre. This perfectly frames how Javed ignores the joblessness of his community, using his music to block out the sounds (and sights) of economic marginalisation and focus on individual goals. This song is not played at the same loud and vibrant volume (and dominating the soundtrack) but quieter and mixed equally with the sounds of the party. Here, the film indicates that, even though Springsteen’s music is ever-present in Javed’s life, it cannot be as all-consuming in the wake of the attack on his mosque. But Javed is again forced to reconsider the role of music in his life, as Javed’s family get stopped by a march of angry National Front members, who attack the family. Here, the song begins to fade while the noise of both the racists yelling a variety of slurs, and the family yelling in horror begin to dominate the soundtrack, with the song slowly fading to silence (heard at 1:21:43). The various sounds of the family yelling are accompanied by sounds of traffic avoiding this attack, and a train going overhead. Eventually, Javed finds his family and is confused over what has happened. The song has now faded completely, leaving Javed alone. They all scold him for pursuing the foolish dreams of going to a concert while they were being attacked, then leave to get help. Javed is left alone in the street. “Because the Night” starts to play (at 1:23:33), while he looks up, processing the fact he is now totally alone, and his music is the only social connection that he has left. The music is now played in low quality, with a lot of echoed effects making it difficult to hear and appreciate fully. As this unpleasant music plays, he

looks at a poster advertising Margaret Thatcher's prime ministerial campaign, stating that she is "uniting Britain at last," which is shown ironically as Javed's family all depart him.

Due to the use of noise and discordance in the music in this scene, it is clear that the music cannot mask the violence that he and his family experience as people of colour in a Britain where racist movements exist, and he must re-evaluate how he will enter the middle class. Music can no longer help him feel a sense of confidence anymore, so he must find other means to enter the middle class. To escape Luton he must work hard at a variety of jobs – in physical labour, in publishing his writing for no money, and in making connections with those who may be able to help him achieve his dreams. Ali Meghji highlights how Black people in Britain have to prove to their white middle-class counterparts that they are valuable through their labour. He writes that "working-class (white) people upwardly mobile into the middle class tend to embody an ambivalence towards their new class status" but for people of colour, they must be "strategic" about how they enter the middle class as for them, "middle-class status is foundationally linked to an expression of hegemonic whiteness, and consequently that a Black person's middle-class status will always be tentative" (2019: 32). Without his music, Javed feels like he is stuck in this tentative phase, without any momentum to push him forward. At this point, he realises that he cannot ignore how race feeds into his class status, as he and his family will always be persecuted by the National Front and Skinheads. He can no longer take on this white person's trajectory into the middle class, as he will always be seen as racialised.

The film ends by detailing Javed's compromise in realising the middle class does not exist for him. Javed gives up his music and works overtime on his writing to help his family through their financial hardships. The music is no longer heard at a loud volume, only in the low-quality way it is heard previously. He no longer communicates regularly with his family, living

with Roops. In the film's final scenes (from 1:48:00), it reveals that he has made up with his family, as his family eventually encourages his writing, when they realize Springsteen helped Javed get inspired to create art about his experience as an outsider. Javed finally feels comfortable listening to music again, knowing that he has an education and a bright career ahead. Yet, he is not dressed like Bruce Springsteen here and his headphones remain at his shoulders. Music is thus still present in Javed's life, but not in the very engaged way where he can use it for race and class escapism. It is clear that he has now acknowledged that his music can only be used to relax, and not to help him directly achieve entrance into the middle class. Although he maintains a special connection with the music of Bruce Springsteen as they both speak of struggle, Bruce Springsteen is ultimately a white, working-class American, who has an entirely different life experience than Javed. Javed must now pay more attention to the fact he will always carry Pakistani heritage and focus his attention on living in the social reality of an unfair Britain that will always challenge his dreams of middle-class comfort.

What *Blinded By The Light* demonstrates is that music cannot aid people in re-imagining their circumstances in the way that sound scholars such as Bull describe. He writes that music gives people "uninterrupted control over their daydreams" (2007: 54). But for characters like Javed, music as a form of class escapism is strictly limited to those of white origins, and the version of the middle class that accepts anyone who is deserving does not exist. Paul Gilroy speaks about how racialised communities often desire to be included into English society, but cannot blend in with typical views of the English working class (as suggested by Thompson, 2013 [1963]): "the contradiction between capital and labour is not sufficient; it simply cannot by itself generate a complete account of the struggles through which the social movements of blacks dissolves and then transcends the formal divisions of class" (2002: 8). He thus argues that the

class system is built on expectations of class being predominantly white and adds that there must be a new vision of class which adapts the Marxist class divisions to a “distinctive political ideology” inclusive of Black “values and norms of everyday life: mutuality, co-operation, identification and symbiosis” (2002: 320). While Javed was briefly able to imagine this entry for a person of colour into a welcoming middle class, through using the music of Bruce Springsteen to re-imagine his circumstances and his immediate environment, he realises that he cannot be offered the world he has made in his imagination. Both characters desire to become part of the middle class as their working-class lives are respectively monotonous and oppressive. Both use music to try to realise a comfortable middle-class life. But crucially, both realise that conditions for entry are limited, and their working classness (and for Javed, his race), cannot allow them to enter without impossible and copious amounts of labour.

2. “I Can Become Anything I Want”: *In My Skin* (BBC1, 2018-) and Musical Escapism

The BBC television series *In My Skin* takes the conventions of young working-class characters using music to imagine better circumstances and pushes this escapism further to show how social mobility has become impossible in the contemporary era, no matter how much these protagonists engage with their fantasies. It borrows tropes from many genres, including coming-of-age, social realism, and fantasy. It is a ten-episode series, set in a suburb outside of Cardiff, where the young Beth (Gabrielle Creevy) must juggle her new responsibilities as she enters Year 11, trying to become the most popular girl in school, while taking care of both her parents and providing for her family. Unlike the previous media works discussed in this chapter, Beth is never seen listening to popular music diegetically as a means to imagine herself in a more desirable environment. Instead, contemporary British popular music and a calming score comes in as part of Beth’s imagination while Beth lies to others to make herself seem more middle-class

than she is. It is a form of what Samantha Colling describes as a “musical address” or a trope often seen in coming-of-age films in which the character uses imagined music to make their world like a music video they control, and in the process, “create a familiar, in-between space – a no place, no time similar to the ‘Once upon a time ... In a land far away’ of fairy tale – where the confines of expression and sensory experience are temporarily unbound” (2017: 91). For teen girls like Beth, “musical address feel[s] like freedom and expansion” from social expectations (such as class) that harm their notion of their own futurity (2017: 92). In order to study how Beth uses musical address, I will focus on select scenes in the first episode (directed by Lucy Forbes in 2018), as this music appears when she is in a stressful situation as a result of her working-class status and needs to believe the future will be better for her once she leaves school and her family and pursues a middle-class lifestyle. What the use of music in these scenes of *In My Skin* highlights is that the process of becoming a part of the middle class has become an emotionally difficult, and that successful entry has become less possible.

The show regularly uses musical address through score to demonstrate how Beth slips into fantasy whenever she feels she needs to reinvent situations that are uncomfortable for her. This is evident in the show’s introduction to Beth (from 0:04-0:28), where the audience hears an accordion soundtrack with a French woman dancing around her well decorated apartment. This narrator, who is believed to be the woman, reads a poem about how she feels a connection with a seagull outside as they are both free to go wherever and “become anything they want.” This fantasy is ended abruptly (at 0:29), as loud sounds of students’ voices in the hallways starts to fill the soundtrack when the camera shows Beth reacting to her teacher saying her poem needs more work. She critiques Beth for lying about her social class status, insinuating that she cannot be a part of the upper class and instructing her that “grit” is needed to make her story true. Beth scoffs

loudly, knocking a desk as she leaves, and walks away to a sombre keyboard score. In the corridor (at 0:50), the voices of other students suddenly seem loud and uncomfortable, as Beth winces. She runs into another student who asks off-camera “well what did she think of [the poem]?” Suddenly, the score and all the voices of students in the hallway go to complete silence. Beth stares at the camera and claims “she loved it.” After Beth says this line of dialogue (at 1:05), the score returns with many violins and synthesizers playing in a victorious way as the show’s title card is revealed with a crescendo. From this sequence of shots, it not only becomes clear that Beth is accustomed to lying, but the non-diegetic music appears as a psychological tool to assist her when she wants to feel like she belongs in the world of the lies that she tells, highlighting her inferiority as she is the only working-class girl in her circle of friends and her desire to escape into their lives. The music, timed with Beth’s confessional to the camera, highlights Beth’s re-centering her shaky confidence through imagining her life as it were a film, making her feel more self-assured. As evident from these examples, it is clear that, much like Javed in *Blinded By The Light*, there is a notion that Beth uses music in her imagination to change her world around her to suit her needs. What musical address is doing in these scenes is serving to control her affectual experience of the world around her. She creates what Patrik N. Juslin terms the “ideal affect,” or how the individual uses music to assist in regulating overflowing emotional episodes to display preferred controlled emotions to those around them (2019: 227). Beth wants to dissemble her own environment around her and reconstruct it to the world she wants to imagine, using imagined music to help her, creating an ideal affect in the process.

Yet, it becomes evident that this type of sonic imagination is not just to help Beth live a certain fantasy of being well-liked by teachers or popular with other students. It is designed to

help her escape a certain understanding of her own class status. This notion also becomes evident when she shares her cultural tastes with other students, such as her friends, Lydia and Travis (in the scene from 1:53-2:52). Beth tells Lydia and Travis that she is going to a concert with her mum later that day, and she is “so annoyed” as it is a classical music concert she has already heard so many times before on their stereo system at home. Lydia tells Beth she is lucky to know that type of music so well, calling Beth a “queen of culture.” Beth bemoans Lydia’s comment, and suggests she is “too above” Lydia and Travis. It is clear that Beth is trying to sell to her friends the notion that she is from the middle class. The popular upbeat song Years & Years’ “Hallelujah” is then played (from 2:55-3:39), where a montage ensues of Beth, Travis and Lydia showing off their dance moves to each other. Because Beth is feeling happy and adjusted with her friends who look up to her due to her class status, music plays in her head. Her attempts to appear as middle class to her friends is not just her trying to fit in with her school friends for popularity, but her escaping her reality and divert others’ awareness of it. This notion is also evident when she interrupts other students in her English class to say how much she knows about the book they are reading. Here, she is loud and aggressive in her tone. When she finishes speaking, a high-pitched keyboard melody is heard. Beth uses her cultural knowledge to claim a middle-class image. But she also uses music to re-enforce her notion of her class image, serving to punctuate and amplify her confidence.

But this motif of musical address does not last throughout the entire episode. When Beth turns away from her friends at school and goes home, the sounds heard suggest that she is someone else. When Beth turns away from her friends in the park (at 4:12-4:59), the somber keyboards are heard again as she sighs loudly. Her over-the-top happiness she experiences with her friends becomes anxiety and exhaustion when she thinks about returning home. This sombre

keyboard score comes in when Beth is stressed about how her friends perceive her and lies to appear more adjusted than she is and deflect a realisation of who she is. When Beth must return home, the weight of her lie starts to sink in, as she knows that her home life is rather different than how she conveyed it to her friends and that she is not the “queen of culture” that her friends said she was. Whenever Beth is walking home in this episode (such as at 4:12, or at 16:57, or 25:17), any music fades, and the loud and uncomfortable sounds of her home environment are heard. These are the sounds of traffic, distant yelling, and the sound of a television left on. Much like Javed’s experience of his home life, the sounds of Beth’s immediate environment is mixed loudly and uncomfortably, to indicate the psychological discomfort of living in an environment where soundproofing resources are minimal, and violence is nearby. When she arrives home (at 4:32), her parents are absent. Thus, the only sounds are not voices, but the sounds of the environment. The only time a voice is heard is when Beth is calling her grandmother on the family’s one cellphone as she asks for money.

But it becomes clear that it is not monotony that Beth is trying to escape, but noise and violence. In a scene at home (at 5:28), Beth closes her eyes to imagine calming music, but New Order’s “Blue Monday” is heard playing very loudly from a boombox in the street. She sees a woman washing a car with only a T-shirt on, playing the song from a boombox. The sounds become even louder with each second in this scene, such as when her father yells from another room that she is a “crip” and “psychotic” (at 6:02). Feeling overwhelmed, Beth goes outside to deal with it. The music increases in volume as Beth tries to cover her ears and resolve the situation. Beth’s mother shouts the lyrics of the New Order song very loudly as the next chorus comes in, drowning out Beth’s voice. Another neighbour adds to this noise (at 6:46), yelling that he needs the “fucking music” blaring in “our streets” to end or he will call the police (referencing

that the neighbour is not just upset with the noise from a non-neurotypical individual who does not understand the nature of Beth's mother's episodes but at Beth's family's class status as well, through the reference to "our streets"). When they eventually walk away from the car (at 7:43), the sounds of her mother's voice and the song fades out as the keyboard score comes in, albeit in a much quieter way. Beth desires to escape these noises of a loud environment in which she must solve every issue herself. She is classed and at-risk at home, and imagining calming sounds is her one escape from her hectic life. The use of score in this moment does not only indicate the upcoming scene change, but also reflects how Beth does not want to be in her current scenario, feeling abandoned by both her parents and needing to care for both of them. It suggests that Beth wants to escape permanently through musical address. She does not want to be left on her own in this overwhelming environment – she would rather be in control of her sonic experience, unbound from her familial and class expectations. The score continues as Beth returns to her room after this incident and puts in her headphones before the scene cuts. The lingering score thus suggests she is going back to escape to her middle-class fantasy. The music is not just a comfort in a tense moment but serves to create an "ideal affect" in her vision of her own class status.

Beth imagines various forms of upbeat or soothing music in moments when she wants to avoid the noisiness and unhappiness she feels in her working-class life. Beth is happy with the world she built in the lies she tells, and in her imagined soothing environment where she does not need to contend with the noise of her home life. Yet, it becomes evident that this escapism cannot continue to sustain her. This is heard when Beth visits her mother in the psychiatric ward (in the scene from 19:45-24:54). After a loud exchange where her mother calls her a "stupid bitch," Beth begins to get emotional, but must maintain a calm position not to escalate things. In

order to imagine the noise away (at 22:59), she tries to reconnect with the calming sounds and imagine the woman with her seagull from her poem, by closing her eyes and mouthing “seagull” a few times, in order to incantate the musical address she experienced in the first scene. The sombre score returns, but in a markedly quiet way where the noise of her mother yelling and being held down by hospital workers is still audible. There are no fantasy elements anymore, and the score is much fainter than it is originally. This is where the calming noises begin to fail for Beth, as she can no longer engage with this escapism. She must acknowledge that her existence is working class and that she cannot afford to live the middle-class fantasy that she desires and the noise of the environment she lives in will always prevent her escapism.

The rest of the series follows Beth as she tries to believe that she can be successful as a student at school while supporting both of her parents, then falling into poverty. Although there are several other interesting examples of middle-class escapism from the rest of the series in the plots of the other characters,²¹ I believe these moments from the first episode of the series reflect Beth’s desires to enter the middle class by imagining a musical address to help her escape noisy and stressful circumstances. The ideal affect produced by musical address at first, seems achievable and something to help Beth when she becomes overwhelmed by her immediate circumstances. But as she attaches her notions of class to her escapist fantasies, she begins to lose her ability to connect fully with her fantasy. In this final scene described, Beth realises that lying about her circumstances will neither change her position as a carer, nor her class status, and ultimately, imagining calm music cannot assist her in her quest to enter the middle class.

Because the noise begins to become unavoidable, she must accept her working-class circumstances.

²¹ Such as Poppy’s attempts to get the position of head girl, in order to exercise power over others, or Cam trying to persuade Beth that getting a university degree is the only way to be seen as “normal” in British society.

3. “A Space of Our Own:” Establishing A Middle Class In *Lover’s Rock* (from the BBC1 *Small Axe* series of films, 2020)

The *Small Axe* anthology focusses on the lives of West Indian communities living in Britain from the 1960s to the 1980s and the types of discrimination that they face. Its temporal setting reflects issues of a current era, even though it is set in the past. And like *Blinded By The Light*, it looks at the intersectionality of class. Its episodes are all referential to contemporary issues, such an episode on the power of protest in public spaces when Black men are murdered, another episode on the discrimination of Jamaican immigrants in the education system, and crucially, an episode on the power that music possesses to give marginalised communities a means of expression. The title of this anthology is a reference to Bob Marley’s eponymous song, specifically referring to the power of community when they are standing together against the state’s power: “if you are the big tree, then we are the small axe.” While each film features characters engaging with music in unique ways to achieve some sense of collective power, none is more evident than the second entry in the anthology, entitled *Lovers Rock* referring to a subgenre of reggae music. Directed by Steve McQueen in 2020, it focusses on characters from the Black diaspora in the United Kingdom, and how they interact with traditional values of British-ness through the role of music. Even though it is set in the 1970s, this film responds to a present moment, as Trisha Dunleavy explains in her analysis of the racial politics of the series: these are “stories [that] seek to document and explain the past, the practices and problems they highlight resonate in race-based inequities of the present” (2022). Thus, its themes reflect the contemporary moment of divisive politics. This series of films are just part of McQueen’s oeuvre that uses archive footage and stories from the past to assess Black identity in contemporary Britain, also seen in works such as *Ashes* (2014), *Uprising* (2021), and *Grenfell* (2023). The plot

of this film surrounds a dance being held inside a flat, where several people with Jamaican heritage meet up, dance to their favourite genre of music and find social connection with others that share cultural roots. Its sound design was largely composed by Steve McQueen, who created a playlist of important songs with writer Courttina Newland based on their childhood memories of Black British parties, and developed the script from the mood the songs gave them. As he notes, the final playlist of songs made the characters “warrior-like,” because they “could be the person they wanted to be” (Gordon, 2020). Even though this film focusses on the lives of six characters in particular, its representation of music and how it helps people establish an escape from a raced and classed experience and create a space free of judgement (like the middle class is afforded) is worth examination.

Within this film, music serves as a form of communication between the characters. The first ten minutes of this film demonstrates this fact through the ways in which the characters, all unnamed, preparing for a party. The film intercuts sporadically between them and their conversations. Four male characters are in the living-room space (from 1:24-3:46), bringing in music equipment and playing with wires and microphones, solely communicating by testing the equipment, in order to configure the best set-up. Meanwhile, three women are in the kitchen preparing a variety of dishes (at 2:22-2:59), singing Janet Kay’s rendition of “Silly Games” in a harmonised way, with a slight echo effect due to the camera’s placement in the corridor. Two women are in their bedrooms choosing outfits to prepare for this escape and complementing each other through singing lines of a duet (at 5:47-7:18). Towards the ten-minute mark of this film, the characters all leave their respective rooms and greet each other, still singing, or playing with the music equipment. It is at times unclear what they are singing, or what exactly they are trying to communicate. Yet, the characters understand each other perfectly, and their communications

are usually forming some form of harmony and arpeggio through singing notes that are either three or five notes apart. From these establishing shots, it is clear that music plays an important part of their lives and that, through music, they are able to communicate with each other about what they are thinking. As the dance goes on, the characters will have conversations based on musical lyrics. This is seen in how Bammy repeats romantic lyrics of the song “Baby My Love” by The In Crowd in an attempt to flirt with the various women around him (at 15:42), or how Martha repeats the lyrics of Patty’s favourite song “Have a Little Faith” by Nicky Thomas to show Patty that she is sympathetic to her fears (at 16:12), and that she understands how she sees the world. In these shots, the language of music is used to demonstrate how characters begin to establish a class of their own – they are all presented as equal within this shared space, using music as their language to indicate their sense of belonging.

The space becomes a place in which characters can not only relate to each other but become a community who can stand and act together. The dance features popular disco music such as Carl Douglas’ “Kung Fu Fighting” (heard at 13:52) and lesser-known reggae music such as The Inspectors’ ballad “Turn Out the Light” (heard at 19:53). Whenever the song changes, every person at the dance knows instinctively what the song is from the first beat, and what positions they should assume to do the dance moves collectively. Through this music, they are again able to establish a common language amongst the community. As they dance, this sense of language becomes more present, as they speak to each other using common argot from West Indian communities and teach each other specific words from different regions. This sense of community becomes especially sonified when the song “Silly Games” is played, in a five-minute sequence (from 29:10-34:29). As the song approaches its first chorus, several people begin singing the song, each taking on different pitch ranges and harmonising like a choir. After the

film portrays people singing this song for a minute and a half, the disc jockey removes the vinyl record from the player. The next two and a half minutes shows people dancing and continuing to sing the chorus on a loop, without the track playing in the background to guide them. They stomp on the ground to create a beat, all moving at the exact same time. As they sing, the camera pans around the room and captures moments of connection between people: they exchange cigarettes; they show each other their dance moves; and kiss. Eventually, the camera turns to the evening's emcee (at 34:15), who yells, "bringing the sound from near and wide! Giving us spiritual protection!" Much like how Javed created his own way of achieving middle-class status by using his music to fuel his confidence in *Blinded By The Light*, the characters in *Lover's Rock* establish a space and a language – akin to a class – outside of how they behave to white British people on an everyday basis. The class they build is akin to the middle class, where the aspirations of these individuals is comfort and invisibility to those outside. There is a sense of equality in this space, as everyone is on the same level, all with the same cultural knowledge and language. This is a space where they develop a sense of their own class from: a shared need to escape; where they possess a common cultural background; and all share a notion that the cultural education of music is valuable; so that everyone can achieve a sense of comfort.

As these scenes demonstrate, music gives these characters the ability to create a safe space where they can communicate with each other at ease and feel empowered by the sense of community that the music creates. Here, economic differences, lack of knowledge of slang, and any other differences between the communities disappears in this particular representational space. They establish a place, language, and community in which they can all comfortably belong. There is an affectual feeling of belonging to a class where they can be comfortable. Paul Gilroy discusses this affect, and how music offers a form of communication between those in the

Black Atlantic and the Black diaspora: “[t]he oral focus of the cultural settings in which diaspora musics have developed presupposes a distinctive relationship to the body” (1991: 113). He then gestures to Édouard Glissant’s 1989 study of Black music: “[i]t is nothing new to declare that for us music, gesture, dance are forms of communication, just as important as the gift of speech. This is how we first managed to emerge from the plantation: aesthetic form in our culture must be shaped by these oral structures” (1989: 248). Through music, they question why they have been discriminated by Western society, then develop a space where they can feel powerful – their voices dominating the area they are claiming for themselves.

Through dancing and enjoying this event with each other, they use music to develop a class of their own – almost like a comfortable middle class. While it could be described as a safe working-class space, their working-classness does not matter in this space, and wealth is referred to in terms of their musical knowledge (seen in moments such as 1:01:05, where Franklin says he is a “rich man” for knowing music). This type of class building through collective music-making is also described by Christopher Small, in his study of transgressive power of Black music: “there is as well a great and genuine subversive and liberating power there, which has enabled black people to endure the generations of oppression” (1998: 142). Later in the book, Small builds on this argument, saying that the playing out-loud of Black music assisted people in various Black cultures to find community, and helped them build a space where they felt comfortable in their own class, despite the presence of the dominant white class existing outside. He argues that there “seems to be a need to show, both to themselves and to the members of the dominant culture, that they are capable of practising the forms of that culture in an acceptable way, and finally that they are masters of them” (Small, 1998: 249). Though these scholars look at the intersections of race and class, it is crucial to note how class plays a role in this film, as

wealth is consistently referenced. They engage in a middle-class fantasy in this space, as seen when Reggie claims that the dance is so well constructed that it feels like “a country club” but “better” than the “stiff” community that their white counterparts have (at 18:29). It is also seen in the outfits the characters wear, where Martha is complimented for looking “expensive” (at 9:12). These examples demonstrate that this community feels as if they are middle class through the exchange of music and dialogue they have with each other. They are able to claim a space where they can engage in their own culture, connect with others, and speak in a common language that they cannot do when outside in a white dominated world. Thus, music again helps create an affect where this discriminated working-class community can feel a part of the middle class.

This sense of protection through community remains mostly spiritual, as the film also gestures to the dangers that lie outside the community. As these people find a class of their own where they can feel empowered through music and language, they begin to realise the boundaries of their community and how the political environment of Britain they live in is a dangerous place for them to be. As characters begin to leave the dance, it is revealed that others around them treat them as if they are poor and uneducated. When Patty storms out of the party (at 23:58), Martha chases her outside. She runs into the middle of the suburban street, calling out loudly for her friend. The further Martha goes down the street, the quieter the music from the dance becomes. Martha looks on the street, hopeless, but her face eventually changes to horror. The camera then aligns with her perspective (at 24:12), showing a group of white men smoking cigarettes on a street corner and chatting amongst themselves. Martha then starts to breathe heavily in fear, making the music more difficult to hear. The group of men take notice of Martha and begin to approach her. They call out to her, making inappropriate comments about how she is dressed, saying racist slurs, and then also remarking how she is “lost” as she has stepped away from the

party. While all these comments are equally appalling, the final comment appears to sting Martha the most, as she looks scared yet dejected that the only space she is able to be comfortable is in this party. This is further reinforced by the dreary sounding A# minor and E minor chords that repeat interchangeably from the song playing inside. A siren is heard and the bouncer from the party appears. He stands in front of Martha and remains there, telling her to go back inside while he stares down the group of racists. Afraid of what is about to happen, Martha runs back to the party.

The sound of the siren in this episode is particularly meaningful, as it is used to signal whenever the record is changing, but also arrives in moments when characters are realising the dangers of what lies outside their communities. In this example, the siren represents the policing of Black British people, and how they must remain indoors when threatened. The use of the siren effect is heard again when the violent C.T. wants to enter the party, yelling about how “unfair it is” that he is being kept away from his community (at 43:43). The bouncer says he is not welcome, as his views are too radical and he is likely to commit a “stupid” action, destroying the fabric of the community. Martha and C.T. then engage in discussion. C.T. reveals that Martha is his cousin and then loudly accuses her of not being there for their family and is too obsessed with her appearance and her “well-off” job to care for her immediate community. Martha tries to counter him, but his accusations are too loud and she cannot get a word in. After C.T. finishes her argument and Martha’s sense of self is shaken, the siren again returns. Martha is left feeling guilty for being what C.T. believes to be a class traitor. The bouncer reappears and tells C.T. to either dance or leave, asserting that he must do certain things amongst this community to fit in with their sense of belonging. The siren again reflects how this sense of community has difficult parameters of belonging and that, even within the community space, belonging is not guaranteed.

From these examples, the film makes clear that while this West Indian community in London is able to claim a space to play music and share a sense of community, sustained by the affectual feeling of the creation of a middle class, this sense of togetherness remains threatened. The playing of music can help them establish a space where they can feel a part of a higher class, and not persecuted in a way that diminishes them, but it is always being interrupted by the siren noise, emphasising how temporary the sense of community is, as there are always reminders that this space cannot always be claimed by them, and that the notion of belonging to this community remains fragile. Thus, this film does not only recreate the past of the 1970s in Britain but emphasises how the entry into the middle class continues to be insecure in this contemporary era, as Black communities continue to face violence at the hands of the dominant white British class system.²²

IV. Conclusion: Musical (Im)Mobility In The Middle Class

From these three examples, it is clear that the entry into the middle class in experiential realist British cinema is an increasingly a “fairy tale.” Not in its representation of the middle class as an idyllic place with many comforts, but in the fact that its existence is increasingly fleeting. Working-class individuals desire to escape poverty, persecution by others, and being branded as non-deserving of welfare. In all of the film and TV works studied, music can both assist characters in finding a sense of self through realising their desires (as seen in films like *Blinded By The Light*), but also a community they desire to become part of (as seen in *In My Skin* and *Lover’s Rock*). But they remain solely a part of the affect, or “wish image,” as Benjamin and Rando describe it. Yet, this space is liminal and always being threatened by external forces wanting to tear apart their communities.

²² It is worth acknowledging that these questions of whether individuals from various racial and ethnic backgrounds can adjust to a white, British hegemony. See Ryder, 2022; Meer, 2023 for more on this topic.

Thus, as time goes on, experiential realism demonstrates that entering the middle class through adapting one's affectual experience and social behaviours to fit a middle-class image no longer seems possible in the way it has been previously thought. While it seems that music is a reliable mechanism to help an individual discover their fantasies of upward class mobility, it no longer serves a concrete means to find entrance into the middle class, no matter how much work is put into pursuing upward mobility. As Rando argues in his discussion of what portable music technology does to our psyche, music consumption and its ability to fuel its listeners' fantasies in the twenty-first century is not reliable: "the unconscious wishes that once attended their invention fade from existence, passing largely undetected and unmourned" (2017: 12). Due to the fact that this music is commodified, and these characters exist in the late-capitalist moment, their dreams of social mobility must fade. These three case studies demonstrate that representations of music makes attaining a middle-class lifestyle increasingly temporary – and that these fantasies only last the length of the song one is listening to.

Chapter 3: Noise and The Working Class

I. Capturing the Working Class on Film

When defining working-class cinema and how it is represented in a British context, one tends to imagine the cinematic portrayals that have become so dominant. In a similar way to the principal cinematic imagination of the British upper class being the landed aristocracy, the dominant cinematic imagination of the working class is of noble labourers who complete important but often overlooked industrial work. Such memorable characters became popular in the British New Wave of the 1960s, where films such as *Look Back In Anger* (dir. Tony Richardson, 1959), *This Sporting Life* (dir. Lindsay Anderson, 1963) and *Kes* (dir. Ken Loach, 1969) emphasise and highlight how economic changes as well as social expectations between the classes affect working-class individuals and their families. This also includes films of the 1980s and 1990s, where films about the working class highlight characters' ingenuity and need to survive in the face of de-industrialisation, seen in films such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* (dir. Stephen Frears, 1985), *Brassed Off* (dir. Mark Herman, 1996), and *Dockers* (dir. Bill Anderson, 1999). The plots of these films often surround the personal struggles of working-class individuals in a society where their governments and institutions do not care about their well-being, leaving them to fight for their own survival in a world where their social circumstances are increasingly dire. The films mentioned here are all from the previous century. Our imaginations have been created in a time where the full effects of austerity, Brexit, and the deprivation of social welfare have not yet been felt. As we have done in the previous two chapters, it is worth assessing how this conception of class has developed since then. Recent British experiential realist films are starting to challenge these notions through using the role of voice and of being heard to expand these representations. But before we analyse these, we must ask – how do cinematic

representations serve to reinforce stereotypical or non-stereotypical imaginations of the working class? And how is the current experiential realist film demonstrating the changing environments that British working-class people are living within?

II. Working-Class Stereotypes

Before this chapter observes the way that working-class characters have changed, it is important to recognise just how much the working-class individual is stereotyped within its representations, how these representations evolved over time and how these characters remain within the British mindset. To complete an accurate study of the new working-class character, we must first dismiss the stereotypes that are so common within British media. It is obvious to note that the working class are not just silent labourers, nor are they the boisterous, violent, and lazy individuals. Yet, there is an instinct amongst the British people to box this diverse and expanding class into a specific and stigmatised image, and use “stigma as a weapon” against working-class people to justify cuts against social and economic welfare (Mortram, 2017: 2). This process of stigmatization involves the stereotypes often associated with the working class: that they are violent at all times, do not know how to care for each other, they are lazy, they are loud and disruptive in public spaces, and most importantly, that they do not work and are unfairly needing government welfare. Imogen Tyler writes about the sociological imagination of the working class, specifically the stereotypes associated with the working class, and explains that they have become demonised and blamed for needing welfare as the political tides shift leading to stereotypical representations in media.²³ She writes that “social safety nets are cut away, people are falling through the gaps in the emergent uneven, fragmented patchwork of state and charitable provisions” (2020: 42). As a result, “stigma” emerges, where the working class

²³ See *Revolting Subjects, Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* [2013] and *Stigma: The Machinery of Inequality* [2020].

becomes the target of blame for “existing inequalities of class, race, gender and sexuality” (2020: 42). They are, in the words of Stuart Hall, “exploited, controlled, or excluded” from institutional welfare as their identification markers brand them as a part of a stereotype (cited in Skeggs, 2008: 682). But how did these stereotypes become so popular and widespread?

Working-class characters often exist in stereotypes. Fictional characters like Vicky Pollard in *Little Britain* (BBC, 2003-2006), the Royle family on their eponymous program (ITV, 1998-2000), the Gallagher family on *Shameless* (Channel 4, 2004-2013), play a crucial role in this imagination. Imogen Tyler writes “Vicky Pollard congealed within political and public culture and within everyday social intercourse as figurative shorthand for ‘Broken Britain’ and the underclass” (2013: 164). This is also evident in non-fiction programs like *Benefits Street* (Channel 4, 2014) or *The Scheme* (BBC, 2010-2011), that demonstrate “the feral and feckless poor as the source of social breakdown” (Squires and Lea, 2013: 12) and “legitimise the punishment of the poor” (Tyler, 2013: 186) for their social abnormality. Raymond Williams argues that this stereotyping serves as a “political formula by means of which it seems possible to convert the majority of one’s fellow human beings into masses, and thence into something to be hated or feared” (Williams, 1983 [1960]: 319). These ideas have clearly perpetuated until the present day, where comedy programmes such as *Little Britain* mock the working class, and pseudo-documentaries aim to demonise them.²⁴ As the working-class individuals Imogen Tyler interviews in her book think, such re-enforced stigma leads them to believe that they will never be heard or understood to a larger public in the way they desire.²⁵ With the media continuing to

²⁴ For more on how British media demonises the working class, see Haywood, 1997; Ingram, 2011; Embrey, 2021.

²⁵ See *Revolting Subjects, Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* [2013] for such interviews.

push forth these problematic stereotypes, they perpetuate in a problematic fashion, to the point in which their voices are increasingly at risk of ever being properly heard.

It then becomes crucial to revisit the definition of the working class and seek representations that show their experiences and situate their voices, especially in the new economic world. With such a focus on the visual image of what a working-class person represents, and films that reinforce such images through repeating these stereotypes, it is time to focus on how exactly their voices have been side-lined. This project began to analyse these characters in the previous chapter, where the relationships between a group of working-class characters in experiential realist films were studied. Specifically, this chapter examined the music they use to fuel their motivations to climb the social ladder and fit into a middle-class existence. Yet, as we have already seen in this chapter, this is not the only cinematic interpretation of the working-class character. Through an examination of how the policies of the past fifteen years have impacted working-class individuals, it is clear the working class have become more than their stereotypes, and they do not constantly desire to enjoy the wealth achieved in the middle class (as we have discovered in the previous chapter). In fact, the contemporary working class must be re-interpreted as a diverse group of people from many backgrounds. It encompasses anyone who is undertaking excessive amounts of labour with minimal income to survive in this political economy where secure employment has become increasingly scarce. As economist Guy Standing suggests, the “proletariat still exists, but it is not a majority anywhere and is shrinking. [The working-class] was never a homogeneous class” (2014: 15). Thus, in order to understand how their cinematic interpretations have changed over time – and what exactly happened to their voices – it is important to understand what the working class is in a current context.

III. Defining The New Working Class

This section has two goals – the first is to cover a brief history of the working class up to this point, then to explain a few characteristics of the contemporary working class that must be considered in the study of their representations. Let us begin with a brief history of how the working class has changed in recent years. Within Tony Blair’s term as Prime Minister, the working class became more diverse.²⁶ In his study of the rise of neoliberalism in Britain, sociologist Craig Berry posits that Blair’s New Labour used a platform of globalisation to subtly reinforce a neoliberal agenda, where “community work became individual” (2011: 194-5). Although New Labour intended for this to appear as a way for the British economy to grow internationally and successfully adapt in the twenty-first century, domestic labour became even more precarious. Community ties were further uprooted, and personal success was increasingly prized over community. Not only were their voices separated from each other at this point, but Blair’s advocacy for a “managerial marketisation” (otherwise known as the “nanny state”) caused disruption to the daily existence of the working class in the form of “ASBOs, community policing, widening surveillance, private policing and security firms, out-sourcing the round-up and expulsion of visa-less migrants, [etc.]” (Hall, 2011: 20). Stuart Hall evaluates the legacy of New Labour and its impact on working-class individuals and writes that:

New Labour did initiate very important social reforms, including the minimum wage, shorter waiting times, better health targets, attempts to reduce child poverty, the doubling of student numbers and (rather reluctantly) some equality and human rights legislation. But triangulation was its life-blood, its leading tendency [...] Regulation was often the site of struggle to resolve the contradiction between an enhanced role for the private sector and the need to demonstrate positive outcomes. But there was a strong impulse towards getting rid of the excrescences of the ‘nanny state’, in areas such as planning and health and safety regulations, and towards ‘flexibility in labour markets (2011: 20).

²⁶ For the purposes of brevity, this project cannot cover the political movements of Blair and Cameron in full. For more on the details of these topics, see Bennett, 2006; Reay, 2008; Mollin, 2009; Heppell, 2014 and Peele and Francis, 2016.

As Hall and other scholars contend, Blair influenced the neoliberal era to expand the forces of labour so his government could triangulate the economy and the labour force so they could appear to support the social lives of the working class, yet not to the degree that was necessary to prevent poverty from notably decreasing.²⁷ As Hall attests, In Blair's government, they could not so easily seek this employment, as they were made to re-skill in fields they were often not familiar with, and contracts were increasingly unclear and temporary. Due to these policies, more working-class groups found it difficult to secure long term, financially secure positions, and eventually felt excluded from the workforce. Because of Blair's government's lack of attention to social issues, social welfare became hard to achieve on a long-term basis. Thus, the traditional working-class character often represented onscreen became increasingly scarce in the era of Blairism. Neoliberalism evolved, so the formation of the working class did too. This is seen in films such as *Sweet Sixteen* (dir. Ken Loach, 2002), *All or Nothing* (dir. Mike Leigh, 2002) and *This is England* (dir. Shane Meadows, 2006), where characters are left by themselves at the end of the film, since they are followed by police, forced to work in precarious positions, and left socially isolated.²⁸ While this version of working class is typically described as "enduring," this ability to survive in the new workforce is much more fleeting than it once was (Dave, 2006: 61). Their voices are still there, as such characters in these films celebrating happy moments loudly and discussing their economic states with others in the community. Yet, they are not as united as a community as they once were. While Blair's government made finding long term welfare and the ability to speak as a community difficult, this endurance associated with the

²⁷ See Hall, 2007; Bauman, 2004; Wacquant, 2009 for a detailed breakdown of Blair's attempts to exclude the working class from claiming welfare.

²⁸ More specifically, isolation is seen in the end of these films as Liam must leave his family behind to avoid police in *Sweet Sixteen*, Rory being abandoned by healthcare professionals due to their classism in *All or Nothing*, and Shaun being unsure of how to fit in his home community when National Front members have come to dominate it in *This is England*.

working class becomes even more impossible to attain in the era of Prime Minister David Cameron. His government's handling of the 2008 financial crisis and the resulting austerity policies caused the working class to shift once again into an ever more precarious situation.

Cameron's policy of austerity was created to rescue the banks from destitution, but in effect shifted blame for the financial crisis away from those in the banks and the government who were responsible and towards the failings of the previous government. Cameron's policy suggests that everyone in Britain needed to "share the pain" equally, when it was really those who relied on welfare and needed the most assistance who suffered the most (Clarke and Newman, 2012: 303). The term "alchemy" is used by John Clarke and Janet Newman to describe Cameron's austerity as "the result of intensive ideological work [...] through the image of the (political and financial) wizards attempting to find the alchemy [which would attempt to] turn disaster into triumph – the triumph being a new neo-liberal settlement" (2012: 300). Thus, the bailing out of the banks was made to be a collective sacrifice made by the entire country, where many more working-class people were not only left without employment, but without social support from the government. Thus, they increasingly lost the ability to receive any income or necessities. Their ability to protest or speak out becomes increasingly muffled, as protests such as the 2011 London anti-cuts protests or the 2013 People's Assembly Against Austerity protests were shut down and criticised for being "weak" in morality, and forgoing a needed sacrifice in the name of national unity (Geelan, 2022: 162).²⁹ In a sociological study of Cameron's policies and their effectiveness on the populace, Walt Borges et al. found that:

[An] upward trending view that the cuts are causing serious difficulties for families may lead many people to say enough is enough. Sustained high levels of unemployment propelled by public sector job cuts put mounting pressure on relief programs and are unlikely to be regarded kindly by either frustrated job seekers or those who used to be

²⁹ For more on the details of these riots and how working-class voices were mobilised, see Bailey, 2014; and Geelan, 2022.

served by the fired employees. [...] [T]he British public is being tempted to conclude that the Coalition Government's austerity policies are ineffective and unjust (2013: 402).

Thus, the working class has gained one important characteristic in their contemporary definition. Their inability to protest their conditions and subjugation have become a key part of how they are imagined. This anger grew to a point in which the working class felt like they were not being heard by their government. As Victor Seidler writes, the British working class wanted a chance to fight back against these successive governments that did not care about their welfare: “[m]any poor and dispossessed people felt abandoned by a political class [and] no longer seemed able to voice their concerns. [They] had little sense of the lived experience of the working-class people” (2017: 44). To possess a voice and protest this injustice would be seen as being too greedy and too loud in the era of austerity. As a result, Tyler believes liberal democratic societies will use “the violence of stigma” in a “symbolic, diffuse, slow and indirect” manner. It is crucial, as Tyler posits, to “recoupl[e] the concept of stigma to economic and materialist histories of bodily marking” as it “deepens our understanding of the social, political and economic function of stigmatisation” (2020: 15). In this interpretation, Tyler is suggesting that the act of stigmatisation involves marking the body as separate from the rest of society. It is clear that the body, and the perception are key ways in which these stigmas are put upon a working-class person.

Such understandings of working-classness and its embodied perception in the public imagination will be useful in defining how a seemingly non-homogenous group of people share certain experiences. From this brief summary of policies this chapter has covered, it is clear that the working class share some key characteristics: they are increasingly falling into poverty due to limiting policies and they feel that they are left behind by a government that does not care. Yet, there are other qualities that are common amongst working-class individuals worthy of study. Let

us look further into other characteristics they have, to determine which experiences this group shares and how these experiences are represented.

The first quality worth assessing is the non-homogeneity of the working class as a group of people. As explored above, the working class are no longer just physical labourers that are so typically associated with the films above, or even those who continue to have any form of employment. Many scholars such as Stuart Hall (2011) and Guy Standing (2011 and 2014) insist on revisiting how the working class is defined, as so many of its original and traditional qualities no longer exist. These boundaries now include “the underclass,” which is broadly defined by those who are socially excluded from employment, healthcare, education, or any other form of social welfare as they face racist, sexual or other forms of oppression, or simple struggle to survive in an increasingly competitive economy.³⁰ This point of view is controversial, as scholars such as Charles Murray (2006) or Christine Haylett (1998) believe that we must consider the underclass as a separate class. Murray posits that those without any funds often have unethical views, as they steal to generate income and should be viewed as different from a working class who performs work in a “legitimate,” or more morally correct fashion (2006: 106). Murray’s view is problematic, as it aligns with the stereotypes mentioned earlier in this chapter, uses morality over access to indicate who is deserving of welfare, and does not attempt to give these people any agency through their own testimony. Historian John Hills (2015) also argues that those in the underclass are a separate class, as they are those who are born with markers that could isolate them from normative social structures (such as gender or race markers) or develop markers of social exclusion later in life (such as immigration status or homelessness). However, Hills’ work does not take on an intersectional approach to class and often aligns with these

³⁰ For more on scholars who study the unemployed, refugees and others who are excluded from British institutions, see Welshman, 2006; Garrett, 2019; Choonara and Murgia, 2022.

problematic stereotypes of the working class as lazy and unfairly deserving welfare. It is necessary to attach the working class, as it is typically imagined, to underclass experiences in one larger working class. In doing this action, this study provides a wider examination of how access to welfare and resources is distributed in the United Kingdom and does not fall into the trap of viewing those who cannot achieve employment as above those who cannot. Not only have other scholars previously taken this view but, as Paul Dave acknowledges, “the systematically destructive effects of capitalism on particular sections of the working class” caused a new group of people who used to once belong to the working class to be made redundant from their current occupations (2006: 83).³¹ They also do not possess the skills to achieve employment in the new globalised job market and internet sector. Dave constructively identifies this new underclass as a “fragment of the working class” as to avoid the problems of aligning this class with Charles Murray’s interpretation (2006: 84). By adding the underclass to our new definition of the working class, we can bypass these ideological differences, uphold that poverty is never deserved by any group, and reject the notion that one must be in the labour force to deserve basic social welfare.

Guy Standing also surveys this non-homogeneity in his book *The Precariat Charter*, where these individuals are called the “precariat” and are defined by their inability to achieve stable labour, their desire to find occupations that are “instrumental, not self-defining”, and their embracing progressive politics in the workplace (2014: 17). What marks the new working class is what Mike Savage calls “a precariousness” demarked by a rapid “pace of change, and the lack of security families have in finding and staying in work that will pay the ever-increasing rent” (2015: 342-3). Here, in their examination of how the working class must be more inclusive,

³¹ Other scholars who take this position include Skeggs, 2004 and Tyler, 2013.

Standing and Savage note another key quality to this imagination of the contemporary working class - that this group is united not because of its collective bargaining power, nor in their ability to protest working conditions, but merely in their desperation to achieve stable employment.

While the traditional working class was defined by their homogeneity, the contemporary working class shares the felt experience of isolation. In a conversation with Stuart Hall about Cameron's term in 2019, sociologist John Harris acknowledges that "[i]f there ever was a mass, unified working class, it doesn't really exist any more. When work is so insecure and ever-shifting and transient, I'm not even sure that the old emphasis on people as 'workers' is reflective of reality" (2019: 131). As Harris notes, the notion that all individuals are together doing the same work and sharing a common material experience is no longer existent. Alongside the years of austerity and rapidly escalating neoliberalism, Lisa Mckenzie writes that the sense of community has disappeared amongst the working class. She writes that "because of this constant state of precariousness, community networks become close; [...] they become very inward-looking, and fear what is outside of the neighbourhood" (2015: 170). She also adds that this causes them to feel isolated from the rest of their communities. In an article on how the Leave and Remain Brexit campaigns affected working-class communities, Mckenzie posits that the "tragedy" in this election is not Britain's lower classes voting for Brexit intentionally, but it has "more to do with the utter collapse of any broader vision of working-class solidarity that might genuinely do something to alleviate the vulnerability and isolation of the thousands of poor communities that struggle to make ends meet across the worlds of global capitalism" (2017: 208). Thus, not only do the circumstances of labour and its material relations change over Blairism, austerity and the Brexit vote, but the working class themselves became more isolated, with the sense of community dissipating over time.

With the notions of non-homogeneity and isolation in mind, let us think about how these are felt on an everyday level. Edward Palmer Thompson posits in his seminal work *The Making of The English Working Class* that what unites the working class is not just their material conditions, but rather the affectual experiences they all share. He writes “[t]he making of the working class is a fact of political and cultural, as much as of economic, history. It was not the spontaneous generation of the factory-system” (2013 [1963]: 194). Thompson thus believes that this class was not just based on a group who share a job, or even a type of employment, but rather a group who find similarities in their experience within “trade unions, friendly societies, educational and religious movements, political organisations, periodicals-working-class intellectual traditions [and] working-class community-patterns” and find that “a working-class structure of feeling” is established (2013 [1963]: 194). Thus, Thompson’s imagination of the working-class is one that lines up with the vision of working-classness seen in films like *Billy Elliot* (dir. Stephen Daldry, 2000) or *Brassed Off* (1996), as characters find a community in their union meetings and their town halls as well as places of work during the miner’s strike of 1984. More specifically, the working class has strong roots in a community where they act collectively, can band together to find moments of joy, and will work cooperatively to find means to survive. While Thompson’s vision of the working class is merely comprised of physical labourers, his understanding of the working class as a group of people who share traits and emotions beyond their labour is productive. This notion can be translated to the contemporary era – that working-class people all feel a sense of isolation, a sense of frustration, and a sense of persecution that they feel in their everyday lives. Thompson conceived his seminal work in 1963, and this interpretation must be held up to a contemporary standard of neoliberalism. Thus, this chapter will specifically take from Thompson’s study another characteristic of the working class – this is

the notion of the affectual part of being working class, or the notion that the working class is a feeling shared by everyone.

From this sociological study of the working-class situation in contemporary Britain, it is clear that the working class as we have understood it is beginning to change. They are no longer a homogenous group of labourers and they work in precarious positions. They share some key characteristics – they are persecuted by unfair governmental policies, they are not homogenous, and they are intersectional. But key to this list of characteristics is their affectual experience. That there is a shared feeling of being working class through the isolation from a community, and an essential desire to be heard (both by other working-class individuals and by the government). Mike Savage writes more on Thompson’s “structure of feeling” (2013: 194), as he believes that the working class regularly feels “fear and anxiety” but also a certain amount of “ambivalence and hedonism” (2015: 343). In defining this, he adds that their worldview follows the lines of ‘Let’s make hay while the sun shines’; ‘Fuck it, we might not be here tomorrow’ and notes that “[t]heir work situation is precarious; when there is work, they work, and when there is not, they don’t” (2015: 343). This quote emphasises how their feelings are involved in their relationships to their work. In this time in and out of the work force, they incur stigma and judgement by the upper class. They are seen as lazy, being unproductive, or a detriment to society for their inability to seek consistent and well-earning work. As evident in the previous discussion of working-class stereotypes, there is a prevailing judgement that is often made is that they are too loud, making too much noise in public spaces and disturbing the peace of a well-ordered society.³² Their bodies are marked as a stereotype of working classness, and their voices are subsequently silenced due to their stigmatisation. These judgements support a classist view

³² For more on these perceptions in relation to public spaces, see Bennett, 2012 and Tyler, 2013.

and often ignores how the working-class communicate amongst themselves and how the ever-changing workforce impacts their lived experiences. It is thus important to switch the lens of study here, and instead of marking their bodies as working class without prioritising their experiences, pay attention to the ways in which they use their bodies (more specifically, their being heard and their voices) to feel and vocalise their perceptions.

But how exactly is this experience of voicelessness and isolation felt by the working class? We know that work is precarious, but how does this precarious work affect their everyday experiences? While working class is often defined by the “working” element in their name, it is critical to acknowledge how this oppression occurs on a day-to-day basis. Edward Palmer Thompson has expressed that to understand how class dynamics shift and evolve over time, one must study “real people in a real context”, gesturing to the material relations of their everyday life (2013 [1963]: 8). While one can understand this quote in many contexts, a useful application is examining the depiction of their sensorial experiences. To understand how this lived experience has changed with the policies mentioned above, let us look at how the characteristics of the working class appear in its representations in experiential realism. Because the working class has expanded its definition in the past fifteen years, the cinematic representations of the working class has shifted as well. The representations of their voices have changed over the past decade, as well as their ability to be heard. This chapter will look at the role of voice through studying its relationship with sound specifically, looking at the role of noise and silence within contemporary experiential realist films. Yet before we delve into the works, let us examine how noise and silence has a relationship with the voice and the affect.

IV. Noise And Voicelessness In The Working Class

The first two chapters of this project examined the role of silence and music and their relation to the upper and middle classes. Although these types of sound are distinct from each other, both chapters studied how classed characters in Britain had become voiceless, and how these sounds were used to either help people avoid the topic of their own wealth or give them the ability to imagine themselves within a comfortable middle class (of course, only to limited effect). This chapter will now take these topics and push this study further, by studying how state apparatuses and institutions attempt to silence working-class individuals, through an examination of the role of noise and silence in films about the working class. One word that comes up often across the problematic literature on the working class is noise. In Murray's manuscript (2006) and Deborah Orr's review of *Benefits Street* (2014), the working class are described as noisy and producing too much sound for people who produce so little in the labour force. Such accusations merit further exploration, as these scholars do not accurately explain how their noise equates to their productivity. This chapter will not interrogate this interpretation of the working class as noisy, as this understanding is stereotypical and problematic. Rather, it will look at how characters are stereotyped for the noise they produce, and thus silenced, while they live inside noisy environments. It will look specifically at how the amount of noise will lead to their voicelessness.

But what exactly is noise? And how can something so loud cause voices to be silenced? In her study of noise, Susanne Binas-Preisendörfer posits that noise is a common experience that is felt by everyone and has a key characteristic difference from both silence and music. While music and silence are "auditory events," (or types of sound a person willingly engages in to feel comfort) "loudness, as the volume perceived and/or felt by the listener, is comprehended

differently from the physical dimensions of an auditory event – that is, its acoustic pressure” (2016: 261). Thus, noise, or loudness, is not only about the quality of the sound, but about the reaction to the pressure it causes. When people absorb unwanted noise, it causes them to feel uncomfortable and desire to get out of their situation for the good of their health. Philosopher Marie Thompson argues that this discomfort caused by noise is representative of specific relationship dynamics: “[t]hinking noise through affect is useful inasmuch as the latter encourages a relational, non-dualistic and process-oriented perspective, focusing on the formative and transformative influence of the relations between entities, backgrounds and environments” (2017: 42). Later in her monograph, Thompson posits that this noise shouldn’t be seen as a “mere epiphenomenon,” or as a fact of everyone’s existence, but as a means to “interrupt and transform relations” or to “produce the future, bring[ing] about new relationships and connections” (2017: 176). Thus, noises are not random, but rather are produced by and help to produce further relationship dynamics. Simply put, people are able to use noise as a means of expressing dominance over each other. When one wants another to be quiet, they are able to use noise to bring about discomfort and their ultimate silence. This element is essential to David Novak’s study of noise, where he suggests that all noise is “relational” as “[i]t can only take on meaning by signifying something else, but it must remain incommensurably different from that thing that we do know and understand” (2015: 125). Novak here argues that noises suggest the relationships we have with each other. Cultural theorist Douglas Kahn pushes this notion further by writing that “noises are too significant to be noises. We know they are noises in the first place because they exist where they should not or they don’t make sense where they should” (1999: 21). Thus, Kahn’s argument adds the point that noise is something that is made in an intentional way and not produced consensually. This chapter will use this notion of noise as representative

of class relationships, as those who make noise to silence each other reflects class hierarchies. This attachment of noise to class is necessary to study the dynamics between them, as Marie Thompson suggests. At the very end of her text, she addresses that, in twenty-first century Britain, Europe and North America, capitalism is now the most dominant force in creating noise to affect these changing relationships and plays a huge role in the ways in which socio-economic structures are now perceived by individuals (Thompson, 2017: 179). This could include noise produced by a factory, by traffic, or even a party. Yet such a claim merits further exploration, especially when attached to the lives of the working-class.

While noise appears to be an overpopulation of sounds inhabiting a densely populated area, it is also important to assess how this noise leads to a sense of voicelessness in the working class. When one imagines living in a soundscape filled with sounds, it becomes difficult to produce any intelligible and clear sounds from one's body. Thus, the ability to possess a voice that can be audible is difficult. When defining the voice, terms involving agency are often used. In Amanda Weidman's survey of the voice, she defines it as "sound produced by and characteristic of a specific person/animal" (2015: 232). She furthers this notion in writing that "[a]ttributing voice to nonhuman entities (the collective, the mechanical, musical instruments) is a powerful way of making them intelligible, of endowing them with will and agency" (2015: 232). In stating this, it is clear that the voice is the means by which people are able to claim agency as a human being with a certain degree of power. This relates to Edward Palmer Thompson's ideas of a "structure of working class feeling" where the ability to speak and be heard is a feeling shared by many. This creates what Judith Lochhead calls the "sonic affective regime," or the notion that the individual's ability to react to and recognise certain sound imbues them with emotions (and thus the affect) and makes them human (2021: 18). Since the working

class feel that others are silencing them, it is as if they are not being heard, leading to their feelings of voicelessness and inhumanity.

This sense of voicelessness is inherently dependent on the act of institutional silencing. As we have already seen in the study of the brief history of the contemporary working class, there is a felt sense of not being heard. In their study of silence and its political dimensions, Ed Pluth and Cindy Zeiher believe that silence can be defined as a social condition and “not an impossible object” (2019: 3). In stating this, Pluth and Zeiher posit that silence is not an object that exists in opposition to sound, but rather a condition that is brought about by deeply embedded social hierarchies that divide marginalised classes from those in dominant positions of power. The social hierarchies of silence are also described in an essay by sound scholar Maria-Luisa Achino-Loeb, who argues that silence operates as an “indicator” in one’s understanding of their own identity (and thus, their affectual understanding of their class), as it “teaches us where our social boundaries lie” (2005: 36). Achino-Loeb rightly acknowledges that our ability to produce sound and be heard teaches how much we are able to protest and speak out against injustice given the identity markers we possess. She adds that silence creates social boundaries between people, as it is a “locus where *power* can take root,” and that, oftentimes, people do not dare to cross social boundaries by speaking up about the injustices perpetuated by groups in higher social standings (2005: 35). Thus, the role of the voice and silence are interrelated, and are influenced by who holds social power in each situation.

Within these studies of sound, there is a relationship dynamic worthy of study appearing. The noise that is made is not of the working classes protesting their working conditions or social environments, but rather a product of the environments they live in. They already struggle to be seen as possessing a voice by institutions that do not care about their well-being, but they feel

silenced by the social conditions that they are placed within. This study will observe how these dynamics play out in terms of its representations in experiential realism, where the perceptions of the working class will be prioritised. It will examine how much of their voice is heard amidst a noisy environment, where they often are shut out and ignored by various institutions designed to support them.

The popular imagination of the working-class involves having a voice – either through the communities protesting their subjugation by their bosses or their governance, or through the stereotypical portrayals of them making excessive noise. Yet, as we have explored earlier, this is no longer the lived reality of the working-class, as the policies dictated around the working-class cuts their access to welfare, and thus makes their environments increasingly unliveable. This then leads one to ask – how has noise, the voice of the working class, and the act of silence changed in a cinematic sense, and what does this mean for the future of the working class? The following sections of this chapter will examine four works that look at how the voice of the working-class character disappears through various institutional acts of silencing. This chapter will study the sounds that these characters listen to and produce in an everyday sense, paying specific attention to how this ever-growing working-class use their voice as an act of protest against institutions that inhibit their well-being. It will then show that over the period between Blair’s resignation and the fallout of Cameron’s austerity, state institutions attempt to silence these working-class individuals and increasingly take away venues for them to speak up against their marginalisation or express themselves in a manner that they would desire. Through restrictive policy and increasing societal stigma that is applied by institutional officials and upper-class individuals to working-class behaviour, the voices of these characters increasingly disappear. While there are several cinematic works released in the past few years that survey the

lived experiences of the working class, there are four key works that display how working-class individuals attempt to fight institutions with their voices and ultimately get silenced.³³

These films are unique compared to other works on the British working class, as they all share a specific production style. They show the lives of the contemporary working class through using non-actors or up-and-coming actors who have lived through these experiences. The directors each took in the experiences of the actors as well as others living in the community they filmed in – to assure that these representations are as real as possible to their experience. These films are: *Fish Tank* (2009), which observes the life of a young working-class girl who fights against behavioural correction institutions and contends with a societal image of her being too violent to remain within regular society; *The Selfish Giant* (2013), follows the life of two working-class boys (one of whom has a behavioural disability) who contend with an exclusionist educational institution and must resort to child labour; *I, Daniel Blake* (2016) shows the life of an older working-class man fighting the disability and unemployed benefits system simultaneously; and *Rocks* (2019) shows a young working-class girl fighting educational and family social services in order to be understood. In order to survey the transition into gradually more violent silencing, this chapter will look at these films in chronological order.

1. Combatting Stereotypes And A Fixed Fate In *Fish Tank* (2009)

Written and directed by Andrea Arnold in 2009, *Fish Tank* follows the life of Mia (Katie Jarvis), a fifteen-year-old girl living in a council flat in Essex with her mother, Joanne (Kierston Wareing) and younger sister, Tyler (Rebecca Griffiths). She is often forgotten and ignored by her family and has lost her connection with her friends, so she spends her days venturing into the world by herself. At the time of *Fish Tank*'s release, writer and director Andrea Arnold was

³³ For an overview of the contemporary working-class drama, see Forrest, 2013.

known for her contributions in British social realism, in her works such as *Wasp* (2003) and *Red Road* (2006), which both survey working class communities living outside London. She often collaborates with sound recordist Neil Robert Herd, who often places microphones close to sound sources, to create a dominant soundtrack in which characters' voices are seldom heard (Parker, 2021). There is little non-diegetic sound in her works, so sounds of traffic, background chatter, or construction are often most heard over character's voices. In *Fish Tank*, Mia's voice is equally marginalized, as she encounters various men who seek to provide help to her, but she resists their aid, feeling the need to show that she is tough and possesses a strong voice of her own. Yet, this film is not solely about Mia's relationship with her family or the men who influence her life. The film also demonstrates how Mia fights off an interpretation of her as just another violent member of the working class who has no future, by using her voice to dominate or silence judgemental conversations about her.

Mia is a character that insists upon dominating every conversation she is placed within and uses her own volume in order to bring positive attention to herself or shut down other's interruptions. When she argues with Keely in the next scene (at 2:45) or with the group of boys who own a nearby horse in the middle of the film (at 58:03), she uses loud sounds to bring others' attention to her. She pauses music from a loud beatbox nearby, throws rocks at windows, stomps, and screams. In both scenes, Mia yells slurs at the top of her lungs with all her energy to gain attention from other people nearby. In these instances, she thus uses her voice to take total control of the usually loud soundscape around her. Her volume is also seen in how she relates with her family, using her voice to express exactly how she feels when they force her into any situation she is uncomfortable with. During a family road trip (at 41:09), Mia lets go of her stiff stance and begins break dancing and singing, delighting in the fact that her voice and her body is

the site of positive attention. However, when Joanne comes back and yells over the music to Connor. Mia yells back to Joanne, insulting her “loud mouth,” and calling her sexually promiscuous. She continues shouting incoherently as she leaves, blocking out all music and conversation. This scene thus reflects how Mia once again uses her voice to dominate every soundscape she is within. She always needs to be in control of every conversation and must have the last word.

Mia’s need to be this loud and in control could be attributed to her position as a teenage girl – she is a young teenager with a rapidly changing body and she wants to remain within a constantly changing friend group (as her friends cyclically abandon then re-join her). However, the sounds heard in the background explain Mia’s need to be so loud and aggressive. As the film’s title suggests, Mia lives in a sort of fish tank where she is always observed and judged. She is often placed next to windows, or on stages, where she is able to be viewed by the public. These judgements are not because she is a teenager going through the typical problems – it is because she is a working-class individual who needs to combat the stereotypical image people have of a person in her class status: as violent, as needing care at all times, as thieving, as sexually promiscuous – and most importantly – as loud. For example, in any scene when Mia ventures from her apartment into the yard in front of her block of council flats, there are noises that can be heard from nearby traffic and construction, which shows how the people from the council estate already need to talk at a loud level.

The audience is meant to hear just how loud the noise around Mia is and are encouraged to feel overwhelmed when her soundscape becomes too loud. This sensation is further defined by David Forrest, who writes that *Fish Tank* “concerns itself with Mia’s emotional world and therefore adopts a style which necessarily foregrounds the subjective experience of life as a

young woman living on a tough council estate,” referring to the film’s focus on tactile and visual sensations (2020: 89). He further argues that “while this might efface structural analysis [of the systematic ways Mia is oppressed], [the film] is – through the privileging of the perspective of a marginalised subject –nevertheless political” (2020: 89). As Forrest acknowledges, the sensorial dimension to the film is worth investigation. While Forrest’s analysis studies the ways that visual and tactical sensations appear in the film, I believe that the auditory dimension of this film is even more important. In taking Mia’s sonic perspective in a literal and overwhelming sense, the film highlights how young working-class girls like Mia struggle to be heard. Even though she attempts to be the loudest in every scene, this does not last. As the rest of the film demonstrates, Mia protests against people who do not believe in her abilities based on her class status through her voice. Even though she constantly relies on noise and sound disruption as a means of locating positive attention on herself, others often silence her through stereotyping her on the basis of her class status.

This notion comes in especially when school is mentioned during the film. She has been excluded from her school due to some prior incident that is never explained and feels her identity is in free-fall. In the film’s only scene with no audio track but score (starting at 6:21), the film cuts between different shots of Mia’s empty room. Various pictures of Mia in a school uniform making faces with her friends are seen, as well as trophies and medals. The silence and emptiness of her room suggests that Mia was once part of a big social group at school, and was successful in this institution, but is no longer welcome. Cut off from her education and social life, she is left in an eerie silence, forced to make something of her identity. Without an education, or friends who can support her, she feels as if all she has left of her identity is her working-classness. In this moment, the silence is peaceful as it is the only space Mia has where

she does not feel pressure to fit into or combat social expectations of her. However, this silence only lasts so long as Mia must confront her lack of education. She is often rejected before she can even speak (seen when she is at the internet café at 45:12, or when she auditions at 1:49:34), because she presents as the appearance of a working-class person with no education. When Mia is confronted by a social worker who is helping to get Mia back into the education stream (at 42:57), she hears Joanne and the social worker talking, where Joanne says, “I bet you won’t be able to control her.” Mia looks hurt that her mother would say something like this but continues to walk down the stairs, ready to combat this image. She then hears Joanne say how Mia is “so fucking annoying,” “aggressive,” “violent,” and how she does not have a future, while Joanne admits she “just doesn’t know what to do with [Mia] anymore.” The camera pushes in on Joanne’s face as she continues to speak, emphasizing her anger at her daughter. Paired with the sounds of music, cars honking and mechanised noise in the background, Joanne’s commentary is overwhelming and relentless, which serves to align the viewer with Mia’s perspective of hearing increasing levels of noise with no ability to respond. Before Mia has a chance to speak with the social worker, Joanne interrupts once again, repeating how hard it has been for her to take care of Mia. Mia is angry, she slams a drawer shut to stop Joanne from talking, then runs away dramatically from both the social worker and Joanne, slamming doors behind her. She tries to dominate the soundscape with noises, as she is not able to speak against the stereotypes. As she runs away, Joanne screams out to her, yelling insults. As Joanne gets increasingly distant, her screams fade out as Mia’s panting breaths and door slams are mixed in the soundtrack in a loud way. Throughout this scene, Joanne keeps interrupting and talking for Mia, being disparaging about her behaviours. Mia’s voice becomes lost as Joanne makes the social worker believe she is violent and uncontrollable, as if she was the extreme of a working-class stereotype. Mia cannot

combat all these stereotypes at once and feels the need to run away and find happiness elsewhere.

In this scene, Joanne refers to the stereotypes of the working-class. This view of the working class is common, as Imogen Tyler assesses. She believes that “[t]hese perceptual realities come to organize ‘public opinion’ and incite ‘consent’ for punishing the poor through the rollback of welfare systems: *there is a revolting underclass and we need punitive policies to deal with them*” (2013: 165). Thus, Joanne aligns her with this stereotype, and thus insists she deserves the punishment and ultimate silencing that comes with it. At this point, it becomes clear that Mia feels silenced by her mother and needs to run away from the noise she creates and take control of her own image. She runs away from the unwanted sounds (or, noise) she is hearing.

Mia finds solace in listening to music and dancing to it in this empty flat. Here, she can play her own music loudly and dominate her soundscape once again. Yet, she does not do this to escape into another class, as the characters in the previous chapter did, but rather listens to music to escape the gaze of others and the judgement she experiences from her stereotyping. When she is alone in this flat, she plays hip-hop music loudly and dances these routines out in an aggressive manner, loudly grunting, her trainers squeaking on the floor as she dances (heard in such scenes such as the ones starting at 15:11, 50:29 and 1:09:37). These noises are the only way Mia can have a voice.

The concept of Mia as a voiceless person of the working class is especially heard in the breakdown of Mia and Connor’s relationship. When Mia breaks into Connor’s home and discovers that he is wealthy with a family (in the scene starting at 1:31:31), Connor slaps Mia as if they were strangers and tells her she is a “violent idiot” that does not belong in the neighbourhood. Instead of combatting this as she always did, Mia runs away, knowing her voice

will not matter to him. The soundscape of the wealthy neighbourhood is quiet, and any protest she would make would just affirm to the upper-class people around her that she indeed represents the stereotypical imagination of the working class. Mia can only call Connor on his voicemail later and beg him to understand her for who she actually is, but the one-sided nature of this phone call ensures that no one will listen to her. Mia, yelling in the receiver louder and more desperately with each message comes to realise she is only yelling to herself. She eventually slams the phone down and cries alone, realising that if she were to speak out, she would be seen as too loud by others in the upper-class neighbourhood around her, or get the police called on her for being a disturbance. He has left thinking she is a needy thieving individual who will never amount to anything else. And he, with a steady income and a family, will never want to really help her out of her poverty. She is ultimately voiceless and cannot find a meaningful way to combat the stereotypical image she will always be forced within.

The film ends with Mia realising that this image of toughness cannot last, purposefully silencing her own voice by going elsewhere and letting everyone around her rest in their incorrect assumptions. The film ends with Mia getting her things to move out (in the scene starting at 1:54:32), accompanied by the song “Life’s a Bitch” by Nas playing through her mother’s stereo. The song repeats the refrain “Life’s a bitch then you die,” emphasising the fact Mia feels as if she has no escape from her life of being perceived as a violent member of the working class. Her line of communication with her family is clearly broken and her only option is to start anew. Mia runs away. Her image of toughness is now completely gone, and she feels she cannot speak, as the world has seen her vulnerability and she does not want to acknowledge the fact she will always be judged as conforming to the stereotypes associated with the working

class. She has no one to connect with and everyone around her thinks of her as violent and too loud.

British film scholar Clive James Nwonka notes that *Fish Tank* is “indicative of the realist mode, reveals a tension between a drive for greater realism and the type of fictional representation indicative of pleasure poverty” (2014: 213). While Nwonka focusses specifically on the visuals of this film, it is clear that the film uses sound as well to explore the tensions between stereotypical images of the working class and the emotional reality they experience. Through the focus on noise and Mia’s inability to combat it to be heard in a meaningful way, the film represents the new felt reality of working-class people feeling voiceless to combat their stereotypes.

2. A Parable Against Fighting The Machine in *The Selfish Giant* (2013)

The Selfish Giant was written and directed by Clio Barnard in 2013 and follows the lives of Arbor (Conner Chapman) and Swifty (Shaun Thomas), two boys in a working-class community in Bradford desperate to make something of themselves. Throughout the film, Arbor and Swifty are often judged for their working-class behaviours and are often pushed to act differently so they can be more productive to others in their society – whether it is the upper-class people in the school they attend or the formerly working-class owners of the scrap yard they get employed at. Like Mia, these boys are often judged throughout the film specifically due to the noise they are making and find solace in having a shared voice when their oppression becomes too much. However, while Mia was able to temporarily escape her judgement by running away from the noise in *Fish Tank*, *The Selfish Giant* displays through sound how young working-class individuals become voiceless when institutions pit them against each other and abandon them. Clio Barnard specializes in creating films about the British working class, as she

has done in *The Arbor* (2010), *Dark River* (2017) and *Ali & Ava* (2022). Before filming, she researched this film through recording conversations several working class people in Bradford, and writing their experiences into the script (O'Hagan, 2013). This also influenced sound designer Tim Barker, who took these conversations and wanted to bring these emotional experiences to life through emphasizing certain memorable sounds, such as the metal scrapping machine (Pak, 2022). Thus, like *Fish Tank*, this film responds to the moment of austerity and current policies surrounding class and child welfare, but in a way that privileges their perceptions and experience. The film sonifies the process when institutions abandon working-class characters when their behaviours are marked as being too aggressive and loud by upper-class individuals, are left to find whatever work they can to survive and, in time, find themselves in a life-threatening situation. In this process of class-based exclusion and precarious work conditions, Arbor realises that his voice as a working-class child has become muted.

Like *Fish Tank*, *The Selfish Giant* showcases the noise that populates Arbor's environment. Yet it also showcases the solidarity that Arbor and Swifty feel with each other and how they can combine their voices to block out the judgements that others vocalise. Arbor has Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, and when he becomes overwhelmed, he makes noise as a means of working through his emotions. When he arrives at school (at 11:03), Arbor sighs loudly in frustration when other students are completing exams, as he does not understand the questions and cannot seem to focus on them. He shifts in his seat, calls at Swifty and throws paper balls. Eventually, his teacher condescendingly tells Arbor that he is being too noisy and that students are unable to concentrate. Arbor continues to shift around out of discomfort, as the teacher continues to instruct Arbor to stop interrupting the class at increasingly louder volumes. The teacher threatens punishment, where Swifty raises his voice saying Arbor is not making

disruptive noise to him, and that he must be listened to as he is in pain. Even if Arbor and Swifty are punished for showing noisy behaviours that are deemed as raucous, they are momentarily able to be understood by each other through showing solidarity in their voices. Through the silence of the institution and the obsessive need to regulate the soundscape within it, this scene shows that working-class children with disabilities like Arbor are not welcome in institutions as he is unfairly punished for the disruption when he needed the staff to empathise with his struggles. This notion of showing solidarity in oppression is demonstrated when upper-class children make fun of Swifty for being poor (at 17:38). Although Arbor physically attacks one of them, most of the fight is presented vocally, as Arbor violently and loudly explains he should be seen regardless of his income. They stand together against their oppression in several settings, as when they get hired in the scrap metal yard and are told they are members of a larger society of scrap metal workers, they scream in delight with other members there reciprocating (in a scene starting at 34:03). In this moment, their voices are seen as equal as those of the other established workers. As they go back and forth achieving pieces of scrap metal from various institutions (such as the Yorkshire Electric Company, the train tracks, etc.), they yell harmoniously as they did in the first scene, suggesting the sense of power they have when their voices are united with other workers of a working class who are equally trying to prove their worth to the larger community.

Yet, this show of solidarity only goes so far. In his study of the film, Kyo MacLear compares the cinematic version of *The Selfish Giant* with the Oscar Wilde story from 1888 it was adapted from, arguing that the film took the original story and added a subtle political dimension through how it portrays the institutions of education and work in comparison to its main character. She writes that working-class children are often abandoned by education institutions

for “not belonging” and not providing them the chance to explain their thoughts or behaviours. MacLear writes that “[i]t bears emphasizing that when the film was made, a neo-liberal austerity program was accelerating in Britain, a move toward complete privatization and abandonment that includes an ongoing onslaught on children and childcare” (2018: 39). She posits that these policies were specifically designed to hurt the working-class, as “the cruelty of long-standing but augmented violence played out upon class lines” (2018: 40). MacLear studies specifically how Arbor’s character is visually shown as not belonging, but it is important to reinforce how the sound is used to frame this protest. While they feel that they are protesting a system that often oppresses and excludes them, the institutions find ways to separate them, in order to prevent this solidarity from fully developing into a larger protest of the working class against those who own and run institutions.

Let us turn to how the film frames this isolation of voices. Arbor is often singled out and separated from others who want to stand in solidarity with him for the seemingly excessive noise he makes. This separation is done exclusively by the upper-class people in his classroom, and the former working-class managers of his scrapyard. In the scene where Arbor receives his daily medication at school (at 10:11), Swifty is not permitted to be with him. Nervous that he is alone in an institution that consistently demonstrates prejudice against him, he squeaks his trainers against the floor repeatedly and shifts in his chair. In making this noise, he feels as if he is controlling the noise in the hallway and begins to smile as he is making this regulated space his own. This noise ceases when a nurse physically holds him down to give him medication, as Arbor makes noises of discomfort. The nurse continues to move his body around until he cannot make any more noise. This scene suggests the control that school staff use when he is alone to prevent Arbor from speaking out or acting in a noisy way that is not deemed acceptable. In the

scene in which Arbor and Swifty are excluded (at 18:13), the visuals present Arbor as he wanders the corridor, hitting various objects around him. Yet, the sounds heard are not of the expected noises of slamming, but rather the headmaster speaking with his mother about his behaviour. This disruption of sound through voice-over serves to represent Arbor's voicelessness. The camera focusses on his confused expression, even though he cannot hear what is being said about him. The headmaster says phrases such as "he is too violent" and "he does not fit in with other students" (referencing his class status) ultimately leading to his conclusion that "he has no place in this academy." His mother tries to interrupt him to defend Arbor's character – thus acting in solidarity with him – but the headmaster insists that it is only polite that they take turns speaking and thus continues to dominate the conversation with his assessment of Arbor. The headmaster insists on rules of etiquette enforced by an upper class, and condescendingly speaks as if Arbor and his family do not understand these social expectations as they are from a class where rudeness is presupposed. The fact that the camera shows Arbor and not either person in the conversation further demonstrates how defenceless he is in this conversation about his future in education. He cannot express himself in a way where he can be heard, and those who defend him are shut down for not knowing social rules.

This sense of social isolation also applies in his experiences at the scrap metal yard, where Arbor is left alone in an overwhelming environment where he cannot be heard. At first (such as the scene starting at 26:46), the various machinery is loud, and the boys are given no protective equipment by Kitten (Sean Glider), the owner of the scrap metal yard. Arbor hunches over at times (such as the moment at 38:12), feeling overwhelmed by the noise of the machinery. Since Arbor gets overwhelmed and occasionally spasms involuntarily, he soon gets in arguments with other people at the site, where the combination of voices, machinery sounds, and shoving

makes for an even more overwhelming soundscape. In the two scenes where Arbor tries to protest this by asking Kitten if he can speak with him (at 40:56 and 1:05:46), Kitten sees Arbor as adding to an already noisy soundscape, and greedy for trying to get more than he deserves. In the second example, Kitten grabs Arbor's hand and guides it to a mechanised axe which makes a loud, high frequency sound. Arbor tries to scream for help, but his voice is drowned out by the machinery. Although Swifty is nearby, he cannot help him, as he is covering his ears as the sound is too overpowering. Thus, as scrap metal workers, the boys become the victims of the hazardous work force and must remain a victim to the precarity that Kitten's scrap yard entails. In the scenes where they decide to rebel or speak out against their working conditions, they literally cannot get their voices heard due to the overwhelming sounds around them.

Thus, to Kitten, Arbor exemplifies every negative stereotype that society reinforces about the working class, while Swifty is seen as silent and obedient. Because of this, the boys' voices become even more separated from each other. When Arbor tries to help Swifty by talking up how great he is to the other workers (as he does in 29:18), he is seen as annoying to them and is rejected. When Swifty congratulates another worker for his job (at 40:56), he is praised for not speaking so loudly. Although Swifty originally benefits from this chance of upward mobility in the scrap yard, he stands with Arbor one last time (in the scene starting at 1:07:58), seeing that he will consistently be judged for behaviours and societal beliefs he cannot defend, and possibly be arrested for committing acts that he did not know would get him punished. When Swifty is ultimately killed trying to help Arbor with a deadly task assigned to him, a quiet high pitch frequency is heard as Arbor panics (starting at 1:10:29). This high frequency sound increases in volume, further reinforcing that Arbor has become voiceless. No matter what action he could take in this moment, he would ultimately be silenced – either through Kitten calling the police

and having him arrested for routinely acting out, or through authorities not believing his testimony due to his working-class status. Arbor then realises that Swifty, one of the only people who would defend him and stand in solidarity with him, is dead. He cries as the high pitch frequency plays to complete silence. Arbor is the one that holds the blame for this event and he will – yet again – not be given a chance to defend himself, just like the previous scene in which he was being excluded from school. The remaining ten minutes of the film are in near total silence in terms of dialogue between characters, with only three short exchanges in dialogue as Arbor contends with his guilt – he tries to talk to his mum, Swifty’s parents, other workers at the scrap yard, and even the police, but is consistently ignored, told to be quiet, or interrupted as they tell him how he is an undeserving person who thieves and kills due to his working-class status. Much like Mia after her interaction with Connor at the end of *Fish Tank*, the film emphasises how working-class characters are consistently judged and abandoned by others in their close vicinity to the point of voicelessness.

In these last ten minutes of the film (from 1:13:54-1:23:50), Arbor has gone from a loud character who often uses his voice to attempt to speak out against his conditions to a character who is silenced by several institutions based on class, as well as his own grief. He is silenced by the school that excludes him based on stereotypes, often threatened by Kitten for speaking up about his precarious conditions, and then silenced due to the loss of the one person who saw him as more than a stereotype. It is clear that the sound is working in an important way to demonstrate how working-class characters are excluded from the various institutions designed to support them, and how they have limited means of showing solidarity with each other. In *The Selfish Giant*, the education and work sector are represented as institutions that silence working-class individuals about the mistreatment they experience.

3. “I’m Trying to Tell You But You’ll Not Listen”: Voice, Class and Humanity In *I, Daniel Blake* (2016)

Both *Fish Tank* and *The Selfish Giant* represent young working-class people attempting to speak up about their subjugation and protest about a system that does not care about their wellbeing. Yet, they are not the only generation that have become stunted by the new socio-economic reality. While *Fish Tank* and *The Selfish Giant* were filmed late in the era of Gordon Brown and the beginning of Prime Minister David Cameron’s austerity policies, later works showcase that there is a different form of discrimination in older generations, especially late in the era of Cameron’s economic austerity. One key film that demonstrates the impossibility of achieving social welfare under austerity is *I, Daniel Blake*, directed by Ken Loach in 2016. Loach is most often recognised as a director interested in telling the stories of the working class. In his previous works, such as *Kes* (1969), *My Name is Joe* (1998) and *Sweet Sixteen* (2002), he studies the social oppression affecting the working class, often criticising specific policies. Sociologist Raymond Williams argues that Loach had extended the scope of realism not only through his depiction of reality as it is, but as a form of “socialist realism,” referring to the notion that he focusses on specific ways in which class-based inequalities are perpetuated in Britain and often presents the ways in which government policies can be changed to be more fair to more people (2004: 76). He often collaborates with editor Jonathan Morrison on the sound design of his works, often recording real sound on location and editing it only to emphasize real discomfort that individuals experience. As Loach notes, “the sound is true when it reflects the real experience of being in a location ... if the sound is not true, then the whole authenticity of the film is undermined” (Whitford, 2021: 2). Because of this approach, Loach’s works often use fictional narratives to “prob[e] beneath a realism of the surface” to comment on “underlying

social or historical movements” (Cresswell and Karimova, 2017: 20). In the case of *I, Daniel Blake*, Loach looks specifically at the legacy of Cameron’s austerity especially in relation to the unemployment and disability welfare scheme, with attention to how hard it is for older people and those with disabilities to locate a stable form of employment.

Set in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, *I, Daniel Blake* follows the life of the eponymous character (Dave Johns), who is forced to retire from his job as a carpenter when he develops a heart condition. More specifically, it details how he finds a way to survive under contradicting advice – the job centre says that if he is to receive jobseekers’ allowance, he must continually try to apply for jobs and find ways to make himself an ideal job candidate. However, this goes against the advice he receives from his doctors. The film’s plot follows his gradual entry into poverty, as he struggles to find employment and cannot apply for financial support from the government. Like Mia in *Fish Tank* and Arbor and Swifty in *The Selfish Giant*, he will always be made voiceless by the institutions around him (in this film being the job centre, the disability assistance office, and the government welfare helpline). In studying the film’s use of noise and silencing, these institutions continually interrupt him through making more noise when he speaks up about his conditions, or physically stop him from speaking if he tries to find solidarity with others in the working-class community. The soundscapes of the film reflect this struggle to be heard, as these social institutions continually find means to be louder than him and silence his voice altogether.

Daniel is a character who acts as a voice for his community. For example, in the film’s opening, we are introduced to Daniel solely through his voice. There is a black screen for two minutes of the film, as Daniel speaks to a healthcare worker about issues in his health and in his community. Already, the film establishes that Daniel is a character whose identity is heard

through how he speaks to people and speaks on behalf of his community. This notion is repeated when Daniel is seen in wide shots, wandering through his working-class community. In these scenes (such as the moments at 3:36, 36:24 or 1:18:39), there are sounds of traffic from the streets nearby as well as the noises of people arguing in the courtyards. As he gets closer to the city centre, the sounds become even louder, with sounds of construction and louder conversations between people fading into the film's soundtrack. Daniel looks unphased even though the amount of sounds he hears is rather overwhelming, as he is accustomed to this noise pollution.³⁴ Yet when he speaks to working class people around him in his flat or around the city centre (such as 12:32 or 43:37), his voice is always mixed louder than usual. It is as if he is the hero of his community that people will always listen to regardless of the noise around them. Throughout the film, he often speaks back to those who aim to teach him and other working-class people how to be a productive member in contemporary society. This is heard when he goes to a seminar on job interviews (at 46:12), where he interrupts the seminar leader to explain that he and other people in the seminar already know this information and want to hear something they have not heard before. This is also heard when he goes to the library (at 29:41), where he talks back to the computer and the instruction manual he is handed. He does so in order to get help for him and the unsheltered people who are also using the libraries' services. At this moment, Daniel is portrayed amongst all the other unsheltered people using the library, rendering him small, and almost insignificant. In these instances, Daniel demands help from those who insist on not listening to what he needs. Even if he does not always get the assistance he desires, the film highlights how his voice is used to speak on behalf of his community.

³⁴ For more on noise pollution, see Schafer, 1994. For a case study of noise on the working class in the United Kingdom, see Mansell, 2016.

Yet, even though Daniel acts as the voice of his community, there are also several instances of various institutions rendering him inaudible or voiceless. In this first scene where he speaks to healthcare worker (starting at 0:31), the healthcare worker routinely cuts him off to remind him that the questions necessitate yes and no answers. Daniel is frustrated with this process as he feels some questions are not relevant and he does not feel the need to keep his answer to a yes or a no. Every time Daniel speaks longer than the two words these healthcare workers are expecting, they interrupt him and explain “just a simple yes or no please” in an exasperated tone. At the end of their conversation, the healthcare worker explains in a rehearsed tone that she will pass the information on to the system. He says, “I am talking but no one is listening” and the nurse gives him a condescending response that she is only trained to perform healthcare in the yes or no model the National Health Service trained her in. The healthcare system thus makes it impossible for Daniel to be heard in a meaningful manner, as he cannot elaborate or speak to his own experience. This discrimination is further demonstrated when Daniel tries to explain the contradicting advice he received from those who are hired to help give him information. When he contacts them either in person or on the phone, they: interrupt him (such as the case in the job centre employee interrupting him when he asks about his C.V. at 31:01 or the moment where the woman at the job centre sanctions him for his attempts at job seeking at 1:08:23); put him on hold (such as his many phone calls with the benefits helpline at 10:38); insist on documents before they will listen (such as the technological assistant who he contacts at the library at 29:45); say there is nothing they can do as low-level employees (such as his voice message from the N.H.S. he receives at 7:59); or, ignore him as they look at files they have instead (such as the case in his third visit to the job centre at 1:21:21).

The final manner in which Daniel's voice is diminished worth examining is through the deterioration of his own health. As Daniel needs to keep going out for long days to earn some income, his heart condition worsens, rendering him even more voiceless. In the scene where the men come to take his things away and becomes unsheltered, Daniel's speech is diminished, not interacting with the movers at all. His neighbours check in on him to ensure he is alright, but he does not answer the door. He goes about his daily life, but he is no longer as talkative with the people around him as he was in the beginning. He keeps giving out C.V.s and attending the job centre but does not talk to people. From the 1:01:03 mark to the 1:15:34 mark, he only has five lines of dialogue. Eventually, he feels fed up, and goes to the job centre to retaliate at 1:24:54. He explains he cannot do this anymore then goes outside to paint his manifesto on the side of the building. He knows he will not be heard, so he paints his words so someone may read them. It reads "I, Daniel Blake demand my appeal date before I starve and change the shite music on the phones." He finishes this with a brief speech where he asserts his livelihood. He says:

I am not a client, a customer, nor a service user. I am not a shirker, a scrounger, a beggar, nor a thief. I am not a national insurance number, nor a blip on a screen. I paid my dues, never a penny short and proud to do so. I don't tug the forelock but look my neighbour in the eye. I don't accept or seek charity. My name is Daniel Blake, I am a man, not a dog. As such, I demand my rights. I demand you treat me with respect. I, Daniel Blake, am a citizen, nothing more, nothing less.

Although working-class people applaud him on the street, authorities such as the job centre employees and police go to separate people from congregating around the sign and silencing them with the threat of arrest for applauding. From these scenes, it is clear that the voice Daniel possesses might matter in his community, but it does not matter to the various institutions he must interact with on a daily basis. He feels he is stuck in a governmental system that is built to disenfranchise his thoughts and opinions, and feels he needs a way to be genuinely heard by a system that does not care for his well-being.

Daniel's journey into voicelessness is represented not only as the experience of an individual character who occasionally talks back, but representative of what was occurring for many different people across the United Kingdom. This is heard in the background noises in various scenes that use wide shots to visually and audibly display many working-class people all talking. For example, in the job centre, the room is always presented as noisy as there are many conversations between workers and unemployed individuals that are clearly audible on the film's soundtrack, yet dividers make them invisible. The audience can hear people speaking about how they have no income, such as the instance at 14:07, where voices speaking about how they are worried about their children receiving a proper education and how they are worried about providing food are audible. This sound design shows what sound scholar Tom Rice argues happens in state institutions such as hospitals or prisons. He writes there is a "privacy curtain" made so people who enter the institution cannot see one another in a vulnerable moment, but their voices are left to hang in the air (Rice, 2013: 42). As Rice acknowledges, with all these voices speaking at the same time, it makes it difficult for any individual to become fully audible, and any issue to rise above another. Thus, Daniel's issues become inaudible, as well as the others. The only time a voice is heard above the others in the four scenes in the job centre is at 16:42, where single mother Katie (Hayley Squires) is loudly protesting her treatment and she is loudly told she must stick to her appointment as there is a protocol that must be followed in order to "properly serve everyone here." Daniel also yells to ensure that Katie's issues are treated fairly. Instead of referring to these incidents as one-offs, Katie and Daniel are reminded that they are "disturbances" to a protocol and the volume of their voices do not belong in the job centre. When both Daniel and Katie speak out at a louder than usual volume, they are deemed unworthy

of a state-run service built to help them. Thus, they are discriminated against for simply being working-class people in need of help.

This notion of Daniel's voice being representative of a community is further developed when he and Katie are standing in line at the food bank at 51:47. At the beginning of the scene their voices are singled out as they walk to the area. Yet, as they approach the location, the sounds of their hungry community become overwhelming, as many other voices are heard and mixed at the same volume. They are each asking for what they need to survive the week, but not one voice can be heard above another. These sounds become overwhelming, where the film again highlights that there are many working-class voices all speaking at the same time, where none are heard. Even though they all have the same need, their individual needs are difficult to comprehend. This sound cue demonstrates what Brian Marren studies in working class communities: an "increase in social alienation [and] the decline in social harmony" amongst working-class people, where no voice can be heard over another, and people are thus represented as isolated (2016: 10).

Thus, the way that sound is presented in *I, Daniel Blake* encapsulates the way he and his working-class community are silenced by every institution around him. While he can bring about some form of protest through uniting a community with his manifesto against the system, Daniel is silenced through the various institutions who aim to render him and others like him mute. In his assessment of how the film represents poverty, Nave Bernard points to the directorial style of this film as a key part in its emotional delivery: "[t]he camera is placed at a distance, without asking or insisting on overbearing sentimentality, protest or compassion. Instead, we see an intensity of the moment [...] the insistence that something must be done urgently" (Bernard, 2016: 18). This is evident throughout the film, where the use of sound emphasises Daniel's

struggles to get his voice heard. Both the authorities and Daniel use noise to overpower each other, but the state is the only one who is able to silence him on a long-term basis, as they insist that paperwork is the only way to claim benefits, increasing the risk to Daniel's health. Thus, this film shows that the policies of austerity have become so cruel, that it silences working-class individuals permanently to maintain its system.

4. Being Quiet For Survival: Noise, Voice, and Silence in *Rocks* (2019)

While the first three films studied in this chapter show characters fighting against oppression and gradually accepting the fact they are voiceless, the 2019 film *Rocks* portrays a character who intentionally silences herself to avoid being punished by authorities already intent on punishing her. Directed by Sarah Gavron in 2019, the film follows Rocks (Bukky Bakray), a teenage protagonist, who does not only possess a working-class label and must speak back to the judgement of others around her at school in central London, but must also cope with abandonment by their mother and their gradual slide into poverty. This film is a debut feature from its director, and she wanted to encapsulate what everyday life is like for a young and racialized working-class girl. She was heavily involved in the sound design of the film, using the experience of young people she interviewed in the development of the script, and testing the scenes with young audiences in the editing process to ensure young working-class people could find the visuals and the sounds relatable (Gavron, 2021). The film uses noise as a means of showing how Rocks and her group of friends find community with each other – they are all working class and share their opinions through playing their music out loud, singing, talking loudly altogether, clapping and dancing. Yet, like Arbor and Swifty in *The Selfish Giant* and Daniel in *I, Daniel Blake*, the film also uses noise to show how Rocks is being silenced by institutions around her – namely the schoolteachers and social workers who regularly interrupt

her behaviour or intervene in her life in an intrusive way. As Rocks gets increasingly stressed by these circumstances, she begins to find the loud environments she once loved to dominate increasingly overwhelming. It is because of this increasing presence of institutions dominating the soundscape and the gradual loss of Rocks' voice that this film's ending is not as sweet as it may appear visually. Let us examine the various ways that the film uses noise and its relationship to voice.

The film uses noise in the ways that Rocks and her friends communicate with each other. In their introduction (from 0:08-1:45), the sounds of these girls are still heard through a black screen, as they are all talking over each other, or singing along to the hip hop music played in the background. Like Daniel in *I, Daniel Blake*, the introduction to Rocks and her friends are through the noise that they make. Once the production credits finish, the shots cut between them as they show off their dance moves, interrupting each other to ask for opinions about things they are reading on their social media accounts, or yelling in excitement about a song that is playing on the boombox. They briefly break the fourth wall, as the shot mimics a phone camera, and the girls all pose and say their names to camera as they yell. It is clear that these working-class characters have come up to this rooftop to express themselves and find connection with each other through the noise they are making. Through introducing themselves directly, they not only dominate the soundscape in the way that Mia or Arbor do, but also control how they are judged, through telling the audience how they want to be perceived. This film frames these girls through their own perspective and emphasises the community they feel through recording themselves making this noise on their mobile phones. This community is also seen in scenes where they are at school, where they often yell nonsense words like "Ohiya" (heard at 0:41) or "Lamoona" (heard at 34:27) when they see each other, not only to indicate excitement, but also to indicate

that they are a community with their own language and rules of belonging. They also sing songs when they are all together. Particularly, they sing Tina Turner's cover of "Proud Mary" at three points in the film (at 1:46, 25:38 and 1:21:31) and use it to inspire a type of community with her friends at school. Rocks sings the lyrics of the chorus rather loudly, where her friends all applaud her talent while singing along. What these scenes demonstrate is the power that the working class have in creating noise together. Even though these girls desire to escape their current environment in a fantastical fashion, they are not upset at their current socio-economic circumstances as they have a strong community based on the noise they can make together.

The film's use of voice indicates that Rocks cannot be heard meaningfully in every environment that she experiences. Even if the opening scenes of the film present Rock's voice as one that can dominate, there are several scenes in the film that also show how Rocks is spoken over, ignored and physically silenced. This is seen in the moment when Rocks realises his mother has abandoned them, where noise starts to enter the soundtrack in an uncomfortable way. Her brother Emmanuel is playing with a toy and hitting it on the wall, while the volume of the traffic sounds are mixed more loudly. While Rocks used to be able to sing and laugh and dominate the soundscape, she can no longer. This is also seen when Rocks and Emmanuel use stolen money to stay in a hotel (at 54:47). When the hotel's owner learns Rocks is lying about her identity and tries to evict her, the sounds of the various hotel machinery are perceived by Rocks (and the film) as louder than usual (such as the air conditioner and the computer fan). Rocks responds that she does not know what else to do in desperation, raising her voice. The man responds and says, "your kind are all the same," which Rocks infers meaning her race. She yells back to contradict her racialisation, but the sounds around her get louder. Suddenly there is a beeping from an unknown source, which serves to emphasise her fears. The man yells back at

her until the police are mentioned, where the overwhelming sounds affecting her reach a crescendo, rendering her voiceless. She then leaves, fearing the repercussions of her speaking up against the racism she faces.

This form of silencing is not just incidental noises heard that indicate the affectual stress that Rocks is feeling from her newfound position. While the loud noise in this scene could be attributed to Rocks having an emotional breakdown after her mother leaves, it becomes clear later in the film that this noise does not arise just because of emotions, but also through various institutions slighting her due to her working-class status. While this chapter has already examined how several institutions work to silence working-class characters, it is used again here in the way in which Rocks interacts with schoolteachers and social workers.

In terms of how schoolteachers silence her, there are several examples throughout the film of them thinking Rocks and her friends are too loud. Much like Arbor and Swifty in *The Selfish Giant*, they are told that the way they communicate is not meant for the upper-class school space and they must cease. When Rocks attends classes with her group of friends, they find the best way to learn is through communicating with each other. They are usually loudly having conversations, playing their music, or clapping along as they take turns rapping and singing. They treat learning as a communal act, helping each other as they tackle various challenging school assignments. Even when they are following their assignments' instructions, teachers find moments to remind them that (such the example at 18:03), "even if they act like this at home" (referencing their working-class heritage) they are being too noisy for a space. In a scene (starting at 7:36), where a teacher instructed them to discuss what careers they want to pursue, Rocks' friend, Khadijah (Kosar Ali), yells that she wants to be a lawyer in a confident and excited tone of voice. Her friends, including Rocks, all start talking about this and

applauding her. Quickly, a teacher silences this confidence reminding her she “does not have the marks” to become a lawyer and should focus on “a plan B” that is “more realistic,” using a condescending and shushing tone of voice, not only to remind Khadijah that her dreams are not achievable based on her abilities, but also reminding her of her socio-economic position by shushing her when she is feeling confident about her future. Rocks then tries to assist her by saying she wants to make a million pounds by the time she is thirty through a career in rapping. She immediately raises her voice to show off her skills. Her friends and other students begin to clap and cheer her on, but the teacher reminds them that she must do her assignment “correctly” and not bother other students, asking them to be quiet. From listening to this scene, it is clear that authorities do not give Rocks and her friends encouragement to pursue their careers as they desire, but they also do not approve of them speaking up and using their voices in a confident manner, believing the noise to be too disruptive to other well-off students. They do not subscribe to the notion that these girls are able to find community through the noise they make and want them to reject their working-class markers in order to “fit in” to the normality of the school – the “normality” of a quieter middle class.

The final example of how Rocks is silenced in school is when she is using her cell phone, as she hopes her mother would call her (starting at 28:50). She attempts to please the authorities by only calling on breaks and in moments where the teacher is not present, so to not create the disruption she is typically blamed for creating. When she tries calling in the bathroom, she whispers to the voicemail. When Rocks is in her maths class and accidentally forgets to turn her phone off, it rings loudly. The other students notice it but do not seem to mind when Rocks quietly moves to the back of the classroom to cease it ringing, while the teacher begins loudly interrogating the noise by saying things like “who’s phone is that?”, “you know phones are not

allowed in here” and “turn it off!” She speaks quietly into the phone saying “Hello? Mum is that you?” while also whispering and pleading to her math teacher in a calm and quiet way that she needs to take the call and it should only last a minute. The teacher’s angry yelling lasts for a full 45 seconds. Because of this noise, Rocks has difficulty listening to the voice on the other end, as the words are mixed to be quiet. Dejected, she apologises profusely to her teacher, who is still upset and yelling about how she has no respect for the institution of school. This scene demonstrates how the institution aims to silence working-class individuals like Rocks in the name of silence, believing she was making too much noise and disrupting the class when other students stated they were not bothered. Thus, not only is Rocks feeling overwhelmed by her present situation, but she feels she cannot act as herself or get help as she is always bothering the institution and is forced to remain silent. Much like Arbor in *The Selfish Giant*, she is told to keep quiet and is cruelly treated by the institution of the school for a relatively minor incident where she makes noise. Yet, while Arbor was excluded from school relatively early in the film’s run time and attempts to yell about his mistreatment as much as possible, Rocks internalises this idea and tries to remain as silent as possible about her mistreatment to avoid upsetting the status quo.

This notion of people believing that Rocks makes too much noise is also seen in her interactions with social workers. She intentionally silences her own voice to avoid being detected as a child in need, which would in turn incriminate her mother. Her efforts are seen in how she tells Emmanuel (at 16:18) to not play as loudly as he usually does and “just act like everybody else on TV,” effectively telling him to not appear as a working-class person and rather the image of the average middle-class person. In silencing their own voices, Rocks believes they can pretend to appear as affluent to others. In the aforementioned scene in the hotel (at 1:03:36),

Rocks relents from combatting the racist and classist hotel manager when the police are mentioned by him. The hotel manager specifically mentions her “raucous” behaviour is the reason the authorities will be called and recommends she “stop” the disruption she brings “wherever she goes” to avoid being seen as a worthless working-class person. It is at this point she recognises that if she were to speak up again, she would not only be affirming his point of view, but also involving social workers who she believes would imprison her mother and send her and Emmanuel to the foster care system (thus, destructing the family unit and ceasing their communication). She makes an exit, silencing her voice entirely. Thus, it is clear that again – Rocks is denied shelter as her class deems her too noisy and too disruptive for the other patrons of the hotel. The only way that authority figures know how to silence her is to get the police involved, so she knows she must silence her own voice to not be seen as a threat.

The next example of Rocks having to deal with social workers is a key moment in the film when Rocks and Emmanuel are taken in by the foster care system and separated. When Rocks and Emmanuel are staying at their friend Agnes’ house, police and social workers invade the home in search of them (in the scene starting at 1:10:13), Rocks asks what is going on and some questions over Emmanuel’s safety and whereabouts. All these social workers ignore her, acting as if she is not there, continuing to file paperwork or search the house. Eventually, one social worker halts her from moving around and asking questions by saying, “Rocks, you need to listen to me, it’s for the best,” This interruption of Rocks is barely heard on the film’s soundtrack, as the noise of the people moving around the house is much louder, overwhelming Rocks. She eventually breaks free from this noise to find that Emmanuel is being taken away by a social worker. Rocks runs over to talk to him, but the social worker rolls up the window as she approaches. This is the first scene in which Rocks encounters authority figures where she does

not silence her voice, instead choosing to speak and sob loudly for Emmanuel to listen to her. The social worker whispers to Emmanuel to ignore her, so the only sounds heard on the soundtrack are the increasingly louder and desperate cries of Rocks. We do not hear Emmanuel's or the other social workers' reactions, but only Rocks as she makes noises, until she physically breaks down into tears. The looks of disgust from both the other social workers and the neighbours around her suggest that their class prejudices are coming into play – that she is a working-class child trying to fight against the social services that only aim to help her. However, they each remain silent as Rocks is struggling and screaming for help. A social worker eventually enters the frame, condescendingly telling Rocks that she needs to stop crying and settle down as she is being too loud, as if she is from another social class and does not understand rules of etiquette. Eventually a social worker tells her to quiet down as she is “only making this worse” and forces her into a car, where her cries end. The silence comes not from Rocks quieting herself, but because she is being taken away to another space to restore peace to the neighbourhood. Although the sounds that Rocks is making in this scene is quite loud and overwhelming for the listener, the film portrays that this noise is something to be sympathised with. Thus, the film does not align with the notion that these social institutions are designed to help Rocks but shows how they judge her and silence her for her screams of help. Eventually, Rocks gives in and decides that she must be quiet if she is to get away from Agnes and this site. This quieting is demonstrated as violent as Rocks cannot express her distress, communicate effectively with the social workers, and talk to Emmanuel as he gets driven away. Because the reactions of the social workers are shown as callous, the noise of working-class characters being silenced is shown as callous as well.

The film's final scenes are worthy of analysis, as on their surface level they present a happy ending, but in looking at the use of voice, demonstrate how Rocks has become adjusted to remaining voiceless against the various institutions around her. She stays silent with her new foster mother (in the scene starting at 1:14:53), feeling as if she cannot be meaningfully heard by her. When she returns to school (at 1:17:27), she reconnects with her friends. They go to see Emmanuel on the train as a group (in the scene starting at 1:21:31) – singing and laughing together as they did in the opening scene. However, Rocks is not leading the chorus as she once did, remaining silent as she is now aware of how classism will affect her. People on the train and in the small town they arrive in give them stares of being too loud for a public space. In the film's penultimate scene, Rocks and her friend Sumaya are sitting at a restaurant after they see Emmanuel having fun at school. Rocks admits to Sumaya that this is not the life she wanted and begins to cry at the thought of Emmanuel being separated from her permanently. Sumaya hugs her and gestures to her friends standing at the other end of the restaurant, suggesting that Rocks will always have a community with her friends. They then go to the beach and film each other doing tricks on their iPhones (in the scene beginning at 1:26:27). They are making a lot of noise and they are being judged by others, but this noise allows them to find a community. Rocks laughs, but not too loudly. While this ending is presented as a happy one, the film's use of voice suggests otherwise. Like the representation of the community in *I, Daniel Blake*, Rocks represents that working-class people are still in contact with each other, yet they are often isolated through the threat of authorities persecuting them and must internalise their emotions to not give much cause for authority intervention. Through the diminution of Rock's voice, the film continuously reminds its audience that this community is always under threat, as institutions like

education and social services often silence and forbid working-class characters from fully expressing themselves and finding community.

V. Conclusion: The Noisy Working Class?

In taking on the impossible task to define what noise is, Douglas Kahn writes that “[n]oise is a world where anything can happen, including and especially itself. In a predictable world noise promises something out of the ordinary, and in a world in frantic pursuit of the extraordinary noise can promise the banal and quotidian” (1999: 22). But he insists that “noise has also been an occasion for hearing loss and loss of hearing, psychic malaise, and psychological warfare” (1999: 22). In this quotation, Kahn describes noise as a permanent silence in a symbiotic relationship, where one will bring about the existence of the other, to the point where individuals in a position of sociological power will use this noise to silence the oppressed. It is in this tangled relationship where these working-class characters within these British experiential realist films find themselves. While noise provides an ability for characters to communicate, find a sense of community and, on some occasions, fight back against a system that does not care for their own wellbeing, noise is used to silence characters, stigmatise them, and ultimately inhibits them from being able to remain as a solid working-class community in this time post-Blair. The films studied in this chapter demonstrate that the working-class community is constantly judged as too noisy by the institutions and authorities until they are eventually silenced.

Thus, revisiting the stereotypical representations of the working-class that were mentioned previously in this chapter, it is imperative that we re-imagine them in the context of the political shift to the right. These characters are not violent, uncivilised, dirty or being too noisy. In fact, they are very much the opposite. When we listen to the soundscapes of these

experiential realist films, these characters are silenced, pushed aside, and deprived of their basic rights with no possibility of speaking up against their positions. While the upper class are able to gate their communities and the middle class have the limited ability to imagine community through their music (although their fantasies eventually fall apart), the contemporary working class are deprived of their community altogether. They are left to fight an unjust system as individuals, where they are doomed to work in precarious positions, be judged by society as the predominant stereotypes and then be deprived of basic economic and social benefits to help them survive.

Now that we have looked at each of the sonic cinematic representations of the predominant social classes in Britain, the next chapter will bring these films into the context of the contemporary politics of the Brexit era and understand how the divides between the social classes are further deteriorating.

Chapter 4: Evolving Sonic Perceptions of Class in the Brexit Era

I. Reviewing Representations of Class Post-Blair

In the first part of this project, post-Blair experiential realist films are analysed – looking specifically at representations of how New Labour and Austerity policies have come to affect the various classes. What these three previous chapters have established is that the lived realities for classed characters have changed since 2007, where characters are silencing each other, must silence their own desires as they cannot vocalise them when they are oppressed, or have reached a point in which they are silenced by institutions around them. As evidenced by the soundtracks in these films, the representation of these classes show that they are becoming increasingly separated from each other, both literally in terms of geography and metaphorically in their ability to connect with one another. As they are separated by social walls of silence, they lose their ability to find purpose in their lives, feeling that their class status has caused them to be isolated. The analysis of each film reaches similar conclusions – a character will attempt to use sound (through vocalising, creating noise, listening to music, being able to control a soundscape) as a means of discovering, assessing, and re-evaluating their class status, but ultimately realise that they are stuck within a given class status with given social means of existence, and they can no longer speak out to change this. There is a certain fear for each of these characters, where they feel a sense of uncertainty in their journeys forward. They have lost a sense of purpose, feeling chained to a class status that will always prevent them from achieving what they desire, or a sense of a future that will forever be lost to time.

This sense of loss is not merely just a cinematic narrative that is repeating itself in British cinema - it represents a real loss in British society. In concluding his study of the representation of British class in films of the 1990s and 2000s, film scholar Paul Dave argues that the rapid

changes in the British economic system leaves people so “atomised” that they must only fend for themselves (2006: 173). There is a notion that they must forget about the others equally struggling in similar ways around them and leave behind their own desires and the other possible futures that were once available to them. Mark Fisher writes about this era and a lack of future available to all British people, believing that this abandoning of future desires is a type of “forgetting [that] has always been the exemplary technique of sanity” in this period, as it crucially has a “special role to play in late capitalism” (2009: 42). As he adds:

memories prior to the onset of the condition are left intact, but sufferers are unable to transfer new memories into long term memory; the new therefore looms up as hostile, fleeting, un-navigable, and the sufferer is drawn back to the security of the old. The inability to make new memories: a succinct formulation of the postmodern impasse... (2009: 44).

Thus, Fisher asserts that what has happened to British people is the inability to see a future beyond what late capitalism has done, especially in the face of New Labour’s economic policies and David Cameron’s austerity politics. And this notion is present within its cinematic representations. Without the ability to see past the immediate moment, these films capture how these characters have a sense that social class has become rigid, separated through walls of silence, without the ability to speak out and enact change.

The goal of the British cinema at the time, as Dave suggests, was to reflect the circumstances of class back to the audience and lead them to ask the question “[h]ow did we end up like this, all of us?” (2006: 164). Here, Dave is referring to the fact that popular dramatic films of the 1990s and 2000s (such as *Sliding Doors* [1998], *Billy Elliot* [2000], etc.) framed the pursuit of capital as a repeating and key part of many plots, where characters would turn on each other in the name of economic and social comfort. Dave then proceeds to answer this existential question, by stating that the advancement of neo-liberalism through Blair’s New Labour has

caused a series of “consequences of a historically unfolding, socially determining process of capitalist imperialism,” which causes people to be left on their own, without connections to other people in their class, or an understanding of what their future may look like (2006: 164). While Dave reviews the films of the 1990s and early 2000s and assesses how these characters either succeed or fail to find wealth (where he determines that their success rate is in line with the social determinants of their class), he, unbeknownst to him at the time, looks forward to the future in his assertion that audiences will constantly be posing this question. As Paul was writing in early 2006, he could have not possibly known that Blair would resign due to his mishandling of the economic crisis and his role in the Iraq war, that the Conservatives would win the following election, that Cameron would enact sweeping austerity policies that would affect many, and, of course, that the Brexit referendum would pass and continue to affect how British individuals secure income. Neither could Fisher, who also died before the Brexit referendum occurred, predict how Brexit would influence British culture, the class structure, or the ways this would change over time. However, it is right to argue that we are still asking the very question he poses.

Yet, looking back into Dave’s text, he offers one ominous prediction of how class will be represented in British cinema going forward. In his closing sentences, he writes that within the world of these films, the pursuit of capital will become more and more competitive and aggressive and that the social boundaries of class will become increasingly antagonistic of each other and themselves. Then, he argues that “the privileged world [will continue to] lack the categories of connection and cause, rhyme and reason” where the working class will continue to struggle in “connecting” with each other, as they fight for what jobs are remaining (2006: 164). Thus, at the time of writing, Dave offers that these class divides are doomed to grow throughout

the following decades, with a looming possibility that things will somehow get worse. While this statement can be read as a vague prediction of a future that, at the time, seemed impossible to predict, it then becomes necessary to revisit this question, and further flesh out Dave's speculative predictions. It also, indeed, becomes pertinent to bring these questions forth to the Brexit era, and ponder how they will increasingly become worse in decades to come.

It would be simple to end this study with this notion, acknowledging that the social realities have changed over the decade after Blair had resigned. This assertion would assume that Britain is currently made up of three separate spheres: one in which the upper class will violently gate their communities in order to avoid discussing their wealth; one in which a certain group of working-class individuals are fed fantasies of living in a comfortable class through the music they listen to (and eventually suffer the consequences when they realise that the social reality in their music does not line up with their reality); or one where other working-class individuals struggle to be heard by the institutions in charge of their social care. Yet, if this study were to end with this notion, this project would then insist that these classes do not interact with each other at all, and that they are – in some manner – existing in three different versions of Britain. The previous chapters also do not question how the ongoing impacts of Brexit threaten to change these class realities further. To effectively address these issues it is clear that more research is needed. There is thus a need to address how these classes interact with each other, and question how these interactions are sonically taking place in experiential realist representations of the British classes. It is also worth revisiting the notion that Fisher poses at the very end of his text, as he argues that “[t]he very oppressive pervasiveness of capitalist realism means that even glimmers of alternative political and economic possibilities can have a disproportionately great effect” (2009: 56). He further insists that “[t]he tiniest event can tear a hole in the grey curtain of

reaction which has marked the horizons of possibility under capitalist realism. From a situation in which nothing can happen, suddenly anything is possible again” (2009: 56). The Brexit referendum is this debate, and it is worth exploring whether it has changed the course of capitalism and classism, or whether it continues to maintain the status quo.

As established in the introduction, the Brexit referendum election took place on June 23rd, 2016, where the British people elected to leave the European Union. While the reasons for these results are varied and debated amongst the British people and various academics, two things are often agreed upon – that class plays a major role in the discussion around outcomes of Brexit, and that the classes all feel that Brexit will cause further changes in the future.³⁵ Thus, it is crucial to revisit how experiential realism captures these changing perceptions in films since 2016.

In the years since the referendum experiential realism is beginning to address how these classes communicate, especially with the policy outcomes of Brexit on their minds. While characters continue to deal with the realisations of their class statuses, they are also beginning to realise their class, and indeed, their national statuses become all the more important in this new era. Characters are beginning to face the crisis surrounding immigration and employment, and how nationalist rhetoric affects the racialised individual. In order to hypothesise how Brexit will change the lived experiences of the people of Britain, we must observe how Brexit has caused changes in the imagination of class. From this discussion, we will be able to understand how the soundscapes of the classes are changing, then be able to examine its cinematic representations.

³⁵ For more on the specifics on the Brexit debate and the referendum, see Duke, 2019, who writes on how the working class perceives “threat” in the Brexit era; Evans and Menon, 2017, who write on how the various political parties speak about class throughout the referendum; or Adam, 2020, who looks at the legal implications in the United Kingdom separating itself from the European Union.

II. How Brexit Changed Class Dynamics

Even though the Brexit referendum took place in 2016, its policies continue to harbour a mass wave of effects on the British people. Such policies were originally sold as helping British people achieve secure employment but ended up making the job market more precarious and uncertain.³⁶ It also convinced voters to believe that this was the only opportunity to reassert a set of assumed legal and cultural norms that had once disappeared: “the referendum result was taken by some as affirmation that the country was not only now ‘theirs’, but that it was theirs ‘again’”. In this way, there was a sense of history being corrected and of historical wrongs (immigration, primarily) being righted” (Burnett, 2017: 86). This battle over who got to “own” Britain was at the forefront of the referendum. It was also a key site of conflict between the classes, played out in the soundscapes that they have come to inhabit.

Before we assess this sonic site of conflict, this chapter must address the diversity of the classes that are being created. As sociologist Emma Dowling writes:

[o]ne of the most interesting outcomes of the Brexit vote from a sociological perspective is the resurgence of the category of class: everyone seems to agree that class mattered, yet the conceptions of class deployed have been limited (2021: 258).

Thus, there have been many problematic approaches to class that have shown up in the wake of the Brexit referendum. Dowling asserts, “the working class is rendered synonymous with a particular social identity, namely a male industrial proletariat of yore,” where the stereotypical image of men doing industrial labour dominates and often stands in for a larger, more diverse working class (2021: 270).³⁷ What Dowling’s work implores is a more contemporary, more diverse approach to class studies, where social events must influence the

³⁶ For more on policies of employment in the Brexit era and how the various classes relate to their employment, see Moody, 2016; and Won, 2019.

³⁷ For more on stereotypical explorations of class are explored and their diversity, see Shilliam, 2018; Virdee and McGeever, 2018.

ways that class boundaries are understood. As sociologist Gurinder K. Bhambra writes, this process of class re-development is not unique to Brexit and contains within it many other debates at the same time. She notes that such a rigid and undynamic class imagination “makes exceptional what is in fact central to the configuration of socio-economic hierarchies” (2017: 227). It is therefore necessary to view nation and class together, as Othered national identities in Britain have also come to impact visions of an individual’s class status. Thus, there is a need to revisit class, especially in regard to the changing socio-economic policies, and in regard to nation and race. What Bhambra insists is that we must use the Brexit moment in order to connect the ways that class and race intersect, and to view the ways that race and ethnic identity play into the imagination of British class, as a key issue in the Brexit referendum is immigration, and who should qualify as British in the first place.³⁸ Class is not solely about the amount of money one earns, the type of occupation they have, or their expectations in terms of future employment. It becomes about who has earned their way into Britain fairly and who does not belong in this system.

Class historian David Bailey writes that the Brexit referendum effectively redefined how class struggle was imagined in Britain, as “continued and sustained social struggle” remained between the classes as usual, but now “the conditions [have been put] in place for an ultra-neoliberal socio-economy, both promoted and legitimated by a nationalist and xenophobic discourse engendered by the very act of seeking to negotiate the process of achieving Brexit” which will in turn cause “class eruptions” (2017: 335). While he does not define exactly how

³⁸ It is crucial to acknowledge that racialised violence has increased in the wake of Brexit, often being described in class-based terms. For example, well-earning people who might have once appeared as middle- or upper-class have suddenly become of a lower-class status, as racist upper-class people decide that they no longer belong within an upper-class social circle. For more examples on racial hate crimes and their relationship to class, see Laverick and Joyce, 2019; Awan and Zempi, 2020; and Hester, 2020.

these eruptions will happen, and indeed, who they will most affect, it is worth noting that the boundaries in which class is understood are now beginning to change once again, and that a large swath of the population will be affected by the many changing economic policies in place.

Sociologist Lisa Mckenzie looks closer at these class eruptions, as she studies how the working class has been blamed by the middle class for the result of the referendum, even though it is mainly upper-class individuals who have voted to leave the European Union.³⁹ Mckenzie writes that this has caused a new version of class antagonism, where “[t]he people who were once categorised as ‘respectable working class’ have been devalued in the last 30 years, and are now ‘residuum’” (2017: 278) as a result of the referendum. They were blamed for voting against their best intentions, and not using the democratic vote in the best interest of the whole nation. In summary, Mckenzie believes that this new class antagonism comes out as the classes no longer view each other as “political threat[s] – just social problem[s]” to be dealt with (2017: 278). Here, Bailey and Mckenzie address the misconception that Brexit would bring about an equilibrium amongst the class. Rather, they insist that the inequalities would only rise post-referendum to the point in which the class system will begin to shift itself, becoming unfamiliar, antagonistic, and not as steady as it was once imagined to be.

Economic historian Ben Rogaly speaks further of this instability, where he argues expectations of the class system (such as the passing down of financial wealth from generation to generation in the upper class, and a diverse and employed working class consisting of white, racialised and migrant individuals) will become gradually become unstable – secure labour can no longer be assumed, and wealth cannot be easily built and passed down to future generations. He writes that “Brexit is not a single, one-off event but a process that exists on the surface in many arenas of

³⁹ For more on the results of the referendum and the statistics by class and geopolitical region, see Goodwin and Heath, 2016; Gutiérrez-Posada et al., 2021.

everyday life,” as these inequalities will gradually grow over time, and more and more people will fall into poverty and lose the “working” part of their working-class identity (2019: 28). Such ideas of the upper class fretting over the security of their wealth or working class falling further into poverty have been explored in previous chapters, but it is worth highlighting Rogaly’s notion of instability regarding class in an everyday sense – especially in the Brexit era. What Rogaly posits here is that while the British people once understood the borders of their class, the Brexit referendum brings about a new era and a new form of governance where one no longer can assume that their class will remain static, as the policies surrounding Brexit threaten to change them at any point. The government, as Bailey describes, threatens to erase and redefine a British individual’s national identity through its separation from the European Union, but also threatens to change how this individual’s class is defined. Lisa McKenzie suggests that more analysis of the way classes live everyday is needed in the wake of the Brexit referendum, in order to continue to assess how “we understand and articulate class distinction, and how we expose deep structural inequalities that are hiding in plain sight behind the cultural distinction of class prejudice” (2017: 278). To study how these shifts are occurring, this dissertation will turn to how these class boundaries are changing in an everyday sense. It will look specifically at the inequalities in sound and voice of the social classes. While some struggle to have their opinions over the Brexit referendum heard, others have come to dominate the political conversation, or have their opinions distorted by politicians and the media.

III. Brexit, Voice, And Soundscape

As we have previously explored in the introductory chapter, the language of sound is often used in describing how the classes reacted to the Brexit election result and continue to react to its aftermath. Such examples of stories of working class and immigrants “yelling” to the

governments in power what they needed to survive began to appear in the media, while the government promptly responded with messages such as “we hear you” and “we are listening” (Seidler, 2017: 183). A consistent reference to the “voices” demanding to be heard throughout the media demonstrates how prevalent the metaphor of sound has been throughout the Brexit referendum (Seidler, 2017: 183). After the result of the referendum, not only was the election result discussed through sound, but also this growing tension between the classes was discussed in sonic metaphors. Political scientist Raphael Malek analyses the referendum opinions of those who self-identify as part of a class in polls and focus groups two years post-Brexit. He also refers to the language of sound, saying that the British people could only agree on one thing - they have “largely tuned out” the news coverage of the ongoing negotiations which affect them, as they have grown tired of fighting for their own voice to be heard (2018). The upper class who voted for Brexit are tired of hearing consistent news coverage over something that might not impact them at all, while working-class people are frustrated as politicians and the media will not listen to the causes that they care about. In his survey of how the Brexit referendum was covered by media and academics, Gary Watt posits that divisions were often discussed through the metaphors of sound. He believes that people will only make “noise” when news “stories confirm their pre-existing point of view,” or when they violently oppose a political act (2020: 1). He notes that there is no middle ground to the news coverage of Brexit, where opinions remain in either extreme. Thus, the discourse of Brexit surrounds the ability of an individual to use their voice loudly to support or disagree with a certain viewpoint. So, even if the non-stop back-and-forth in political policies have largely been “tuned out” by the general public, they will still make noise after the election has passed if the issues pertain to their day-to-day existence. Thus, sound continues to be used as a metaphor to describe how people relate to Brexit. But it is more than

just a metaphor. The soundscape has come to represent who has the power to speak and who does not, ultimately affecting the understanding of changing class boundaries.

The sounds of Brexit that the British individual has come to constantly consume leads to a sense of endlessness, where their voice must constantly struggle to be heard in a crowded room of many people speaking all at once about the Brexit debate. Sociologist and media scholar Jean Seaton, after studying the representation of the voice in news coverage of the Brexit debate, concludes that with so many voices present and constantly commenting on the minutia of each event in the referendum, many voices, especially lower-class voices, were left unheard. Much attention was paid to ensuring that so many voices had a platform, that the soundscape became a crowded room, rather than an evaluation of pressing political issues and how they could be addressed. She believes that “[d]uring the referendum, this beautiful tool of adjudication was apparently lost sight of. Everything was treated in the Manichean way that political positions *had* to be,” one of balance, in providing space for both sides of the referendum to speak, counter against each other, and debate on policy (2016: 334). But as Seaton contends, “much of the ‘balance’ consequently lacked proper proportion”, as the voices of the people and the items they wanted addressed became lost (2016: 335). Seaton then argues that this impacted the view of the equality of voices in Britain, where the voices of the upper-class person was prioritised, where politicians spoke on behalf of the working class, and the voice of the working class became lost. Thus, the notions of a lived, experienced sense of class got lost in the political back-and-forth of the Brexit political debate. And this can be represented especially in the role of their voice. It is important to look at what the individual voice is doing, and how the individual is experiencing this increasingly hostile soundscape as we acknowledge what Brexit will continue to do. It is important to emphasise how voiceless the majority of the British public have become,

as they struggle to find a way to be heard, amongst the crowded room where every element of their life comes to be political. The British person is left without a voice in a political exercise where people speak for them, endlessly in turns.

But what does it mean to be voiceless, and what can a study of voicelessness tell us about the Brexit debate going forward? Why should the study of voice against a hostile soundscape be prioritised? The voice, as Jeff Pittam defines it, is a staple of an individual's identity, and symbolises their ability to assert their unique socio-political character amongst a busy soundscape: "[s]ituational context, other social variables including aspects of group identity, emotion type, and level of arousal may all influence judgments of personality" (1994: 84). The voice is thus inherently attached to class, as it is a social variable that affects one's ability to be heard amongst the crowded room. This judgement is where we are able to see what Robert D. Hermanson calls "silence and cacophony merging" as many people, whose identities are judged by the public to be the same, all speak at the same time, but cannot be heard as these prejudgements silence them in an already hostile environment (2019: 49). For example, between 2018 and 2019, many protests were held outside Westminster to condemn Article 50 being passed (and initiating the Brexit process), including the People's Vote March and the Let Us Be Heard March. In these marches, many people spoke, gave opinions on policies, chanted together and jeered politicians, but public perception of these events often focussed on how dangerous their voices were, including Cabinet Minister Andrea Leadsom writing that protestors "abuse, intimidate and scream in the face of someone they don't agree with" (Twitter, October 19th, 2019) and the BBC reporting a "noisy soundtrack" where many voices remain "frustratingly unclear" as they all speak at once (BBC News Live, October 19th, 2019). While people from all sides of the political spectrum attended this protest, it is clear that the voices of the working class

were the ones criticised in these reports. Even if they use their voices to express themselves and what they need to succeed, they will continue to be judged on their perceived identities, without any means of speaking back against the judgements they face.

The notion of being voiceless is especially pertinent, as these scholars often refer to Britain throughout the Brexit referendum through the metaphor of the soundscape of a crowded room, where working-class people have been speaking for generations but struggling to have their opinions heard by people in positions of power. In his writings on the political power that sound has in the mind, Stirling Christabel also refers to the notion of a crowded room as a metaphor for public discourse. He writes that within this crowded room, sound works to introduce individuals to political causes and the various stances within them and goes on to “affirm, entrench, or destabilise normative social hierarchies” and this, in turn, causes “socio-corporeal relations [to develop with] political ends” (2018: 57). In this practice, Christabel believes that individuals are able to use their sensations to imagine their own identities in relation to a social cause and recognise who their opponents are. In this practice, they are “[r]ecognising, however, that pluralism, difference and co-presence mean little if the encounters that manifest between bodies continue to legitimise relations of hostility and domination” (2018: 64). Using the language of a crowded room in the context of Brexit, the debate allows those to figure out who they are through the language of sound. They realise who is heard, who is not heard, and what they must do to be the most dominant voice in the room. During the Brexit referendum, they find it difficult to locate who else shares their voice, as everyone is speaking at the same time, and socially dominant voices get prioritised. Thus, there is a certain sense that the British individual has become voiceless.

This feeling of voicelessness is something that eventually causes individuals to feel as if they are stuck in an endless loop with no end in sight to this hostility. Watt goes on to suggest that “what is really going on, perhaps subconsciously but emerging through acoustic events and through acoustic language (especially metaphor), is an effort to win the battleground of sound, or at least to make sense of the acoustic environment through processes of acoustic participation” (2020: 3). What Watt suggests here is that sound plays a key role in the way that Brexit came about and continues to be discussed. But what Watt also emphasises in this idea is that this discussion is not framed as a pleasant conversation. This use of sonic language is particularly useful, as it likens sound within the Brexit debate to a form of warfare that occurs between two parties. Both parties are fighting to be heard in the crowded room, and no one ever feels as if they are having the upper hand. They will continue to fight on an infinite timeline, leading to feelings of madness and uncertainty over who they are, and whether they will ever be heard. Thus, while the study of the political play between the two classes is a fascinating one, it will not result in one side being victorious, and can continue to be assessed in its minutia for aeons. In order to better understand the effects of Brexit, it is worth assessing how the British people are affected in an everyday sense – looking specifically at the sounds they are hearing. It is worth wondering *how* they are feeling the weight of these policies, *how* they are already experiencing the environments around them changing, and ultimately, *how* the aftermath of Brexit continues to threaten their own sense of class identity.

The changing boundaries of class is now not only about how one identifies oneself given certain cultural markers, but also about who one believes should belong within these boundaries and who deserves to be heard. Yet, the working class argues that they are unheard by political elites and feel as if they need to be listened to. What were once hard boundaries of an understood

class system begin to change, as the boundaries of who does and does not belong, and crucially, who does and does not deserve to be heard begin to change. For some, the working class is no longer deserving of welfare, and immigrant others must be removed from an unstable job market. For others, the wealthy have become so wealthy that they are hoarding wealth unfairly and leave those less financially secure to die. What has become of this is a debate between security and insecurity in Britain, where class, and voice, lie at the heart of who is secure and who is insecure.

What the Brexit referendum accomplishes is a notion that the class system is no longer an objective hierarchy based on income or community, where common experiences exist solely on the lines of class, but rather a subjective standpoint, in which the British people are forced to reconsider the boundaries of class. It is crucially about who is permitted to speak, and who is able to be heard amongst the crowded room of political discourse. They employ their own understandings of who is deserving of a place within Britain, and who does not belong. As a result, communication amongst all people is breaking down. The only thing that unites all British people is that they must constantly debate who deserves a sense of security, welfare, and participation in British society. As Robert Holland describes this aftermath of class division amongst the British people, the language of sound is employed once again. He writes that this class conflict happens “not with a bang, but with a whimper” within the Brexit era, as people gradually come to realise that they have been silenced for their class status and are left to remain in a hostile soundscape around them (2020: 17). Thus, it becomes useful to return to the field of sound studies in order to understand how the Brexit referendum played out on an individual and everyday level, and how this class conflict threatens to grow over time.

But how can we study this sense of class-based voicelessness felt by the British person since the referendum? Psychologist Valerie Walkerdine provides some useful comments on a

methodology to study these impacts. She has studied working-class reactions to restrictive policies in Britain that affect the working class. In her article “No-one Listens to Us: Post-Truth, Affect and Brexit,” she highlights the importance of undergoing sensorial-based research as a means to study class in social movements. She studies the ways that everyday sensations are experienced by physical labourers in Britain and suggests that it is possible to understand how “present [socio-cultural] practices [are] produced through a history” of sensory discrimination (or denying workers the ability to see, feel, touch, etc.) (2020: 148). Through studying the senses denied, it is possible to understand that “the workers were caught up in the plays of global capital in terms of the worldwide demands [...] alongside many other aspects of what it meant to be a worker” (Walkerdine, 2020: 148). Through studying the sights, sounds, touches, and smells that the workers have, it is possible to study an “affective history” of a certain political moment, in which the body becomes a central place to understand how larger class tensions are felt individually. In the sounds people make as protest or in support of a side of the debate, or the sounds they consume in listening to others agree or disagree with political stances, they are able to understand how their class status is changing, and how it will change in the future. Walkerdine also insists that it is important to consider other sounds, “such as the disposition of houses, mostly terraced” where “women could talk as they put their washing out on the same day each week” as well as “the bells and whistles of work time, the joint movement of bodies through the streets at this time, the sounds of the works themselves” in order to understand the “temporal and spatial arrangements” of how policies affect their lives (2020: 148). Thus, in understanding what is happening in terms of environment, we are able to better understand how these individuals go about their fights to be heard in the crowded soundscape, how they feel their worlds are changing, and the worries they have for the future.

Thus, it is clear that the study of the everyday sound and ability to speak as representative of class tensions in the Brexit era is an entirely valid approach, and an in-depth study of how individuals hear and understand these prejudices is just as crucial. How Brexit is being sonified is through the ways that the class tensions are being heard, how these two opposing sides fight to show that they belong and that the other does not. They use their voices, their bodies, the environment around them to assert their Britishness in a world where class boundaries are changing so rapidly.

IV. Brexit and Cinema

In order to study how exactly Brexit has furthered tensions between the classes, it is crucial to revisit the methodology of this project. This chapter will use the same practices of close analysis of sound in experiential realist films as employed in previous chapters, only it will bring the timeline forward to the Brexit era. It will also make a few adjustments in its studying of the classes altogether and in the ways that experiential realism is defined.

The first question worth asking is what exactly qualifies a “Brexit film” in comparison to films that continue to show the larger impacts of New Labour’s economic changes and Cameron’s austerity policies. For the purposes of an accurate analysis of class without prejudice, this chapter will not analyse works that directly present the Brexit referendum, as only a few have been made that directly show the politicians in power and how the election itself has played out in the public sphere. These films (such as *Brexit: The Movie* [2016] and *Brexit: The Uncivil War* [2019]) aim to make a martyr of, or attack, a political party rather than depict the British people, who have been largely affected by Brexit policies. Thus, analysis of non-biased filmmaking and cinematic works that look at the real impacts of Brexit on the British public must

be privileged over films that aim to depict the political players of the Brexit movement and their actions.

For the purposes of this project, a “Brexit film” should thus be defined as one that depicts the impacts of policies on the people directly, rather than one that shows the referendum itself, the politicians involved, or the devising of policies. It should be considered as an experiential realist film that shows the aftermath of the referendum, one that represents what the Brexit referendum has done to individuals, rather than one that represents key moments in the election directly. As Neil Archer posits in his book about the impacts of Brexit on the British film industry, Brexit is not mainly represented as a literal theme that is visually depicted in the lives of these characters, but a cinematic mode unto itself. In Archer’s writings, he argues that Brexit presents a new cinematic “imaginary [...] in practical and political terms” as contemporary British cinema is now “bring[ing] acutely into view Britain’s more questionable global status and independence – and above all, the question of its self-sufficiency and sustainability as a nation within a globalised world system” (2020: 174). In effect, the consequences of Brexit should be studied by academics not just in the way it is literally represented, but also in the ways in which its policies affect the daily lives of characters on a long-term basis. These characters are average British people, who are represented as questioning how this referendum will affect their lives, how these policies will change their employment, and what this all means for their identity. What Archer suggests in this statement is that British filmmakers and production companies now must reflect how the British nation and the British character has changed, now it is functionally independent of Europe. It must look at past interpretations of Britishness and wonder what sets the contemporary British character apart from past interpretations and the larger European identity.

What Archer observes in his study of various genre films made in the Brexit era, the Brexit movement appears to “demarcates an ‘us’ and ‘them’” within the characters depicted – the English characters in former and the cultural Other in the latter (2020: 61). They are constantly at odds with one another and are presented in a way to indicate how the English person has no idea what races and culture exists outside their own world. What messaging eventually arises from this conflict is an “ambiguity that highlights the uncertain history of England (more specifically, in this case, than ‘Britain’) vis-à-vis Europe as a physical, cultural, and political entity” (Archer, 2020: 61).

Archer writes that Brexit exists in cinema as an unspoken but omnipresent theme, to “underscore an obvious anxiety” that the British character feels (2020: 54). Yet, it is too simplistic to relegate Brexit as a type of ghost that dares not speak its name in the realm of recent cinematic productions. Archer’s analysis focusses mainly on the decisions that film executives make about how the theme of “Britishness” should be represented, and how these decisions visually appear on screen – but only looks at the process of pre-production. This form of study problematically assumes that these studio executives are solely responsible for the ways that films will be interpreted, and that these reflections made by often quite financially well-endowed executives will always accurately represent the lives of the average British working-class individual. Thus, further analysis into the Brexit mode of filmmaking will be necessary to understand how exactly Archer’s hypothesis of the British character being re-imagined plays out in other forms of cinema.

The class tensions that we have explored are starting to bleed into experiential realist cinema, where the character must debate their own place within British society. In a manner, these characters are not just placed in isolation to question their own identity markers, but they

are realising that the classed British identity they have become so accustomed to is no longer existent, and they can no longer recognise the world they once inhabited. They are often placed in the crowded room soundscape, where they are cut off from the sensations they are accustomed to, with their distorted sense of sound representing the ways they are pondering both their class and their national status. In a way, they are asking themselves the very question Dave asked in his earlier text – “how did we end up like this, all of us?” As they ask themselves this question, they recognise the lack of power their voices have – against a hostile soundscape and with each other. To answer that very question, they are forced to re-assess their class status, question their national identities, and re-discover their environments around them. As these characters re-examine their positions in their classed worlds, they realise that the nation that they live in has become completely unrecognisable.

As social realities and an individual’s understanding of their own class status crumble in real time, it becomes difficult to render an accurate reflection. As people adjust to Brexit, they begin to see their environments around them change, and cinema is capturing their sensations as the world changes, instead of reflecting the world exactly as it is. Post-Brexit, experiential realism falls further into experimental techniques, where further aesthetic liberties are taken in rendering realities of these characters who do not recognise their own realities, or the identities they inhabit. In speaking about the role of the city in British cinema and how it changes under globalisation, film scholar Gareth Millington writes that recent dramatic works showcase “[t]he optical unconscious of cinema” and “exposes not only the fine material detail of mundane, everyday urbanization” as it “dramatizes the struggles of migrants caught up in this process; that is, those who are active in practices of emplacement but suffer the effects of displacement,

separation and xenophobia” (2016: 76). This type of aesthetic liberties being used in realist cinematic works is not entirely new, as described by film scholar David Forrest, who writes:

[t]he ever-diversifying social realist mode continues to respond to the changing fabric of society, whilst retaining a primary concern with marginalised characters, and by extension the expectation that such a focus constitutes a revelation of social reality (2013: 199).

In defining what this diversification means exactly, Forrest looks forward to the work of new auteurs of the time he was writing (namely Andrea Arnold, Lynne Ramsay and Pawel Pawlikowski), and argues that British social realism will change through “its ever-deepening deployment of abstract formal and aesthetic strategies” in the way real life is shown (2013: 200). As such, the genre responds to changes in reality and misrecognition of oneself and one’s identity in experimental cinematography, fast-paced editing or, most importantly, in sound design.

Thus, experiential realism is no longer about depicting and understanding reality as it is in as accurate form as possible, but rather using the perceptions of the individual to show how they react to a changing political atmosphere. We have already seen the methodology that Walkerdine has suggested in studying how the sensations around a British person allows for the study of an individual or collective political conscience. It is also worth applying this methodology to the context of Brexit (as her study mainly focusses on the alternative facts trend of 2016, and Trump-era politics). As we have come to understand in the previous chapters, sensations and perceptions work together to help an individual understand radical political change, and how this can affect their self-identification. While she refers to physical feelings such as sickness or surprise, it is worth combining Walkerdine’s suggestion of the study of sound, to fully evaluate how sensation fits into this paradigm. As we have seen, the language of sound is so often used to refer to class and the tensions they experience. In focussing on

sensations of the individual as reflective of the larger political changes that surround them, Anghad Closs-Stephens suggests that we are able to assess “how this political moment has been felt—as an intensification in racism, Islamophobia, and identity politics” (2019: 405). In combining the methodologies of Walkerdine and Closs-Stephens, we can assess how these class tensions are lived out in an everyday sense, and better understand how British individuals are feeling that their class status (and indeed, national status) has come under recent threat. Here, we are able to see how Brexit affects the lived realities surrounding class, and nation, by analysing the changes that are seen when the classes begin to interact and realise that this event has fundamentally changed how they interpret their own identity.

Before we delve into the films themselves, it is worth revisiting the methodology of how this film analysis will be conducted. Although the study of the sounds within these films will be similar to those of previous chapters, this chapter will diverge slightly in its analysis of class. While the previous chapters analysed each of the classes in their own worlds separately, the analysis of films in this final chapter will assess the impacts of Brexit in studying how all the classes interact with each other. While this might seem contradictory to group the classes together, or even problematic (as the experiences of an upper-class person differs entirely from that of the working-class), this method of study follows with what contemporary sociologists such as Victor Seidler and Imogen Tyler implore in their methods of studying Brexit. In his book, *Making Sense of Brexit*, Seidler surveys the opinions of how people reacted to Brexit at all stages of its conception, then turns to what can be done to address their growing sense of anger. He ultimately argues that “structural changes are needed” to the way class is imagined as “the neoliberal market economy” post-Brexit threatens to change the way the classes will be composed in the future (2017: 193). In his own research, Seidler studies how the classes interact

with each other, in order to capture how their lack of communication causes misinformation to spread in the Brexit movement. Following Seidler's example, it is clear that in adapting approaches to the study of class to look specifically at class communication, one can capture how the movement threatens to affect class relations and dynamics. In addition, Imogen Tyler posits that discussion of how Brexit will affect each of these classes individually requires them to be researched together. In writing about her methodology of studying class struggle in Britain, she argues that "conditions of deepening economic and social inequalities urgently require class analysis if we are to comprehend forms of exploitation that underpin the decomposition (and re-composition) of class relations" (2015: 497). Through this we must study "empirical studies" of all experiences, "upper and lower, urban and rural" (Tyler, 2015: 497). This chapter will perform such hermeneutic studies through observing the recent wave of films that capture how class dynamics are changing. It will observe how the silence that each class experiences at the end of the austerity era have grown into a lack of communication with the other classes, leading them to confusion over their own identity when they are forced to confront them. Through looking at how each of these characters experiences confusion when they communicate, how they are each presented with a bleak future with no outlet, and how their homeland has become a haven of confusion for them, this chapter will assess the ways that Britain itself is becoming unrecognisable to those who inhabit it.

The films assessed in this project that were made in the period of New Labour and Austerity use sound as a means for the classes to continually assess their own identities throughout the beginning and middle of the film, but by the film's conclusion, they are almost always certain of what class they belong in, what geographic territory they occupy, and the reasons behind their success or persecution. Moreover, they are almost certain of what they can

expect of their future based on their employment status, their ethnic identity, or the activities they are involved in. In a way, their class status once cemented their experience for the rest of their lives. Yet, in the experiential realist films made in the Brexit era, they are always at threat, always unsure of where they belong, and feel as if their future is certain to be one of being an outcast. These films show the journeys of characters as Brexit threatens to upend their lives through the ways in which the classes come into tension directly. Each class is always being told that they do not belong in the area they have come to occupy, and the sound becomes increasingly unfamiliar and uncomfortable for them. Their home becomes unfamiliar, as well as their class status and territory. This analysis of unfamiliarity of territory becomes even more crucial in the face of Brexit, as it will provide clues to how class is being re-considered in real life scenarios.

In order to properly represent the voices of British individuals throughout this movement, this chapter will observe in parallel the experiences of individuals in Britain, through sociological studies of class. Once we have established how silencing plays a major role in the discussions of Brexit and its effects on real people, it is key to look at how Brexit threatens their voices and the ways in which they communicate. This chapter will now analyse several works that show the effects of socially damaging policies within Brexit (such as tariffs on fishing and immigration), and how it threatens to change the future of Britain itself. These films are *God's Own Country* (2017), *Bait* (2019), *Mogul Mowgli* (2020) and *Limbo* (2020). In analysing the soundscapes of all four films, especially with regard to how different classes interact with each other, it will become evident that the Britain that was once so fixed in its traditions, so recognisable in its national status and class hierarchy, and an unchanging homeland for so many, is becoming unfamiliar and unhomely.

1. Locating The Classed Other In *God's Own Country* (2017)

The first film that this chapter will study is *God's Own Country*, directed by Francis Lee in 2017. While this film was released very shortly after the Brexit referendum had passed and seems impossible to attach with the referendum as it was conceived beforehand, this film perfectly captures the ways that xenophobia was felt amongst the working class as more and more immigrants came to Britain in search of work. This film surrounds the life of Johnny (Josh O'Connor), a young farmer living in rural Yorkshire, who is being primed to take over his father Martin's (Ian Hart) farming business. While he lives a rather isolated life where he only interacts with other working-class men, this all changes when his father hires Gheorghe (Alec Secăreanu), a young Romani migrant farmer, who is claiming asylum in Britain on a short-term (and questionably legal) contract. While both men are working class in their respective cultures, the film uses shifts in the soundscape to capture how these two men attempt to dominate each other, thinking the other is a threat to their class status. They feel aggression that they have been socially pressured to feel for one another and enact it through silencing each other. Although they begin a sexual relationship, where both parties must unlearn their cultural biases, the film aptly uses silence and noise to frame their inability to express themselves authentically, and ultimately break down imagined class barriers. This film was Francis Lee's feature debut, though he has directed several shorts about Yorkshire (such as *The Farmer's Wife* [2012], *Bradford Halifax London* [2013], and *The Last Smallholder* [2014]) and is invested in how class plays into rural and urban divides. Francis Lee did the sound design himself, with attention to the voice and how it gets disrupted:

The sound was so important to me, and so carefully crafted. I wanted, in a sense, to keep being brought back to the reality of the world, the situation, the noise. Rather than having it be very quiet, seductive, I didn't want people to get cozy at any point. I wanted to undercut that natural world and the natural sounds with man-made sounds, or mechanical

sounds. I ranked those up in volume, with another hard cut and a hard sound. It was always to undercut the rural, pastoral, “Oh this could be nice” world.” (Heeney, 2017).

Thus, *God’s Own Country* plays with sonic expectations of rural Yorkshire, and represents voicelessness through its attention to how the other is realised and rejected in a Brexit atmosphere.

First, let us establish the type of soundscape the film creates in representing the environment. Historical representations of rural life in British media often use sounds akin to those in programs such as *All Creatures Great and Small* (BBC1, 1978-1990): of sheep bleating, of wind passing over the landscape, of babbling brooks and general quiet representing serenity. This film challenges this notion through its use of sound design and soundtrack mixing. There are loud sounds that accompany Johnny throughout his life. When he is in the barn (such as instances at 4:31, at 21:51 and at 1:22:48), there are banging noises often heard as he does his work. The barn’s architecture echoes his dialogue, sounds of machinery and various tools that Johnny uses make high pitched noises, and the sounds of various animals crying is mixed much louder than they are typically mixed, subverting expectations of vococentrism in the dialogue. This use of loud and uncomfortable sounds challenges the images traditionally associated with farm work in Yorkshire. This notion is especially present in first shots of the film (from 0:20-1:16). The initial sounds are of the wind, branches hitting the roof, as well as bird calls. It is set up to be the stereotypical soundscape of rural Yorkshire - quiet and idyllic. Yet, after nearly one minute of watching a sunrise over this still visual landscape and calming soundscape, a man is heard vomiting and grunting loudly and drowning out all the sounds on the soundtrack. After twenty seconds of these sounds, a woman is heard calling him (at 1:53) in a manner that is also mixed to be grating. The man grunts loudly in response, mixed at the same volume. It is clear from these shots that the film is challenging the typical understanding of the Yorkshire farm.

Thus, the soundscapes are clearly unusual, twisting an understood calm reality to be one of discomfort, sickness, and abjection.

Yet, the high and grating sound levels are not just limited to the soundscapes the characters are placed within in this film, but also in their interaction. The film inserts the audience into Johnny's perspective as he tries to find meaning in his existence, using his voice to dominate over others. Much like how Mia enjoys screaming and creating loud noises to protest her judgement in *Fish Tank*, Johnny uses his ability to make noise to intimidate others into remaining silent and perceiving him as a man in total control over his surroundings. For example, when Johnny has sex with another farmer in a trailer (at 7:10), Johnny controls the sounds made through covering the man's mouth, grunting loudly in a manner to threaten him, and banging intentionally on the sides of the vehicle to create noises of metal clanging. The sounds heard in this scene are thus not those of sexual pleasure, but the pain that Johnny creates in the other man. When the man tries to approach Johnny afterwards, Johnny bangs his fist against his car in a loud manner to intimidate him into running away. He rejects social connection and viewing other men with equality, but rather uses his opportunities to regain control over a soundscape that has become dull to him.

Johnny's use of violence and the creation of noise to assert dominance in a space is a common theme in the film, as it reveals Johnny's isolation and disconnection from his work and his space around him. The film constantly references the notion of the abject, or the act of emitting something from one's body, as the way Johnny tries to gain control over his space. As he abjects, he makes sounds in a triumphant way, as if he is conquering over this loud soundscape. There are plenty of examples of this occurring throughout the film, such as when he grunts and moans as he fixes and dumps sweat on a fence (at 2:53), when he performatively spits

and urinates on the barn before he heads out to town (at 3:58). The film aptly sonifies Johnny's feeling of sameness, to the point where he does not attempt to even recognise the scenery around him anymore. This is also present when he is at the bar (in the scene starting at 1:14:02), where he slams tables, spits out his beer on the carpet, and bangs a slot machine to make it clear to the other patrons that he is masculine and is not to be interacted with. His outlet is through violently taking control over his space and being the most dominant part of his soundscape. This could be attributed to him rejecting or deflecting his sexuality. Yet, this use of abjection and sounds also indicates the separation Johnny experiences from the expected country life of a working-class individual. In her writings on what bodily abjection signifies, Julia Kristeva defines the abject as the fluid materials that emerge out of us, where its meaning changes – it becomes both a disgusting object apart from ourselves, but also something used to make the outside world closer to ourselves: “one can understand its skirting the somatic symptom on the one hand and sublimation on the other [...] the abject permeates me, I become abject” (1982: 11). In depicting Johnny as he urinates, spits, vomits and makes noises to disrupt a quiet soundscape, it not only indicates he has become sick of his experience and wants to treat his working environment as if it does not matter, but also that wants to become less alienated from his own experience, through leaving a part of himself on everything he does. The uses of abjection in these scenes indicate that the farming profession is something to be frustrated with, something that one feels constantly alienated from, and through leaving parts of oneself in the space, one is ultimately able to feel as if they are gaining control over it. The reality of farming work has changed for farmers like Johnny in Britain, where he is desperate to assert his identity as a farmer who is in total control of his territory as much as possible, through literally blurring the lines between what

is his territory and what is himself. While he is able to put a piece of himself in his work, he does not find a reason to care for it or enjoy it and moves on from one task to the next.

The way Johnny makes sounds is directly attached to his class status, as demonstrated when he talks to his friends in the nearby village bar. When he runs into a former schoolmate (starting at 17:13), He insults her, effectively calling her weak as she had left the working-class life to get an education. This is first heard when he interrupts her as she tries to introduce her friends from university and encouraging him to join them on a night out. He says, “you bring them in to gawk and laugh at the natives, huh?” laughing at how strange her upper-class friends appear in a working-class village. In interrupting her, he stops her from taking control of the conversation, or bringing in her upper-class friends to dominate the conversation. He wants to appear in control, guiding the conversation in the way he desires. When she tries to defend herself, he then cuts her off once again loudly saying “you fuck off to your posh colleges and that, swan back here on your holidays, thinking you know it all,” ignoring her attempts at conversation and instead trying to use this opportunity to talk over her and assert that he is doing the more noble work while she is a form of class traitor. The former schoolmate is left in silence, unsure of how to respond to Johnny’s aggressive comments. For Johnny, the ability to interrupt and “get on with it” is to enact power in a social situation, using his working-class status to accuse others of being oblivious about the reality of class in the United Kingdom.

The notion of Johnny using his voice as a source of claiming classed power is also evident in his interactions with Gheorghe. As Gheorghe begins to be initiated into the daily workings of the farm, Johnny sees him as a thieving immigrant being primed to steal his work, so Johnny responds to his work by grunting at Gheorghe (such as the instance at 22:36), slams doors (heard at 24:08), and ignores Gheorghe when he asks for help (heard at 24:37). He also

calls Gheorghe slurs for travellers and Romani peoples whenever he feels that Gheorghe is stepping over his bounds or outperforming him in terms of work (such as when he asks him who he actually is at 13:21, or when he calls him a slur at 25:55 and 29:01). He uses abjection as well, by throwing up on Gheorghe's cabin (at 20:37). He thus alters the soundscape as he did in the previous scenes, enjoying the pleasure of silencing Gheorghe and reminding him that he is dominant in terms of class status. Gheorghe remains rather silent during this, unsure of how to fight back against the violent Johnny. It is important to establish here that while Johnny's actions here are racist, they do not merely reflect an inherent racism he has against Romani people but reflects the fact Johnny sees Gheorghe as a threat. As Sarah Neal et al. posit, rural working-class individuals, like farmers, often do not feel nationalism as they have a hatred of the Other (and, in fact, many farmers often express positive views of a more diverse industry), but because they believe in a version of Brexit "filtered through a nostalgic recovery of a 'what was once' - overlapped with those assemblages of 'the rural'" where farming industries are able to thrive without outside help (2021: 177). Through racist behaviour or non-acknowledgement of the Other, they believe they can return to a world in which they are able to maintain their farms on their own. Even though Brexit is not acknowledged in this film, and it is unclear whether Johnny would be in favour of these policies or not, this interpretation of racist action holds true to Johnny's beliefs. Johnny's racist behaviour towards Gheorghe is not one of actual racist hatred and white-only nationalism, but one based on his own work. Through ignoring him and acting as if the sounds he produces are not ones worth acknowledging, Johnny avoids the very notion of the Other, Gheorghe, and pretends as if he is able to manage the farm on his own.

Now we have understood how the film depicts Yorkshire, who Johnny's character is and his discomforts with his class status, let us turn to the study of voice and voicelessness

throughout this film. While this film often hints at Johnny's various attempts to be the most dominant and in control of the soundscape, it also suggests how voiceless he is, and how he is ultimately unable to effectively communicate with those around him. This is first acknowledged in the scene when Martin and Johnny argue (at 8:34), where Johnny's expected dominance and control over the other reverses, to the point at which he has become completely inaudible. While they are fighting about the division of tasks, the sounds become a lot louder and harder to parse from one another, as their words reverberate around the barn's tin architecture, making for an uncomfortable echo. These sounds become strange and almost unreal as the reverberation becomes more and more profound, as the echoes prevent them from understanding each other. Not only does this reflect the difference in perspectives that Martin and Johnny have but reflects the voicelessness that both characters have. It is clear that the reality for Johnny is changing, as his tasks are mounting, and the environment he enjoys dominating is now one where he can no longer be heard by those around him. This frustration is not just due to architectural choices in the shooting location, but representative of the bleak state of farming in the Brexit era. Johnny's and Martin's sensations reflect the state of farmers at the time, as they too were frustrated at the outcomes of Brexit on their communities. Film historian Chamberlain Staub studies the history of the cinematic representation of farming in Britain and argues that *God's Own Country* reflects the changing attitudes that Brexit has caused in the farming community. He writes that "this nonstop cycle of uncertainty [caused by Brexit] is a constant stressor. Farmers now have the added worry of losing support with government removal of subsidies" (2018: 80). He then posits that this change in farmers' attitudes must be reflected in the representation of farmers in British cinema, as he contends that farmers are always represented as stable and masculine individuals who are willing to face any challenge. With market uncertainty, Staub believes, there is a

“necessary and overdue task to reassess what it means to be a British [farmer]” (2018: 84). Thus, the use of reverberation and inaudibility in this scene indicates a shift in the world that working-class farmers inhabit. They once were able to weather storms, but with the threat of another migrant worker and a lower income, Johnny feels a threat to the only work he can get. There is a feeling of voicelessness in this scene in how both characters are unable to express themselves or are able to agree on what tasks must be done on the farm. Their world is changing at a rapid pace, becoming unrecognisable and inaudible to them.

This theme of voicelessness recurs throughout the film. It also appears in Gheorghe’s character, who feels like he must get on with his work without overstepping his place as an immigrant. He is unable to communicate with anyone around him, as Martin, Dierdre (Martin’s mother and Johnny’s grandmother), and Johnny all ignore him due to language barriers (heard as he cannot understand the television program at 52:58), but he also remains quiet out of fear that he would be asking for too much. He remains silent when he arrives and is introduced to his work at the farm (at 20:38), and also when Johnny asks him questions about his life (such as 1:11:22). The soundscape of silence is thus unfamiliar to him, as if he is placed in a new world where he knows he does not belong, and that communication is impossible. He is also silenced in his communication with his family, as they were once wealthy farmers in Romania before an unnamed tragedy happened that forced Gheorghe to flee. He attempts to speak to pictures of his family (at 16:06), and the uncomfortable silence here represents the familial and class reality he will never get back. Even though Gheorghe fights back against Johnny’s stereotypical interpretation of himself and spits back to Johnny (at 30:02), he only does so once, and whispers as he speaks to ensure he does not seem too aggressive. Thus, through sound, class realities have shifted for both of the film’s main characters. For Johnny, he sees Gheorghe as a credible threat

to his career and his status as a working-class farmer and uses noise and abjection in order to assert a territory he increasingly sees as under threat. Meanwhile, Gheorghe is separated from his previous class reality and his previous family life and cannot communicate to anyone nearby as they already have stereotypical interpretations of him. The interactions between these two characters shape the way they understand each other, and how they will continue to understand their class relationships going forward.

This voicelessness is occasionally challenged, especially after the point in which Johnny and Gheorghe have sex and teach other non-aggressive behaviours. Yet, their voicelessness continues to be established. After their sexual exchange and this realisation that they indeed are fighting for the same things, they begin to act as equals. As they finish the lambing tasks that they have been assigned, they have full conversations speaking on the same level of volume (such as the conversation about the beauty of the landscape at 35:54 and their mothers at 42:31), help each other with their work without speaking (as they repair the boundary at 37:21), and aid each other when they are literally hurt (where abjection is no longer presented as an object of threat to assert territory but as a means to heal a collective wound at 45:03). Thus, the soundscape becomes much more peaceful and quieter, where the exchange between characters becomes not one of antagonism but fighting for a collective good. But this sense of harmony is only when both characters are together, and in brief moments when they are not being watched by others. This is demonstrated when Dierdre watches them as they watch television (at 53:35), or when Martin sees Johnny and Gheorghe playing out in the field in an intimate way and they must pretend they are fighting (at 56:12). When others are watching, or even nearby, they sit apart from each other in total silence, keeping up the appearance that they are still antagonistic with each other as they once had. As the characters become increasingly aware they are being

surveilled, the film becomes silent as Johnny and Gheorghe realise that they cannot speak out about their situation. Johnny and Gheorghe do not want to speak about their relationship, or risk upsetting their classed dynamics, lest they be judged by others. They do not want to acknowledge a queer relationship as they are both presented to be conservative and traditional. Thus, all the characters are left without the ability to speak about their social situation, no matter how upset it makes them. While at a bar together (at 1:14:53), they comment on the fact they are being watched by others around them, and even if they want to be out in public, they could not perform as romantic partners, as both Johnny and Gheorghe must conform to certain classed expectations of themselves, and not show any care for each other. Johnny continues to slam the bar, scream to the barkeeper, and loudly have sex with another patron in earshot of Gheorghe. This violence is done to keep up appearances to other bar members that he is a typical working-class person (as every other bar patron is in this scene), and Gheorghe is just a quiet immigrant. As their relationship would make them susceptible to the judgement of the village, they must remain silent about their romantic, or even platonic, attachment.

The final way the film emphasises voicelessness is through the use of score. The film seldom uses score, in its effort to focus on how voiceless and uncomfortable these characters are in this classed environment where they will be prejudiced for the remainder of their lives. The first of the film's only uses of score is heard as Johnny and Gheorghe climb the scenic hills (at 24:52), to swelling and hopeful-sounding violins and cellos. This score serves to further reinforce their voicelessness, as neither character is able to comment on the wide-reaching landscape they are consuming. They cannot see the end of the environment that they are placed within, nor hear each other in a meaningful way. It is as if their environment is all-consuming, and they cannot escape from these feelings of voicelessness. No matter how loud they could be,

they will never be heard by anyone around them. The other instance of the same score being used in this film is in its final shots of the caravan being taken away (at 1:40:06). This is meant to appear uplifting, as Gheorghe and Johnny are finally able to be a couple living in the same house. But this score highlights how even in a moment of triumph, they cannot speak about their relationship, or even act as if they are a couple. Johnny and Gheorghe watch on as the caravan is taken away, staying far apart, and not speaking to each other, as the score plays. They then watch the lorry leave in silence. They look at each other, both not saying anything or conveying any expression, then walk into the house one after another, only holding hands when the lorry is gone and they are sure that no one else is in the house. As they enter the house, the score returns once again in a minor key. The quietness and minor score of this scene is rather chilling, as it suggests that they are not able to communicate as openly as they were in earlier scenes, as they must continue to be antagonistic, or be accused of being queer or acting out of their classed position by those around him. Even though it is clear that Johnny has learned from Gheorghe about how to express love in a tender manner, and that their worldviews have both been challenged as depicted through the role of sound, they both must keep up appearances and remain voiceless in order maintain an image of normality in a racist, homophobic and classist community. They must keep their personal lives silent, for the sake of their professional careers.

The ways in which this film represents voicelessness reflects the ways that Brexit has forced farmers to change their perspectives on their work. The soundscapes keep changing for him, as his world becomes increasingly unfamiliar and uncomfortable for Johnny. Both Johnny and Gheorghe feel as if their ability to speak or act authentically has disappeared. Through the creation of an uncomfortable soundscape, *God's Own Country* represents how Brexit causes individuals to realise that their own position is not as steady as they once considered it to be, that

they cannot live in isolation with their own class, they are voiceless as a community. For the first time in this project, the differences in class perception are highlighted and discussed by its characters. Yet, they hold no power in creating difference in their community, or challenging preconceptions of migrant workers. In some means, this is a rather happy ending for a film about Brexit, as the film represents a confrontation of the other that ends with a tender relationship. But it must be acknowledged that this ending is not fully happy, as the future remains uncertain for the farm, and the relationship must be kept secret, lest they lose their image of masculine, enduring working-class people to those around them. Ultimately, the soundscapes of Brexit loom over this film not only in the preconceptions of class that each character had of the other, but in the ways that they will continue to act out their class in the future. Thus, Brexit casts a dark cloud over them, and makes a moment of class solidarity one of bleak silence and voicelessness.

2. “A Sense of Discomfort and Otherness:” Dislodging Voice and Class in *Bait* (2019)

God’s Own Country was released in 2017 and represents just the beginning of soundscapes becoming increasingly unrecognisable as the characters fall into voicelessness. This theme only becomes more omnipresent in British experiential realist films as time goes on, where the soundscapes become increasingly unfamiliar. One of such examples is *Bait*, directed by Mark Jenkin in 2019. Mark Jenkin is a Cornish director who does his own cinematography and sound design, who is invested in representing how Cornwall is culturally and politically becoming distanced from the rest of England. *Bait* is his first feature length fictional film, as he previously worked in the experimental genre for films such as *The Midnight Drives* (2007), *The Essential Cornishmen* (2016) and *The Road to Zennor* (2017). In *Bait* (as he does his other works), Jenkin recorded the film’s visuals without recording sound, and foleys the dialogue and sound effects in later to create “a sense of discomfort and otherness” in his viewers, dislodging

them from a stereotypically idyllic image of Cornwall (Concannon, 2019: 44). *Bait* is a film surrounding a small fishing village in Cornwall. It follows the lives of siblings Martin (Edward Rowe) and Steven Ward (Giles King), two fishermen who are forced to reassess their business as they suddenly find that going about their work is more difficult in the face of less demand and an ever-engulfing tourism industry taking over their village. This film uses sound almost exclusively to frame the unfamiliarity that Martin experiences as his knowledge of home, his career, and himself begins to disappear. As he interacts with the upper-class people who come to inhabit his village, he notices that the boundaries of his class are beginning to change during the turbulent Brexit era, and his ability to speak about his concerns disappears.

Let us begin the analysis of the film with understanding how exactly the film uses sound to frame an unfamiliar environment. The film opens (from 0:14-2:26) with a title indicates that this is “before” the main events of the film and depicts fishing work in a rather conventional style. Two fishermen are shown doing their work, where sounds of cutting of rope and the dropping of traps are heard in a soothing and measured manner, indicating how this practice is routine for them. These various noises of their practice dominate over the soundscapes of the waves crashing and seagulls calling. It is clear that these fisherman, Steven and Martin, feel relaxed and in complete control over their work, as suggested by the rhythmic and pleasant intercutting of shots. As the boat goes out to sea, the screen fades to white as the sounds fades out. The film then cuts, without an “after” title (at 2:27), as the violent sounds of waves crashing enter the soundtrack. It is clear from this audio cue that not all is harmonious as it once was. At this time cue, a multitude of sounds are heard: seagulls are mixed much more loudly; sounds of the boat brushing against the dock are warped to sound more like metal scraping; and the sound of Martin’s footsteps are much more booming than expected. From these sounds, it is clear that

the world of the film is not to be as expected, as sounds are mixed at seemingly the wrong volume, are distorted, and altogether unrecognisable. The environment is not just unrecognisable, but also makes Martin out to be smaller than usual. In a scene where he walks on the cliffs and beaches of Cornwall (such as 40:34), Martin's usually loud footsteps have become quiet against the formidable landscape around him. The sounds of wind are strong, and he cannot find a way to be heard amongst all this noise. This effect indicates a sense of disjointedness, or the notion that the once familiar world that Martin inhabits has now become completely alien to him. *Bait* often demonstrates the unfamiliarity of the environment through the use of sound effects. The film often uses a sound effect of a boom noise, akin to that of an explosion, to indicate when Martin is feeling a moment where his environment is no longer his own (such as the examples at 35:32 when he walks home without a catch, at 52:44 when he realises his trap has been stolen, and at 1:03:32 when he has to scrape together funds for a boat). Wind sounds and wave crashes that often populate the soundtrack dissipate, and the camera closes in on Martin's face as he looks disappointed. There is no explosion literally happening, but Martin feels as if his world no longer belongs to him. Thus, the film uses unfamiliar sounds to indicate that the often-repeated comfortable representation of Cornwall as an idyllic seaside retreat is not present, and the once familiar world that Martin inhabits has completely disappeared.

The sensation of the familiar soundscape becoming unfamiliar is especially tied in this film to the notion of home, or literally, Martin's and Stephen's family home being transferred over to the upper class. This misrecognition of home and class is represented through the Leigh family, who buy the "Fisherman's Cottage" and turn it into a bed and breakfast for their upper-class friends to rent. Whenever Martin is working around the home, he looks at it longingly, but the soundscape is made to be strange as he does not recognise the class of people who have come

to inhabit a working-class space. The Leigh family are often loud when they are around Martin's old family home: they make noise with their loud cars as they park (such as 5:54), they slam doors (such as 45:12), and they host parties (such as 8:22). These noises are mixed jarringly loud, to the point of distortion. This demonstration of the upper class as noise creators is especially noteworthy. In the previous chapter, discussion of the films acknowledges that the working class were often accused of being too noisy, where in this film sound is used to demonstrate how the noise of the upper class impacts the working class as they get on with their work. Martin finds the Leigh family's noise especially distracting as he goes on with his work in the harbour across the street. Unexpected sounds also appear when the classes have conflict around the home, arguing over who owns the space. When local barmaid, Wenna (Chloe Endean), arrives and attempts to help Martin take off a clamp on his car just outside the home in a later scene (at 38:10), sounds of metallic scraping are heard, even though Wenna is just holding the clamp with her bare hands. The use of the wrong sounds persists, as when Wenna throws a ball at the Leigh's Range Rover, the sound of the ball reverberates with a boom, equivalent to that of an explosion. The car alarm goes off, but is pitched slightly lower than average, providing a further feeling of unreality and discomfort. The reverberation of the boom and the car alarm interpolate at different frequencies, creating an uncomfortable sound – it suggests that when the classes clash, an uncomfortable sensation happens. The use of wrong sounds in this instance indicates the consequences of what happens when the lower classes cause conflict, as the upper class may perceive them as louder than they actually are. The use of sounds in this scene once again suggests a shift in Martin's reality. Not only is he not allowed to be around his home without surveillance, but his movements will always be placed under an extreme scrutiny by the upper class. His existence around his old family home is a threat to the class who now owns the

property, and any unwanted sound he could be blamed for making is mixed to be much louder and much more uncomfortable. In this scene, Martin's world is no longer his own, and the sounds he makes are increasingly unfamiliar and uncomfortable.

Yet, within this film, it is not just the sounds of the environment that surrounds Martin that are becoming more unrecognisable. A key way that the film represents the new world where changing class dynamics come into play is through the role of voice, indicating a breakdown of communication. The entire film is out of sync in terms of sound, where characters' recorded speech does not match when they speak on screen. For example, in his first extended close-up (at 7:00), Martin's voice is slightly out of sync with his image as he pleads with Stephen to give him the family boat for fishing (as it is only being used by Steven to give upper-class tourists trips around the harbour), as well as Steven's voice as he denies him. This choice in editing shows a shift in the world that Martin lives in, where not only the environment is unharmonious and unfamiliar, but his ability to speak in a meaningful manner is challenged. Whenever Martin speaks with the Leigh family or others in the village, disembodied sounds are often mixed into the conversation at nearly the same volume (such as children playing, waves crashing, and birds calling), emphasising how they cannot be heard amongst a busy soundscape. The representation of voices in this film, like the sounds heard in the environments, are also unfamiliar and uncomfortable.

Yet, this film does more than just represent the voice as strange and unfamiliar. It represents how voices are lost, and there are increasing instances of the breakdown of communication. Throughout the film, Martin loses his ability to talk back to the family who intend on making his childhood home a holiday destination and he silently realises that he must bend to the will of the economy or be left in abject poverty.

To begin to understand how the film demonstrates voicelessness, let us compare how voice is heard and used between the two classes in this film. In the scene where both Martin and Sandra Leigh (Mary Woodvine) go to work (starting at 8:35), the film uses their voices to indicate the comfort they have in their classed positions. It intercuts between shots of Martin as he prepares a trap, while Sandra is preparing the apartment for guests. Martin is breathing laboriously as he works, as he sighs and audibly struggles amidst a noisy background (voices of nearby tourists are heard over his soundscape and many tourist cruise boats running). Meanwhile, the sounds of Sandra working are quiet, with only a light radio heard in the background as she sings to herself quietly. It is clear from this sequence that Martin is in a classed position where his struggles to complete his work cannot be heard, while Sandra is able to perform her labour with comfort. This form of intercutting repeats later in the film when Martin approaches Hugo Leigh (Jowan Jacobs) at the bar and arduously tries to teach him how to set a trap (at 59:15). The film intercuts this work with Sandra and Tim Leigh (Simon Shepherd) eating a lobster (stolen from Martin) in joy for two full minutes. Both of these scenarios are presented in total silence, even without the presence of ambient sound. This unrealistic use of total silence here suggests the experience of silence that both of the classes are afforded. While silence for the upper class is comfortable, creating focus on the taste of the lobster and a sense of domestic bliss, the silence equally represents how Martin is left without anything, not even the typically expected ambient soundtrack. The Leighs are allowed to take up as many resources as they wish – space (in occupying land), power (in literally eating the product of Martin's labour without paying for it), and sound (as they are able to enjoy making sound as well as exist in complete silence in a comfortable manner). On the other hand, Martin must paradoxically be

nothing – he may speak but not be heard, he can exist but not occupy space, and he can try to earn an income from his labour but come up with nothing.

There are other moments in the film where Martin's voice is physically and violently silenced by the voices of the upper class. In the aforementioned scene when the Leighs arrange for the police to put a clamp on Martin's lorry (at 37:52). Martin responds by making noise - banging on their door, and yelling as he refuses to leave until he is provided a valid explanation for their cruelty. The patriarch Tim Leigh responds with equal levels of noise, yelling that what happened was for the "good of everyone around him." Tim speaks in a confident and defiant tone, as he sees himself as a hero, speaking up for his neighbours. Tim attempts to silence Martin by shutting the door of the property. Martin stops him, letting go of his tough stance. Martin realises in raising his voice he will lose this battle, as the upper-class family have the ability to deploy the police whenever they want to, and that Martin will be taken away should he not try to reason. He then says in a defeated voice "I am trying to earn a living you know" to which Tim slams the door. Martin is defeated, as he has no way to reason, or even speak, with the upper class. If he is angry and takes a stand, the police will be called. But if he remains docile and tries to explain his needs to the upper-class who has social power in the community, he will be ignored and left to struggle to earn any income. He is voiceless in this event, unable to fight back against the persecution he is facing from Tim, lest he be arrested for being a disturbance.

Yet, the film's central point of class tension is demonstrated when Martin confronts Tim about his son's theft of one of Martin's lobster traps (at 51:00). Martin is sipping a beer quietly at the bar, when Tim arrives and once again complains about Martin's actions involving his lorry. Tim yells at Martin, but Martin ignores him, upset that he had been stolen from, but also not willing to engage with him out of fear of being seen as aggressive to the community of working-

class people also attending the bar. Tim comes into his personal space and condescends to him once again, acting as if he cannot hear, and needs to read his lips to understand what he is saying. At this point, Martin has had enough of the Leigh's aggressive behaviour towards him and interrupts Tim for the first time. The following exchange is heard:

Tim: You can't park where you like. You live in this community.
Martin: Oh, yeah. The community? Your community?
Tim: Our community! I don't speak for everyone but as a resident...
Martin: Tourist.
Tim: As a homeowner...
Martin: Tourist.
Tim: As a businessowner...
Martin: Tourist.
Tim: As someone...
Martin: The Chairman of the Pretty Committee?
Tim: As someone who spends a lot of time...
Martin: Two months...
Tim: As someone who invests a lot of money...
Martin: In a tourist business...
Tim: ...in supporting local industry...
Martin: What fucking industry?!
Tim: The tourism industry!
Martin: Where's this industry? We certainly don't see a penny! You fuckers come down here and take everything then you close up in the winter and fuck off to the Maldives!

This exchange demonstrates how Martin has become fed up with trying to be kind to those upper-class people who have come to occupy his home, and no longer wants to accommodate their ever-increasing surveillance and policing. In this exchange, Martin interrupts Tim in increasingly louder tones. He reminds him that he does not belong in this area, is only using the land to get money, and that he does not care for his so-called care for the community. Tim tries to speak over Martin as he always has done throughout this film, adopting a stern and condescending tone, as if Martin is a child who cannot understand the consequences of his actions. He cannot cope with the fact Martin is talking over him and asserting himself. But Martin knows he cannot win and leaves after making that last comment as he knows that as long

as the Leighs own the land, he will not be able to rebel in a way where he will be meaningfully heard. The only thing Martin can do is tell them what he thinks, then move out of their way. He tries to assert that the land belongs to the working-class people who built a long-lasting industry in the region, regardless of who had the deeds to the land. But he knows that he will not be acknowledged by Tim and knows that if he were to continue yelling at Tim, he will be worthy of arrest. He leaves, ultimately voiceless, without any expectation of change.

The film ends on a note of total voicelessness on behalf of all characters, suggesting the complete breakdown of communication between the classes. Martin does not speak much for the remaining third of the film, attempting to not upset the people in his community, with only a few short exchanges of dialogue between locals. This is further reinforced when Martin's apprentice and Stephen's son, Neil (Isaac Woodvine), is killed by Hugo Leigh (in a scene starting at 1:11:17). As he dies, a heartbeat sound fading out is heard. There is no boom sound effect, as previous scenes have done when class tension is present. After the heartbeat comes to a complete stop, nothing more is heard for the remaining minute and a half of the scene. The camera gives a close-up of his face, showing that he has broken his neck, blood pooling as the life leaves his body. No reactions are heard as the camera holds this shot. Then, close-up details of their childhood house are shown. Only a minute later, wave crashes and seagull calls heard, and the shots fade to white. Martin goes to see Stephen after the incident (at 1:17:30), where there is little dialogue between the two brothers as they meet in the now abandoned Fisherman's Cottage. Eventually, the siblings stare at each other, where Martin asks, "what are we going to do now?" to which none provide an answer, looking in opposite directions. The film then shows them as they go out in the boat with Wenna, but it is unclear whether they are fishing or preparing for another tour. The same rhythmic noises heard in the first scene are heard again in this final

scene, indicating a renewed sense of routine. Yet, none of the characters acknowledge each other, conveying a sense of grief that cannot be overcome. As they leave the harbour, the sounds of the boat and the waves fade out to total silence. Silence continues throughout most of the credits (up until the final minute of the film, where it fades to black and silent wave sounds), creating an uncomfortable conclusion to this story. It is clear that in this final moment the class tension cannot be resolved. Blood has been spilled, and the working class has a tangible loss, not only in their labour and their land, but in their familial relations. They are voiceless as they have no ability to speak against those upper-class individuals who have destroyed their lives. The working class has ultimately lost and will never regain a sense of normality.

But what does this use of background sound and loss of voice ultimately signify? It represents a sense of voicelessness that occurs after a geopolitical area's politics change. The sensations that Martin experiences in this film is a common sensation that many were experiencing with changing policies surrounding fishing during Brexit negotiations. In an interview with the British Film Institute, Jenkin admitted that even though he started writing this film twenty years prior to its release, he edited it very close to its showing to showcase the effects of gentrification on the working-class community in Cornwall: "[Martin] wasn't living in a fishing place anymore; he was living in a holiday destination, and the camera also became a catalyst for the simmering resentment underneath the surface" (Concannon, 2019: 45). While Jenkin insists this film is a love letter to the fishermen and Cornwall, and not a narrative about Brexit, the film takes a bold stance on how the increasing tourism and the detriment of the fishing industry affects working-class communities. As James Baxter describes in his article on how *Bait* was produced, *Bait* was created with "disaffiliated locals" who have grown frustrated with "the perpetually disconnected tourist-class" which "inevitably chimes with the cultural

conflict of Brexit Britain, and its endlessly reduplicated tales of liberal metropolitan elites and the post-industrial 'left behind'" (2020). The term "Brexit" even makes an appearance in the film, through radio reports heard in the background (at 9:34). Martin is over at the family home when it is heard and listens to what is being said. However, the Leigh family look elsewhere, or are engaged in other activities as it plays, not giving it any specific attention. It is clear that the effects of Brexit policy do not concern them, as if any of the policies do not apply to their upper-class existence. Its tension between the classes tells a Brexit-era story about how the elites have come to take over working-class regions, claim they know what is best economically for them, then refuse to pay them properly or leave the working class without any way to earn an income.

Thus, *Bait* effectively uses both sounds and voice to present its audience with a parable on what Brexit has done to fishing communities throughout Britain. Working-class locals will not be able to speak, not be able to fight back, or be able to assert their own place in their own home lest they be arrested or reprimanded by the state. Any communication between the classes is disrupted, with little hope of renewal. What *Bait* shows is that Brexit has caused the homes of the working class labouring in fishing villages to become unfamiliar and unrecognisable. *Bait* ends much like *God's Own Country* does, with the notion that an uncertain future lies ahead. Their home will be forever changed, where their ability to hear the soundscapes as they once were or speak in a way where they will be heard, is gone.

3. A Self Divided: Hybridity of Cultural and Class Identity in *Mogul Mowgli* (2020)

Unlike the other films in this chapter, *Mogul Mowgli* provides a unique approach to changing class dynamics and voicelessness. While *God's Own Country* and *Bait* represent Brexit-era class tensions through showing multiple characters representing different classes who literally conflict with each other, *Mogul Mowgli* shows one individual who is in a class-related

battle with himself. Directed by debut director Bassam Tariq in 2021, this film centres on the life of Zaheer (who prefers to go by Zed) (Riz Ahmed), a British-Pakistani working-class immigrant who becomes a member of the upper class through a career as a successful rapper. The narrative of the film follows Zed as he develops a life-threatening auto-immune disease after a nationalist attacks him. As he recovers from this incident, his past literally comes back to haunt him as he remembers who he is, what class he claims to represent, and who he wants to be in the future. The title of the film reflects the conflict itself – Zed is a mogul, as he has made money on his art and asserted his place in the upper class. However, as the film progresses and his disease takes control of his body, he interacts with the “Mowgli” sense of his identity, not only referencing Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Book* but also representing how his identity is set apart from the Western world, where he must wander around a metaphorical jungle to discover who he is. This conflict is represented in the film’s soundtrack (designed by Paul Davies – the sound designer and collaborator of Lynne Ramsay), where Zed’s interpretations of his class and nation are consistently challenged: he makes his own music establishing the class he believes he belongs in, goes through hallucinations that disprove his understanding of class in Britain, and discovers the powers of his voice in the face of Brexit-era nationalism. Thus, *Mogul Mowgli* represents this turmoil that Zed experiences in his perception of his national identity and the way he understands himself as a person living in a post-Brexit Britain.

Zed desires to be seen as a person who has escaped the tragedies that befell his family as they escaped partition in Pakistan. He believes he has earned his place in the upper class through his rap career and often uses his voice to justify his place amongst them. He has accumulated wealth, but also wants to appear as a member of an elite group of people, as he compares himself to Jay-Z in his etiquette. Whenever Zed is at a concert (such as the examples at 2:15), Zed is

using his loud voice to instruct and control his audiences: he tells his D.J. which tracks he wants to be played, he raps verses as he glides effortlessly around the stage, encouraging his fans to rap along with him and yell loudly as he does. Through the way he guides the music, raps the verses, leads the audience in their yelling as well as filming the entire experience, it is clear that Zed feels as if he is in control of his experience, and uses sound as a means to assert his own presence in a space. When a group of boys in the audience interrupt him, Zed takes in this experience and uses the beat of their speech to continue his verse. Thus, Zed feels he belongs in this space and uses his voice to challenge anyone who refutes his place there. Thus, through his voice, Zed is establishing himself as an upper-class person whose experiences of race and original class are irrelevant.

His ability to use his voice to establish his place in the upper class does not just extend to his career, but also to his domestic life. He interrupts his cousin in a family dinner (at 16:41) to say that, despite his Pakistani name, as he has lived in Britain “just as long as everyone else.” As the cousin tells the story of his father’s dangerous migration from Pakistan to England, distant train noises are heard as well as the murmurs of a scared child. Zed appears uncomfortable hearing these noises, flinching at every opportunity. He is not willing to confront the notion of a diverse national identity and feels uncomfortable when faced with it directly. Zed, again uncomfortable with a voice telling him he does not belong in an upper-class space (and instead belonging in a working-class space with his family), interrupts his cousin and starts speaking about his rap career.

Now this chapter has covered how Zed uses his voice to challenge others’ versions of his national identity, let us delve deeper into the representations of hallucinations and silencing throughout the film in order to question what this film is speaking to about class. The use of

hallucinations occur in this film after Zed suffers attacks of his auto-immune disorder but represent how his body does not recognise his own racial and class identity. Like Martin in *Bait*, the world around him is becoming increasingly unfamiliar.

Zed's hallucinations appear as he recovers from both a racist attack and auto-immune disorder, where he is left to ponder his identity. Within these hallucinations, he feels his voicelessness and his family's class status. The first extended instance of such hallucinations occurs immediately after he is rendered unconscious by the attack (at 25:13). He imagines himself in his father's restaurant, on the floor. He gets up as he adjusts to the sounds of tableware clashing into each other and people loudly talking. He sees a younger version of his father running past him, yelling orders to him in Urdu. He is hectically serving people amidst loud and boisterous party, which is creating overwhelming sound in the soundtrack. The film intercuts between close-ups of Zed's and his father, revealing little of their background. Zed yells back to his father in English, desperately trying to convey that he does not understand what is happening and that he needs to rest. His father ignores him and walks back into the crowd of the party, speaking in Urdu. The camera then changes to Zed's point of view as he is up close with party members coming in and asking many things of him in Urdu. He keeps yelling out for his dad and asking him questions to help him position himself amongst this strange and noisy crowd. After a minute of this chaos, he suddenly stops as the music, the voices and the tableware clashing all fade out. This scene represents the fact that Zed has been so dedicated to appearing British, that he cannot effectively use his voice as he did previously to communicate with his family and other people in his community.

This voicelessness of Zed due to language barriers is a common theme through the film as he often struggles to communicate with his family members (such as 28:37 when he wakes up,

or at 33:46 when his uncle reminds him of Bismallah, and at 1:02:03 when his father tries to help him shower). They all speak in Urdu and he only knows how to respond in English. In these moments, Zed feels voiceless as the various family members all talk over each other in a means to provide advice to Zed, where Zed feels overwhelmed and unsure how to respond. He also feels voiceless when talking to the hospital workers (such as his doctor interrupting him when he asks questions about his health at 30:36 or when he is cut off while getting his diagnosis at 43:54), or through his manager (such as their meeting at 37:01 where Zed's business propositions are decided without him). This voicelessness reflects Zed's struggle to remain the autonomous British man who made a career despite his Pakistani background. In every scene where he gets cut off, the camera moves away from his body, further emphasizing how he is being forgotten. All this noise causes Zed to confront the questions of his own agency, as he feels he does not possess the ability to speak up for himself when needed. The doctor's diagnosis that Zed's body "does not recognise itself so it has begun to attack itself as if it were an enemy" reflects this loss of agency and sense of self. For Zed, it feels he is no longer in charge of his own body, and that any autonomy he once had over his own body and culture is now lost. Even though he tries to be heard by talking to others around him (and thus, assert himself as his own being with his own voice), he will never be heard by others around him. Zed desires to remain autonomous through the use of his voice but begins to realise that his body is acting against him and realises his voice does not matter.

As Zed becomes increasingly voiceless in his reality, the film's use of dialogue in his hallucinations demonstrates his inner conceptions about who he is. As the previous paragraph assesses, Zed already feels he is losing his ability to speak out against what is happening to him. The only way he speaks is within his own hallucinations, where various voices force him to

question who he is. For example, after discussing his parents' version of therapy (at 46:13), Zed has another hallucination where he imagines that he is in concert, reciting his new verses to a crowd of quiet people. Without the crowd's cheers to guide what raps he does (as he does with the interrupting beatboxers in an earlier scene discussed here), he must speak in order to guide the experience. He says "Britain is where I am from and I like a cup of tea and that. But tea ain't from Britain and that is where my DNA is at," showing that he is starting to realise the contradictions existing within his own identity politics. He continues to say, "my ancestors were from India but India was not for us," referencing how Partition has displaced his family. But the heavy beat comes in as Zed delivers his final rap, where he admits that "I find my own place in the business of Britishness. Your question is limited, so stop trying to find a box to put us in. My blood and sweat is enough [...] I ain't looking for a handout and I ain't your fucking problem, bruv." This hallucination ends without applause from the audience, where the absence of voices forces Zed to reassess who he is. While this can be interpreted as Zed imagining himself returning to his career (and thus, his desired national and class status), the silent crowd and lyrics suggests that Zed can no longer fight his national identity, rather, he must sit with it and ponder what it means to be the child of immigrants in Britain in 2021, and how this affects his career going forward.

The idea of voices guiding Zed's hallucinations is a recurring theme and is also present in the hallucinations he has of the man in the floral turban. He appears at various points in the film to represent Zed's gradual questioning of his identity, and his inner monologue as he is unable to speak in various situations. For example, when Zed attends a mosque (at 19:43), he appears in front of Zed as he refuses to follow the crowd and complete the prayer. He asks "what are you doing here" both in Urdu and in English repetitively in an angry tone. In this moment, it is clear

that Zed is questioning his religion and whether he belongs in the mosque if he has so deeply assumed what he calls “British values” (as he says at 2:25). After falling out of his bed later in the film (at 57:58), he experiences another hallucination where he feels the man in the turban standing on his back, applying pressure to his spine with his foot. Flutes are heard as the man does this, almost as if it were a meditational track. The man says “let me help you” in Urdu, to which Zed keeps saying “no” in English as he tries to push himself up and get out of his method of treatment. The man says “just submit” as Zed’s gasps begin to dominate the soundtrack, silencing the flutes that are heard in the background. Zed’s sounds of pain are then silenced in a quick cut, even though his mouth is still moving. The sounds of traditional music and the train repeat, as well as the sounds of a tape of rap music his manager gave him. It is clear he wants Zed wants to submit into accepting his Pakistani identity, but he does not want to. The man in the turban appears again when Zed hallucinates being in his father’s past as he works a job at an Indian restaurant (at 26:55). He approaches Zed directly and says “People pay attention. They draw lines in the sand all around them. India and Pakistan. East and West. Us and them. I was born of this rupture. And I am the sickness of this separation. I am Toba Tek Singh.” He then yells “Toba Tek Singh” repeatedly as the lights and music return to the party. There are several distorted close-up shots of the restaurant as many disembodied voices repeat the line of “Toba Tek Singh.” It is clear that this vision was just a hallucination, but the presence of the man’s voice as one that counteracts Zed is key, as it represents Zed’s understanding of himself – that there is a division within himself that he must reconcile.

The repetition of this phrase “Toba Tek Singh” is one said by several characters through the film – both in hallucination and in reality. Understanding this frequent line of dialogue is essential to understanding the film’s message. The phrase itself literally translates to “no man’s

land.” Its cultural connotations are relevant, as it is not only a physical location in Pakistan, but a line which comes from the short story of the same name by Saadat Hasan Manto (1955), about those who are trapped within two identities, never being sure of who they are.⁴⁰ By repeating this line many times at the end of Zed’s hallucination, the film emphasises that those who possess two identities often feel as if they belong to none of them and are cursed to go through life being the victim of constant conflict without any resolution in sight. For Zed’s father, being in “Toba Tek Singh” is about being forced to physically relocate away from a conflict-ridden homeland and move somewhere where his identity markers make him susceptible to violence. A similar trajectory of “Toba Tek Singh” is experienced by Zed, where he is the victim of a racist attack due to post-Brexit nationalists believing the colour of his skin indicates his non-belonging. The fact that the man in the turban, Zed’s father and uncle and Zed himself all repeat this line serves as a curse to Zed, consistently reminding what happens when those are torn between national identities. When “lines are drawn in the sand” (or, how country borders are redrawn in a socially damaging way), “those [who] are born out of the rupture” will face the consequences of being part of the Toba Tek Singh. This information begins to curse Zed, as he struggles to decipher what exactly this information means and what he must do with this. He does not have access to the translation of this phrase in English and feels lost within his identities: he is Pakistani in terms of his ethnic identity, but he is born in Britain; and he was born into a working-class family in which noise was a health hazard but works as a rapper where he feels in control of his identity as he makes noise. Thus, this repeated use of dialogue represents Zed’s internal conflict.

In the film’s final scene (at 1:22:03), Zed uses the “Toba Tek Singh” to silence the turmoil he feels. After he goes through much therapy, he returns home and abandons his rap

⁴⁰ For more on the phrase “Toba Tek Singh” and its political ramifications in Pakistan and in the Pakistani diaspora, see Das, 2005; and Jokinen and Assadullah, 2022.

career. It is now clear to Zed that he can no longer follow the life of acting solely as a member of the British-built upper class, as it causes his body to lose recognition of itself. He then starts to develop a rap in his family home, repeating the line as many did to him beforehand. Zed's father enjoys the verse and starts to sing along in Urdu. Zed is impressed and they build the rap together, where they take turns building on what the other has just said. The film's final shot depicts them as they dance together, yelling "Toba Tek Singh" repeatedly. Only through rejecting the voice of the British and more openly embracing his Pakistani side by repeating lines like this is his body able to act normally. Before the credits, the camera shows Zed's father leaving the bathroom as Zed listens to another rapper on the radio. Zed no longer raps "Toba Tek Singh" to himself, as he is fully quiet. He stares at himself in the mirror silently, making a face that reveals he is still unsure who he is. He still does not know the translation of the line, repeating it without knowing its meaning, and thus is doomed to a sense of voicelessness and uncertainty regarding his own national and class identity. He is no longer sees himself as a deserving part of the upper class, as he has lost his rap career. Yet, he is not entirely comfortable as part of the working class. Even though he has repaired his familial relations, this line of dialogue will continue to haunt him as he must debate who he is. Thus, in some manner, he abandons his voice and his agency entirely.

Yet, the most profound example of the silencing of Zed's voice appears in the ways he is racially persecuted as a migrant in Britain. This is shown most prominently as he is attacked by a nationalist (at 22:15). As Zed leaves the mosque, he is overwhelmed by sounds. A man appears next to him and wants to speak, but Zed cannot hear him as the voices of this man and the imam's voice leading a prayer from the mosque overlap. Zed, feeling the weight of this sensory overload as much as the audience, struggles to focus on what the man addressing him is saying.

The man suggests that they take a selfie together, asking him about his music, and gives him religious advice, all to Zed's confusion. When Zed finally asserts that he needs to leave and moves away, the man becomes aggressive. He calls Zed a slur referring to his nationality and then says, "once you get a bit of money and fame you turn into fucking coconuts", referring to Zed's seemingly undeserved class status. The man clearly believes that Zed acts as if he is above everyone else as he has made money and achieved a level of fame usually attributed to white people in Britain, making him a part of an upper class that usually does not accept people of his race. The man, uncomfortable with Zed's understanding of himself, punches him in the mouth until he cannot speak, nor even whimper. His whole career is about rap performance and, thus, his ability to speak, but he can no longer do it. Zed is paralysed in movement, where the man is briefly heard speaking, as the screen fades out suggesting Zed's fall into unconsciousness. Zed is specifically attacked in the mouth, which demonstrates this individual's attitude to migrants speaking, as he wants to prevent Zed from talking. There is a high-pitched note getting louder as the imam's voice also gets louder during this fade. As the film depicts Zed's injury, it uses these soundtracks to present Zed's reminder of his race and his class.

Thus, British nationalism enters the film for the first time. While this scene is not a typical imagination of nationalism (or, the racist white individuals who believe that people of colour do not belong in Britain), this is an example of someone deciding on appearance of one's nation and class alone that another does not belong in Britain, in their social community, and must be prevented from speaking. To fully understand the social and political gravity of this scene, it is worth breaking down exactly what British nationalism is, how it is indicative of a Brexit moment, and how the questioning of national identity affects Zed in his personal understanding of his class. Historically, British nationalism was about claiming an "ascendant"

empire, in which “Britain was one nation [who] were sovereign of Europe” that had “shared history, not cultural integration” (Calhoun, 2017: 58). It involves pushing forward a populist cultural belief that what is British-born is best, keeping others outside and ostracised, and maintaining a sovereign economy. These thoughts are racist in their origins, as it assumes that the white liberalism is what deserves to be celebrated and anything else is deemed a threat. As historian Bridget Byrne writes, Englishness is defined to be “closed, fixed and white” where “it could not include new things [or] other modes of being [as it believes it] was faced with extinction” (2007: 147). These exclusionist beliefs have never died, as it is seen through the beliefs of Conservative shadow minister Enoch Powell in his “Rivers of Blood” speech in the 1970s (Hickson, 2018); in Thatcher’s British Nationality Act of 1981 (Mark, 2020); and in the Brexit Leave campaign’s notion that immigration has come to a “breaking point” in the United Kingdom throughout the Brexit debate (Durrheim et al., 2018). In her study of nationalism pre- and post-Brexit, Emma Bell posits that Brexit is seen as a solution for these Eurosceptics, allowing them to have a say over things should be run within their homeland. She writes “Brexit is more a symptom than a cause of nationalism that has been rising over a longer period of time in a context of globalisation, multiculturalism, new forms of terrorism and rising migration” (2020: 351). As conservative governments were elected who spoke of their hatred of the European Union and increasing numbers of migrants in the country, they were able to justify their hate speech with a political movement.

For migrants, asylum seekers, and people who appear as non-white, non-British born, such as Zed on this scene, the ability to fully acclimatise to the British national identity marker is constantly at threat in this era where nationalists desire more control. The man who attacked Zed did so as a person of colour but saw Zed as a traitor to what he deems to be valuable to the

community in Britain. He stereotypes Zed by calling him a slur and “fucking coconuts,” even though he is also a person of colour with the same religion as Zed. He thinks he is a traitor to those around him, as he has made a comfortable amount of wealth and is acting outside what he believes the expressed limitations of Zed’s social boundaries. Because he is a migrant, he should be humble to have a place in Britain, and not flaunt his wealth with his voice. Racial education scholar Shamim Miah writes on the perception of Muslims in Britain, saying there is a “good Muslim, bad Muslim” idea that the whole country has internalised in the two decades since the 9/11 attacks (2018: 636). He posits that “[i]t assumed that peaceful, non-violent, liberal Muslims [...] should be considered ‘good Muslim’. The ‘bad’ is projected as obscurantist, undemocratic and misogynistic” (2018: 636). This man has learned and accepted this dichotomy, viewing Zed as a greedy, undemocratic Muslim who betrays the pillars of his faith, as well as his place as a migrant in the United Kingdom, and thus, is undeserving of the place in Britain that he was given.

This notion of racialised and classist attack reprises when Zed imagines himself in a rap battle, suddenly needing to perform a diss track (at 58:50). Zed is on stage in hospital scrubs, where an unknown voice is insulting him, calling him names like “Aladdin” and a “body bag waiting to happen.” A Black man is revealed to be confronting him, telling him, “stop trying to be what your mind cannot fathom – curry and kebab that’s the only thing you’re munching,” furthering anti-immigrant rhetoric. He says “this is our art form, our heritage – you can’t come here and appropriate it, repackage it and sell it” directly commenting on Zed’s career and how he makes his income. He finishes his verse by saying, “your dad should be driving a bus or a taxi” in the place of running a successful restaurant. These last few lines indicate the anti-immigration sentiment felt by some Black people in Britain, where they feel they have worked hard to earn

their place throughout history, and that recent migrants have not faced the same oppression and thus do not deserve their financial success. Zed breathes heavily as he tries to gain the energy needed to deliver a verse. He whispers back in a rather crude manner that this man's parents enjoy eating their curry just as anyone else does then says "you so ignorant calling me an immigrant – haven't you seen your own skin pigment? We should be in this together!" In Zed's verse, he directly confronts internal racism within racialised communities, and that the notion that he does not belong in Brexit Britain is absurd, as the Black man faces just as much racism as he does. While Zed looks at the crowd, fully expecting them to cheer, the crowd boos him, where one scream is heard telling Zed to "go back home." Zed attempts to continue rapping, but the jeering overpowers him so much that his voice fades out and his verses are thus rendered useless. The crowd begin to encroach on him, all yelling racial slurs and other ignorant phrases at the same time. The crowd suddenly disappear, where Zed says "I tried to stand up for my blood, but my blood won't let me stand up. Let there be no war after me. At last we'll be at peace. If there is no seed after me Zaheer will be at peace." The fantasy then ends with another rapper stealing Zed's mic as he is left broken on the floor. The only way that Zed is able to silence a very loud and antagonistic crowd is to make himself voiceless and accept others' interpretations of his identity. Only when he calls himself by his name does the noise of the crowd completely cease and Zed is able to collapse, overwhelmed. He must accept the fact he will be seen as Pakistani and stop using his voice to combat stereotypes that will continue to perpetuate.

In these moments where Zed is attacked to the point of voicelessness, the film begins to probe at these questions of nationalism and classism and what purpose they serve in a post-Brexit Britain. This man attacks Zed through an expressed political belief. Even if he apologises it for his violence afterwards, the film's choice to fade this line of dialogue emphasises the literal

damage that nationalism does to migrants and the children of migrants. It makes clear that those who have political power will have a voice, where those who are more vulnerable socio-economically will often have their voices robbed of them. The hallucination where Zed faces similar persecution also emphasises this point. He cannot speak against those who want to silence him and only through quieting his own voice is he able to be left alone by them.

While this film represents the tensions between India and Pakistan as represented by Partition, it also subtly extends to the Brexit debate. Conflicting racial and class prejudice existing within their own communities was on the minds of writers Bassam Tariq and Riz Ahmed as they composed the script of *Mogul Mowgli*. In talking with Empire Magazine, they have stated that the film is about the life of immigrants in the current era in Britain, with an aim to capture the sensations of what happens “when you were born in London but your skin is brown and your religion is too readily associated with extremism” and to begin “a vital questioning of the superstructures that have allowed prejudice to flourish” (Flint, 2020). The ending is a relatively happy one as Zed is able to regain control of his physical body. Yet, much like the conclusion to *God’s Own Country*, there is a bittersweet quality to it. Zed has lost his career as a rapper, and thus his platform for expressing himself as well as his regular income. He then also must contend with his class status, where he must adjust his understanding of who he is, the income he will receive in the future, and how he will be able to make a place for himself in Brexit Britain. While this film follows the life of one rapper as he deals with the effects of an auto-immune disease, the film very much utilises the environment created by Brexit to showcase how migrant communities are forced to revisit their national identity markers in the face of racism and national uncertainty. Through the film’s extensive study of voice and voicelessness, it highlights who has the power to speak in Brexit Britain, and who must be voiceless as they must

constantly reassess their own national and class-based identity. He is alone in terms of his class status, unsure of how to continue.

4. Class Disrupted: Vocalising The Migrant Experience In *Limbo* (2020)

Mogul Mowgli is not the only film made post-Brexit that mediates the experience of being an immigrant in Britain in the Brexit era. *Limbo* also takes the surreal experience of voicelessness that Zed goes through and further emphasises it. This is done through the creation of a soundscape that is so surreal and hostile that refugees in the United Kingdom can never speak or be meaningfully heard by those around them. *Limbo* was directed by Ben Sharrock (in his debut feature) and released in 2020. Filmed on the remote island of Uist in Scotland, the film captures the life of a group of refugees who come to Britain in search of physical, social, and economic security: Farhad (Vikash Bhai) escapes conflict in Afghanistan; Wasef (Ola Orebiyi) flees economic insecurity in Nigeria; Abedi (Kwabena Anash) flees political crisis in Ghana. These refugees all have wild fantasies of what their lives will become, each hoping to rise the class ladder through working luxurious jobs (Farhad wants to be a celebrity agent, Wasef wishes to join Chelsea Football Club, and Abedi desires to work in home design). These three characters' visions are balanced with those of Omar (Amir El-Masry), a migrant fleeing war in Syria trying to bring his family with him. The four characters are united as they wait for their letters confirming they have successfully claimed asylum and can leave the asylum centre in which they are being held. While Wasef, Abedi, and Farhad treat the surreal situation as comedic, trying to bring entertainment to each other to make the time pass, Omar tries to reconcile his strange new experience with his missing his homeland. The soundscape of this film is particularly noteworthy, as the visual presence of the state is rather simple (a run-down community centre made into an asylum centre, set in the middle of nowhere), but the sounds of

the state are consistently heard throughout various pieces of dialogue, sound effects and background sound serving to remind them that their voices will never be heard by the British people. It also reminds them that they are at high risk of death, and crucially, if they are lucky to escape these two fates, they will never be able to return to their once comfortable upper-class lives in their homeland and must adjust to not being heard.

But before this chapter assesses these soundscapes, it will examine the Brexit context in which it was produced. In an interview, Sharrock states that the film was not based on Brexit directly, but about the recent changes to the asylum system that affects the well-being of migrants as they wait to learn of their fate. He states that “[a]s an asylum seeker [in Britain] you don’t have the same rights [as someone accorded official refugee status], they really are just stuck in limbo” (Tutt, 2021). This film explores this state of limbo, by focussing exclusively on these characters’ interactions with the unfamiliar space of the island as they navigate their new environments, unsure of whether to call it a home. This technique is part of a movement of recent migrant theatre, as drama scholar Laura Purcell-Gates argues. She writes that “the processes of abjection that underpin stereotyped representations of refugee bodies can be reconfigured from an inclusion/exclusion model to a space to *linger* with these excluded objects, bodies, and feelings” (2020: 42). In other words, she believes that the new refugee experience should be depicted as one that no longer focuses on the role of their social abjection from society (where they are depicted as detritus that must be rid of for the general health of British society), but one where they are left to wait the rest of their lives out in an unfamiliar space. They must linger there as they understand what has happened to them in the past, and whether they will be able to acclimatise to their new conditions. The film recreates these conditions through removing the socially designated markers of what is known to be British (such as historic buildings, tight-

knit communities in small towns, and symbols of national pride) by setting the film entirely on a remote desolate land with only a few non-descript buildings. This is also reflected in the film's sound design, as characters seldom interact with others on the island, and often face both the inability to talk with the racist inhabitants of the island, and their families back in their homeland. Without any way to place themselves within the territory the film creates, viewers are forced to match their perspectives with the perceptions that these migrant characters are experiencing and understand Britishness as these characters experience it – through a form of limbo. Its sound design was composed by Ben Baird, who listened to Sharrock's interviews of recent migrants in Scotland and attempted to bring forth their lived experiences through key moments in the sound design – such as the many forceful wind cues, being loudly interrupted by workers in the town's shops, and the creaking of the floors in the asylum centre (Tutt, 2021). Like the other films studied in this chapter, class is no longer a socially determined status which remains in a strict hierarchy throughout the film, but rather made unfamiliar and flexible. In *Limbo*, class and nationality are explored through how the characters choose to define themselves against a backdrop of their home nations, and how they want to set up lives for themselves in Britain. These characters attempt to make their own classes based on their identities back at home, and in their own ways, come to realise that they are uncertain of their own national identities and whether they will ever find a concrete sense of national and class-based belonging that matches their desires and visions of Britain. Thus, under the model that Purcell-Gates describes, sensory perceptions are used exclusively to depict their inner journeys to decide whether they can make a new home in this land. The sounds used in this film are used to create this journey of self-discovery, as each character experiences the British land in a surreal manner and interacts with the British state in a way that makes them uncomfortable. The

following analysis will examine the ways that this journey is sonified, through an examination of select scenes.

The film uses sound to establish the unfamiliarity and uncomfortableness of the environment that these characters are in. This is primarily demonstrated through the use of mixing, where sounds are either too loud or too quiet, reflecting how they are uncomfortable they are in this new Britain. The film's mixing of weather sounds, for example, indicates how any recognisable version of Britain is no longer there. During the film's opening production logos (at 0:01-1:24), wind sounds, creaking, and arrhythmic tapping noises are heard. It sounds like a strong wind tapping on an uncomfortable house. Already, the film suggests a sense of discomfort, a sense of them being alone in a storm. This sensation of being in a storm is also reprised when they use the island's only phone booth (at 5:11). In this first instance of the characters using the phone booth, they all stand far apart from each other, looking off to the horizon in different directions. Abedi is attempting to make a phone call in the booth, while Wasef is narrating that the landscape is desolate on this abandoned island and that is difficult to make contact. Farhad and Omar stand quiet, not reacting to what Wasef is saying. This scene ends with Abedi slamming the phone box and crying, as he was not able to be heard due to the loud weather outside. Omar and Farhad do not react, indicating that the lack of communication services on the island is normal to them, and they have little contact with those on the outside. The camera then pans over to a long, endless empty road nearby, where the sounds of Abedi's cries fade out into the strong winds, mixed in an over-the-top fashion, where it begins to sound distorted. The camera holds on this as the winds become even stronger. The film's title is then shown, further emphasising the state of limbo these characters are put in. The sounds of the wind silencing their voices as they comfort each other indicate that they are living on a desolate and

almost hellish landscape with no certainty of when they get to leave – either escaping to a better life in Britain after having successfully declared asylum, or through being deported and sent back to their home countries. As Abedi's cries fade out, the film forces the audience to consider how migrants are ignored, silenced and unable to communicate what is happening to them to others.

These feelings only grow as the film progresses. There are many scenes where the four main characters get stuck in the rain and cannot communicate their pain to each other (such as at 21:54, 39:53, 59:08). The film uses the same type of overwhelming sound in these instances to demonstrate how empty and threatening this landscape is, through the sounds of wind blowing fiercely, violent rain noises on the ground and roof of their accommodations, waves crashing against the shoreline, etc. The use of these weather sounds often impedes on their conversations, especially when they are talking about their goals regarding class, rendering them inaudible to each other, and others on the island. This is seen in moments such as when Farhad and Omar talk about what they expect of the workplace in the UK (at 6:50), when the group talk about the jobs they want while watching *Friends* (at 21:54), and when Omar goes to help a local farmer with his work (at 49:07). Whenever these characters come to vocalise their expectations regarding their ability to gain work and rise up in the class ladder, they are silenced by the natural world that surrounds them.

Through the role of background sound and dialogue, the film often foregrounds misunderstandings between the often-racist occupants of the island and the migrants who are waiting to leave, revealing that they have little means to understand each other and communicate. When these four characters speak to one another, they often find it is hard to understand what each other are saying: they are unable to hear each other over the sounds of the weather when they stand outside (such as Farhad and Omar talking at 6:01 and 38:11); they are interrupted by the

representatives of the state (such as the postman at 22:33 or by asylum centre instructors at 36:01); and crucially, they are silenced by those around them. For example, when Omar goes for the first of his many walks to the beach in this film to look out to the horizon, he sees a car driving around in circles on the beach (at 11:06). He is annoyed as he wanted to enjoy some peace and quiet but cannot understand why the locals are interrupting the natural soundscape with their noises. They are alien to him, and as the audience is thrown into Omar's perspective, they too hear the overwhelming noise of the car's engine revving on the natural soundscape of the beach. Omar walks away to return home, not being able to peacefully enjoy the beach, but the car pulls up and its occupants ask him questions (at 11:27). The voices are all presented offscreen, as the car pulls just slightly out of shot, as they ask questions such as "You one of them refugees?" "You speak English, pal?" to which Omar replies "yes" quickly as he does not quite understand what they are saying due to the loud radio playing "Once Upon A Dream" by Billy Fury and winds sounds which obscure their communication. These individuals continue to spout racist abuse towards him, as they repeat stereotypes such as "you better not plan any of that al-Qaeda ISIS shit here, OK?" and "I saw a program on the telly about they [sic] terrorists! They got these sleeping clubs where they hang out and build bombs and that" and "maybe that's why they put them here – cause they do not give a shit whether they blow us up." Although the film uses subtitles to reveal the various sentences they say, it foregrounds that Omar is not the alien, but those around him are. They say the same type of racist comments as the man did to Zed in *Mogul Mowgli* but *Limbo* presents those racist people as aliens who cannot understand Omar and his culture. The way the film frames this scene shows how little power Omar has in dictating his own status to those around him. He is rendered voiceless in a sense, as he wants to be able to fight back against what he suspects these racists are saying about him, yet he cannot hear what

they are saying clearly enough due to the noise and inclement weather. There is a fundamental miscommunication between the people on the island and the refugees. As the film puts the audience in the perspective of the refugees as we are able to hear what they say and sympathise with them as they are left silenced, it is clear that the film attempts to show us that the refugees are becoming increasingly unfamiliar with their outside world, and that they have no means to express themselves as they wish. Thus, their social realities seem almost unreal, as their means of communication are often severed or misunderstood.

Now this chapter has unpacked how the film represents space and has begun to portray how these characters have become voiceless, it will now further examine how it represents the voicelessness of the migrant experience, specifically in regard to them never being able to rise in the class ladder in the way they think is promised to them. This tying of voicelessness to a class experience is seen in a later classroom sequence where, when the class is encouraged to speak up about the jobs they had and their dream jobs in Britain (starting at 42:33). Here, the representatives of the state are encouraging the new migrants to share their stories, their hopes and desires as they envision their future. Wasef and Abedi fight over whether their dreams are possible, when they eventually are interrupted by class leader Helga as she tells them in a dry and unenthusiastic voice that Wasef can do anything he wants so long as he “can work hard enough” to acclimatise to British culture, effectively silencing both Wasef and Abedi as they discuss their dream plans. It is clear that Helga is repeating a statement she has said to countless classes before, as she delivers this line in a sour, dry and rehearsed way. In shutting down this conversation, Helga ensures that Wasef is perceived in the class as another migrant who came to Britain to escape conflict and get a job, rather than a unique person with a personal experience worth discussing. In this example, this misunderstanding and silencing becomes class based, as

Wasef's and Abedi's ability to assert their own statuses to the world is now lost, and they cannot even speak out about their mistreatment. This is reprised again at 36:10, when Farhad tries to connect with an older resident on a mobile scooter and "act like Jerry Maguire." The woman is afraid of Farhad as he approaches her and uses features of her mobile scooter to silence him as she drives away. Farhad then makes a comment about how back in their respective countries, they were at least respected enough to finish their conversations. Thus, through dialogue, the film not only begins to frame the loss of their ability to understand the world and people around them, but also in their ability to speak on their class to reflect the strangeness of suddenly losing their agency.

While their discomfort and voicelessness is occasionally played for dark comedy (such as Farhad asking if he and Omar can huddle in the same coat during a storm not only for warmth but so that they hear each other [at 39:59], or the local fisherman interrupting Omar and joking that he probably misses his war-torn homeland as the weather is so bad in the Scottish islands [at 31:32]), later scenes in the film encapsulate how this feeling of voicelessness represents how migrants in Britain will never be able to rise above this state of limbo. While the background sounds in several of these earlier scenes reflect that the weather on the island is uncomfortable, they are certainly not represented as lethal. However, the dangers of the British landscape (both in the natural soundscape and in how they are ignored by other individuals) eventually become threatening as the characters are left wondering if they will ever find a way to comfortably belong in Britain. Halfway through the film, Abedi and Wasef are wrongfully arrested for stealing a chicken (at 57:51). Abedi understands he must bend to the will of the British state and is arrested while Wasef flees. Omar blames Farhad for stealing the chicken and letting Abedi and Wasef take the blame, choosing to ignore him entirely. This is the film's first use of silence

between the four main characters. When Omar helps another person on the island locate sheep (at 1:06:34), sounds of heavy rain dominate the soundtrack, much louder than they have ever been mixed. In this scene, sounds are used exclusively to determine what is going on, as the fog is so heavy that the visibility of any character is completely reduced. Sounds of sheep bleating and dog barking are heard alongside the weather, where the audience is guided by the sounds of Omar's breathing as a way to understand where he is. He breathes increasingly quickly as he has difficulty navigating and is being physically challenged by the weather around him. This is accompanied by one very strong wind blast as Omar is forced to stop in his tracks. Suddenly, the fog clears, and he finds Wasef's dead body, frostbitten and lifeless. Omar steps back in horror, where his breaths have now stopped. The sounds of his breath fade out as the wind fades in, reflecting his inability to speak about Wasef's death, as well as the lifelessness of Wasef. While he and his group were once uncertain about what their futures were and would try to discuss what jobs they could achieve to rise in class status, this scene demonstrates how voiceless migrants are. It is clear here that arriving as a migrant in Britain means death, as they literally cannot be heard amongst the natural soundscape, are not allowed to speak on their class-related goals to others in the community, and then forbidden to have a voice at all. The state caught up with Wasef, as the weather of the island he was placed on killed him in his attempt to escape. His dreams of ascending his refugee status and to work up the social ladder of class has permanently ended.

This sense of voicelessness is perhaps most evident in a scene where the four characters are huddling around their television to watch an illegal copy of the television show *Friends* (at 15:02). While this film can be interpreted as general survey of the experience of migrants in Britain of any era, the film's dialogue reflects the oddity of what being a migrant in Brexit

Britain is like. They discuss how they are interpreted by others and whether they should be optimistic for the future. Farhad and Abedi talk about how they want to live in an apartment like the one in the show, where they talk about their dream jobs to each other. Wasef then interrupts and gives a short monologue, which ultimately halts all conversation about dreaming and speaks to the Brexit moment: “You know they put us here to break us? They try to get us to volunteer to go back home. We’re all single, male, low-priority, past the sell-by date. Come on – Afghanistan, best before 2003. Sudan, best before 2006. Iraq, best before 2005. But... I thought they’d roll out the red carpet for Syrians. Maybe it’s just too late.” After Wasef finishes saying this they all look down at the floor in silence, digesting what he has just said and wondering if there is any truth to it. What Wasef highlights in this scene is that the experience for migrants has changed very recently, as the state process for claiming asylum has become increasingly difficult, and that their ability to maintain the class status they once had is more challenging, as Britain will allow migrants who are deemed as having certain identity markers – since these four have no families, are from countries that are seen as a threat to the Western world, they are not seen as having value, even though Omar was a semi-famous musician and Farhad managed clients back at home. Their class statuses are irrelevant to the British state, as their other identity markers allow for the British state to discriminate against them more easily. As such, the dialogue here renders them voiceless – they realise who they are and the limited power of speaking their class-related dreams out loud. They thus fall silent.

While it has already been established elsewhere in this project that the Brexit referendum limited migrants and encouraged racist behaviour in British people, it is worth assessing how these policies affect migrants as they try to enter the country. This view of migrants is not just Wasef’s perspective on immigration, but representative of a common experience felt by many

migrants. In their review of British immigration policies and how migrants experience them, historians and sociologists Carl-Ulrik Schrierup, Hansen Peo and Stephen Castles argue that “[t]he Home Office was not prepared to deal with the increase in asylum applications” so they responded “with a series of evermore draconian immigration and asylum rules” including measures to reduce “entries through visa controls and carrier sanctions (making airlines bear the cost of repatriating people refused entry), detention camps for asylum seekers, refusal of welfare benefits, and denial of the right to work” (Schrierup, Peo, and Castle, 2006: 121). This policy has only become more draconian, as Taulant Guma and Rhys Dafydd Jones suggest in their survey of migrant testimonies. They studied changes to the United Kingdom’s immigration policy made in 2014, 2016, and 2018. They note that “the questioning of [migrant] rights and entitlements has taken place beyond the level of policy and discourses as they are being enacted in mundane practices and everyday interactions with British state authorities” (Guma and Jones, 2019). In explaining this further they note that, on an ever-increasing level, migrants will have “their welfare payments frequently ‘cancelled’ and their ID documents retained by U.K. welfare authorities, often without any explanation given” (Guma and Jones, 2019). In addition, their access to “other state services” such as healthcare, employment assistance, and education always hindered as they are not seen as fully settled. They can also be punished as their rights to “free movement” in cities, countries and national borders shall be seen as suspicious and cause them to be thrown in prison (Guma and Jones, 2019). In a sense, if migrants are to enter the United Kingdom, they will not only be misunderstood by those around them, as these four characters are, but their access to basic services enabling their survival will always be met with difficulty. It is no wonder then that these characters feel voiceless – not only are they mocked, seen as a threat

and are constantly surveilled, but they have no means to speak and receive what they need to survive in post-Brexit Britain.

After this scene, the characters no longer speak about their dreams of settling with any sort of conviction, as they come to realise that Wasef is right. In another scene, Omar is told by a fisherman in the village of a new migrant work scheme being run by the fishery (at 32:58), only to watch in silence two scenes later as other migrants are being taken to prison for taking the opportunity. When Abedi is arrested for stealing the chicken, he does not resist his arrest (at 57:51). Wasef is eventually killed trying to escape persecution by authorities (at 58:30). Even when Farhad occasionally speaks about wanting a comfortable office job (as he does at 1:05:25 or at 1:29:07), he is met with silence or disbelief by the other characters. The state is effectively always around them, operating to keep them silent. As they will be misunderstood and reprimanded by authorities for speaking up or acting out, they remain silent about their own aspirations. Indeed, the characters feel as if the system has been further rigged against them, where the odds of them achieving asylum and acclimatising to Britain have become smaller and smaller.

This chapter has now covered how Abedi, Wasef and Farhad have come to a point of voicelessness. This study will now turn to the way in which Omar comes to this realisation of voicelessness, which is represented through his relationship with music. His connection to home, class and family is often represented through the oud (a musical instrument originating from Syria) that Omar carries around. At the beginning of the film (at 17:58), Omar admits to Farhad that he was once a semi-famous musician in Syria, regularly performing at concert halls in Damascus. As he left Syria, he promised his parents that he would always take his oud with him and play it, to therapeutically make connection with his homeland. Yet, his harrowing journey in

leaving a war-torn Syria and arriving to the United Kingdom has left him uncertain about his abilities, feeling as if he has lost his capacity to play without trauma. He carries it with him everywhere but admits to people that he has “forgotten how to play” (at 17:24) and he needs more time to “play correctly” (at 33:37), trying to hide his trauma. It often clunks as he drags it with him, sometimes silencing him as he speaks. When he is sat in his room alone, he occasionally revisits old videos of his concerts, where his family flips the camera back and forth between them and him, cheering him on (at 25:22 and 52:09). The cheers of his family and the crowd are heard much louder than Omar’s oud playing to the point where the oud playing is completely inaudible.

The film makes it unclear whether Omar is able to play or whether the oud is actually meaningful to him anymore, as he carries it around but never interacts with it. There are a few scenes where he attempts to practice (such as at 33:37 and 1:16:33), but it puts it away immediately as the sounds are too loud and tinny for him. The film emphasises Omar’s fear of playing through the sounds of notes being tuned in an obviously wrong and cacophonous manner, and the sounds of the wood creaking as he tries to hold it correctly. Here, it is clear that the oud - Omar’s connection to his home - is a burden rather than a meaningful souvenir. He watches the videos again after practices, where he tries to understand what went wrong. After one attempt to practice (at 25:22), he revisits the video and experiences another surreal feeling, where the sound of clapping and his family’s cheers are not in time to the video playback. As these shots replay and are distorted through reverb, home video shots of Omar’s family living their lives normally in Syria are intercut at a fast yet unrhythmic rate. They are eating at high class restaurants, wandering through vast botanical gardens, and standing on top of skyscrapers. This revisiting reinforces the notion he does not recognise the man he once was, and he can find

no meaningful connection with his homeland, his family, or his comfortable class status he once enjoyed. He is cursed with the knowledge he is now a lower-class immigrant to the people who live on the island and can never again enjoy the comfortable life of an upper-class musician. All he has is his musical instrument and the inability to make sound. He has no way forward until he is able to get his letter, and no way backward as he cannot use the oud to return to the Syrian person he once was. He is stuck in this uncomfortable present moment where he is silenced and ignored by others on the island, his friends dying, being taken away by police, or lying to him.

In the film's final scene, Omar attempts to reconcile his identity with who he once was. He agrees to host one last concert in honour of Farhad, as he confesses that he needs a connection to middle Eastern culture (at 1:35:29). He stares blankly into the crowd before him, feeling nervous of their judgements. Many of the people in the crowd have been racist to him before. Eventually, he summons the courage to play and does so effortlessly. The shots pan over the crowd, who look indifferent as he plays. They are in complete silence as they watch. This jarring silence further underscores just how alone Omar is in this new country. He can play his music and attempt to communicate with people on this island as he tried to do back home, but he cannot find a sense of meaningful connection with those around him, as they do not understand him, his culture, or the language he speaks. He is now classed as an immigrant who will not be able to communicate meaningfully, and thus belongs to an underclass who cannot achieve any sense of upward mobility. Not only is Omar disconnected from his homeland, but his sense of class comfort. As he finishes the song, an unenthusiastic applause is heard as Omar nods in appreciation to his audience, desperately trying to hide his tears. The film then cuts to its final shot (at 1:39:00), showing Omar as he leaves the refugee welcome centre and continues his walk to the shore as he usually does. Even after such an emotional experience where he reconnects

with his music for the first time since leaving Syria, he continues with his day, with the knowledge that not much will change for him in terms of his day-to-day life. He will always be a lower-class immigrant to his audience, no matter how well he is able to communicate the culture of his homeland to them. Until he receives his letter, he is trapped in the way he is perceived by the locals on the island. He is a terrorist who poses a threat to their way of being, or a migrant who is taking up their supplies. While the concert provides a happy note as Omar is given an avenue to express himself at all, it is bittersweet, as it remains unclear how long Omar is going to remain in this perception of himself. He is ultimately voiceless against interpretations of himself, and unable to speak against the racism he often faces in his community.

Thus, *Limbo* aptly represents the voicelessness that migrants experience as they come to the United Kingdom. Madeline-Sophie Abbas studies Britain's handling of the influx of Syrian refugees amidst the aftermath of the Brexit referendum and argues that migrants (such as these characters), feel that they are unable to speak up against their stereotypical and racist interpretations by the state and by others in their immediate community. She writes that refugees come to Britain "as security threats requiring verification" as they get their biometrics taken, they are placed in "camps" far away from where British people typically reside, where their behavior is monitored until they can prove that they will not pose a threat to British life (2019: 2463). Abbas argues that, in the process of immigrating to Britain, the migrant must "subject their body for scrutiny and submit personal narratives that are palatable to the demands of western democratic states by performing a depoliticised and non-threatening self", or they will be sent back home or die in the hands of the state (2019: 2464). In this film, it is evident that these migrant characters are not only misunderstood by others, with their dreams silenced and broken, but if they are to possess goals of escaping their class, speak up, and therefore attempt to

escape the state apparatus, they will die. They must remain in this state of limbo, unable to speak for an indefinite amount of time. Thus, the film represents an experience of the migrants who live in a constant state of voicelessness with no end in sight.

V. Conclusion: Class (Dis)Order in The Brexit Era

Through this discussion of these four films, it is now clear that experiential realism is evolving in the era of Brexit. While all four of these films cover different topics, they all share common themes amongst their characters. Johnny, Ghorghe, Zed, Martin, Stephen, Omar, Farhad, Wasef and Abedi are all left in uncertain futures by the conclusion of their own films, all left in a place where they no recognise the land they once knew and feel distant from the areas they called home. They do not know how they will continue in their personal relationships, in their careers, in the ways they identify regarding their class and national status. They are all left in a state of limbo, especially in regards to class, as they all are waiting for something good to happen, where their socio-economic place will be more certain. In defining how people now imagine their country, John Harris writes that, in Britain what “a lot of people have left by way of social glue” from decades of neoliberal competition in the job market, “is ideas of nationhood and belonging that are largely or wholly defined by the political right” (2019: 131). As the classes interact, they realise the ways that government policies affect their sensations of the world, and how the way their lives threaten to change. Yet they have no way to fight back. All characters are voiceless at the end of these works – either they are forced into positions of silence or have lost the ability to speak and be heard meaningfully in their communities. As Harris notes, this prevention of fighting back against this political right message is “at the core of Brexit” (2019: 131). Thus, it is clear that what the Brexit-era experiential realist film suggests is that characters must realise that their home is no longer their home, and their class and national

identity are no longer what they thought they should be. Moreover, the soundscapes of these films suggest that the futures of these characters are more uncertain than ever. Their ways of understanding the world as it is has fundamentally changed, and the ways that they interact with its soundscapes have been warped by other actors. With the redefining of nation and class through the ways they interact with their soundscapes, these characters are left without identity, without a meaningful way forward in their lives.

The question that Dave poses at the end of his text then receives a new dimension – “how did we get like this, all of us?” is not solely limited to the boundaries of neoliberalism, rapidly increasing poverty, and the active silencing of the working-classes by various British institutions. In looking at the soundscapes heard throughout the Brexit referendum, both in real life and its cinematic mediations, what emerges is that the sonic world is no longer what it once was, where voices are silenced entirely. The soundscapes of this new Brexit era are now defined by a loss of identity entirely, left to cruise forward into an uncertain future. There is a loss of memory of what the British identity is, and how it can change going forward. As Fisher himself writes, “memory disorder provides a compelling analogy for the glitches in capitalist realism, the model for its smooth functioning would be dreamwork. When we are dreaming, we forget, but immediately forget that we have done so” (2009: 44). Now we have contemplated how the Brexit referendum plays a significant role in the changing of individual class and national identity, the next chapter of this project will look closer at what Brexit threatens to do in the future, and contemplate how British soundscapes, and indeed, British cinema, threaten to change too.

Conclusion: Life After Brexit - Uncertain Futures?

I. Review Of The British Experiential Film From 2007-2023

As the study of the films from the previous four chapters demonstrates, the emergence of experiential realism demonstrates the increasing fall into voicelessness that many characters are experiencing. Upper-class characters in the new heritage film have come to gate each other out from their privileged worlds. Characters who desire to be a part of the middle class cannot find easy access to it and feel they can no longer talk to each other about what they desire. Working-class characters also feel that they have been silenced by various institutions. Under Brexit, all these characters have come to feel that their voicelessness is increasing to the point they do not recognise the auditory world they once lived in. As such, they have come to be unsure of the class dynamics around them and wonder whether they can ever be certain of their own identities. Throughout the past ten years, characters in experiential realist films have reached a point where they are unable to speak with those around them. Is this trend of the voiceless character a permanent swing in experiential realism, or will it change as Brexit Britain causes further damage to marginalised populations?

In understanding how Brexit will continue to impact the British public, it is productive to examine the ways individuals are understanding its uncertainties. As all these questions unfold in the political sphere, individuals have come to become worried and afraid of what their future holds. As Tim Oliver writes in his predictions of what will become of Brexit, “[t]hese processes by which Brexit is handled could easily see relations on all sides sour due to conflicting perspectives over the future” specifically in “political, economic and security relationships within the UK, between the UK and the EU and within the EU” (2017: 127). This dissolution of all relationships politically comes in turn to affect the individual, in terms the uncertainty of their

own identity and the resulting fear they experience. This is evident the work of sociologist Jean-François Drevet, who notes in his studies of how working-class people and recent migrants are responding to the Brexit referendum results, noting that a “fear” is rising in each person because they do not know whether they will be further persecuted from day-to-day (2021: 101). Because of these rising levels of fear, the individual begins to feel “distanced” from others around them, as if they are alone within their social sphere (2021: 101). They feel this distance increasing, wanting desperately to understand what their futures might look like. Unfortunately, this project will not be able to predict such answers with certainty. What it can do, however, is suggest how we will be able to measure the ways that things will change over time – through the genre of experiential realist cinema.

As this project insists, an ideal method to measure how British people are responding to political crisis is to examine how experiential realism serves to capture their changing relationships with their own class identity, with others and the environment around them, and their ability to speak out against their various oppressions. This chapter will suggest that in looking at recent examples of films that examine the Brexit moment, we can understand that the British people will be in positions of uncertainty and insecurity for the future. More specifically, this chapter will begin its analysis through studying how the people of Britain have previously coped with political tumult – specifically in how emotional responses have formerly evolved in the face of national socio-economic uncertainty. In looking at the past, two possibilities emerge of what Brexit could become and provides a means of how we can measure this social change going forward. Once we have assessed the two possible routes that the Brexit referendum could take, this chapter will next examine another cinematic example to suggest a likely route of where individuals are going. It will look specifically at the role of voice and how it asserts class

solidarity in a time where revolution becomes increasingly impossible to organise. Through this research, a third path will become evident to suggest just how much power a voice is able to hold in experiential realist cinema post-Brexit and suggest how sound and voicelessness can be studied in films going forward. This project will then conclude by looking to the next few years and reassert why the study of sound in British experiential cinema is necessary in the contemporary moment, as well as the future.

It is worth noting that it will not be able to answer any of the questions of what will become of Brexit in any definite sense, but it will begin to hypothesise the ways in which classed voices are heard in the coming decades. It will suggest that a study of recognition of the power of an individual's perceptions, emotions, and indeed, their own voices, as well as their ability to successfully protest the systems that are oppressing them could provide answers of where Brexit is going in the future. It will, most crucially, submit a method to measure how much agency the individual is represented to have in the cinema of the future.

II. Brexit and Class Uncertainty: Have We Been Here Before?

Before we can assess the outcomes of Brexit and what it will do to the population of Britain, it is valuable to consider how large, sweeping changes to the political structure of the United Kingdom have previously affected its class system. Through assessing previous changes, it is possible to see what paths may emerge in the current day. While Brexit is unique in its scope of people who will become affected by a separation from the European Union, it is not the only event in British history that demonstrates a fundamental change to how class is understood and played out in a public sphere. As the introduction of this project explores, after the resignation of Tony Blair, individuals were expected to hope for a better future with little signs of change. Throughout this slew of promises and failures to make for a just society by the successive Brown

and Cameron governments, those who had already been slighted by the Blair government felt as if their class positions were becoming increasingly unstable – they were more unsure of where they belonged and whether any institution thought that their wellbeing mattered. Thus, this era is very similar to the Brexit referendum, and the study of their emotional status in this time is valuable. There are many aspects that are similar between the two events: an air of uncertainty in the population of what will happen to the country, a potential shift in class dynamics, and a general fear of what this means for the future of Britain going forward. It is worth re-assessing the aftermath of Blair's departure, and the ways that sound plays a role in these fears of an uncertain future.

In his study of the wake of Blair's resignation and Brown's ineffectual term in office, sociologist Martin J. Smith explains that "the working class had become excluded from politics, as "the focus of [the government] was more on consumption than production" and as a result, "the elitist state was losing legitimacy" (2008: 427). They felt, in a similar way to characters in this project's fourth chapter, voiceless against a government that did not want to listen to them. While Brown's government responded with a "commitment to social justice" through relaying messages to the public that they would be given assistance from their institutions to cope with the upcoming financial crisis, they paradoxically committed to "unequivocally accepting the capitalist economic order" in their policy changes to the job market (2008: 427), making people feel even more voiceless. This voicelessness became a public distrust in politics, as both Labour and the Conservative Party were seen as operating against the best interests of the working class, as if they are more focussed on developing a strong financial sector in Britain than helping those increasingly slipping into poverty.

As a result of this contradictory promise to the British public, the British population were left unsure of: who the institutions of Britain and their government were really serving; who was able to maintain a full and happy life in an accepted landscape of capitalist consumption; their own labels and boundaries as classed individuals; and thus, the actual power their voices were able to exert in a public sphere. As a result, cultural theorist Stuart Hall notes that “[t]he protests are growing” amongst the British people against the whole notion that neo-liberalist intervention could do anything to assist them into living the lives they were once used to (2011: 26). After Blair’s departure, protests became more common, with individuals speaking out against these institutions in public forums. This is seen in protests such as the 2011 anti-cuts riots in London and the increasing popularity that the Occupy Wall Street movement received in Britain in the 2010s. While these protests garnered much attention at the time, their voices never reached the point of being completely and unequivocally heard by the British state, as Hall suggests. He writes “excluded social forces” such as the working class “whose consent has not been won, whose interests have not been taken into account, form the basis of counter-movements, resistance, alternative strategies and visions” (2011: 26). They use their voices to take over the soundscape of British politics, find means to make their struggles heard by as many people of the public who will listen, and create a counter movement, which leads to “the struggle over a hegemonic system,” or the need to “start anew” a system in which the economic and social needs of all individuals are being met (Hall, 2011: 26). Yet, crucially, they remain within a minority with little means to permanently seize the means of their own representation, are demonised for speaking too loudly for too long by institutions and the media, and then forgotten about as the news cycle moves on.⁴⁴ Hall writes that this fight to be heard is “the reason why history is never

⁴⁴ See Morley, 2009 and Zecic, 2020 for an in-depth study of the presence of working-class voices on BBC and Channel 4 news programs. See Biressi and Nunn, 2013 for a survey of what classed voices are demonised and what

closed but maintains an open horizon towards the future” (2011: 26). In other words, they may struggle to be heard, and even succeed in some contexts, but ultimately will be seen as an emerging movement, and never maintain a strong sense of legitimacy. Oppressed individuals will attempt to claim their sense of place within the British social tapestry but will be silenced by institutions such as the police, the media, or upper-class individuals themselves. Thus, this struggle becomes persistent and ongoing, rather than isolated to a few specific protests.

Within the previous chapters, we have seen examples of characters that protest these Blair-era neoliberal projects: in *45 Years*, Geoff tries to protest Kate’s silencing through his voice; in *I, Daniel Blake*, Daniel protests his fall into poverty by writing his plea in graffiti outside a job centre and using his voice to echo it to the community, but is silenced by police who come to arrest him; and in *Rocks*, Rocks contradicts her perception as a thieving Black woman to the hotel manager by loudly explaining her identity as she perceives it and simultaneously silence the judgements of those around them, but is threatened by police action and must stay silent to avoid arrest. Clearly within the experiential realist cinema post-Blair, there is a sense that protest is possible, and may garner some attention from those around them, but it will eventually be met with total silence as institutions become involved. In summing up the Blair’s term as prime minister, Stuart Hall writes that Labour’s social democratic traditions are being lost as they avoid a “political renewal of any kind” (2007: 122). He then posits that “[f]or the moment, ‘after Blair’ looks very much like the rather bleak landscape we had before” without any hope of change in the future” (2007: 122). In a discussion of political hegemony in Britain, Ihab Shalbak writes that this future is indeed bleak for those working-class people on the Left protesting their conditions on a repetitive basis in the United Kingdom, stating

voices are celebrated in British media. See Zecic, 2020 and Rawlinson, 2020 for a study of how working-class voices are often ignored or discarded in British media.

“[u]nfortunately the hegemonic staying-power of Thatcherism undermined the possibility of an alternative Left politics capable of renegotiating the existing relations of dominance and subordination” (2018: 59). Much like Brexit, there is a notion that the government has remained a group of upper-class elites who are out of touch with the hardship that the everyday person in Britain is experiencing, that individuals are continuing to slip into poverty and that protest is the only meaningful way to combat an increasingly dire situation. As we have seen in the previous chapter, individuals are feeling as if their voices do not matter, and as if their identities will never be in a stable place. Thus, in both the period post-Blair and in the Brexit referendum, this sense of dread makes individuals feel hopeless, as if there is no means of locating a stable sense of identity, no way to speak in a way in which they are being heard, or any means to meaningfully protest the ways in which they are being subjugated.

From this description Blair’s departure eerily echoes the events to come in the Brexit referendum, where individuals now remain lost over what they are able to expect from their governments, from their own identities, and what will happen to them in the future. As anthropologist Jeremy MacClancy suggests in his survey of the sociological impacts of Brexit, Brexit has become a state of fear that the public has become accustomed to. He writes that the word “Brexit” has taken on at least three meanings in public discourse: first, that Brexit can refer to the referendum itself or the UK’s exit itself (which commenced on 31 January 2020), as well as the political process engendered in the UK and in the EU by this referendum. But Brexit also has a crucial “separate meaning,” referring to the state of mind that has arrived within individuals and the “cause of concern more broadly, [seen] across the EU and globally” (2019: 369). Much like the feelings of not being heard in the time after Tony Blair’s departure, people in the Brexit era became used to political turmoil as an emotional state, where their perceptions have come to

define how they understand what is going on around them. This project is most concerned with this final and emotionally-based definition of Brexit, as in the time post-Blair, Brexit has caused a radical shift in the ways in which the individual's notion of themselves is re-developed as they fear that Brexit-era policies, racism, and economic exclusion will affect how they perceive themselves and be perceived going forward. But will Brexit have the same bleak outcomes that so many predicted in the era of Tony Blair (and, indeed, as many are predicting in media coverage), where individuals are permanently unable to communicate entirely, powerless to meaningfully protest their class-based struggles? Or will we see another path divulge where individuals are able to form a collective voice and protest in a meaningful manner to enact class change? How are we able to measure an individual's ability to understand and speak out against the oppressions caused by Brexit in the future?

This project has begun to observe this changing conception of class identity through the ways that cinematic sound represents internal journeys through navigating noisy environments, through singing and listening to music, through communicating with others, and ultimately each character's ability to speak out against those who attempt to silence them. As we have seen in the course of the past few chapters, class boundaries are consistently changing to the point at which one cannot define their own class identity, nor are they confidently able to define those within their community. As such, the means by which they are to define their own class identity and their national identity are left up in the air, and the relationships that exist between people remain uncertain.

Yet, we are starting to see another trend emerge in experiential realist cinema that points to where this uncertainty is going – there are characters in recent works who are finding meaningful ways to protest their isolation and speak their experiences to others, while still being

shut out from social systems designed to assist them. A later part of this chapter will assess the ways in which the Brexit referendum differs from the post-Blair era, through the increasing legitimacy that these protests are garnering in their cinematic representation, but also in the increasingly violent ways that these protests are being shut down. But to understand how these cinematic examples are representing this change in politics from the Blair-era, it is important to understand the means in which this change could be possible – through the characters’ ability to use their voices to recognise their own isolation, connect with others over their confusion and find class solidarity within these connections. Let us look at the arguments from theorists who study British class to study what paths these characters may be able to take in the face of sweeping changes to the class system.

The answers to questions of what will become of the future of class identity in Britain will not come easily, as class scholar Raymond Williams writes. In the face of sweeping changes to the British democratic political system, the notion of class identity will be left in a “process of emergence” or “a constantly repeated, an always renewable, move beyond a phase of practical incorporation: usually made much more difficult by the fact that much incorporation looks like recognition, acknowledgement, and thus a form of acceptance” (Williams, 1977: 115). What Williams thus implies is that the class lines will continue to change over periods of political shifts, especially as people lose faith in their ability to be heard in their protest. This is similar to what Stuart Hall has previously described – that the working class never being fully able to emerge as the dominant class and never fully being able to seize the means of their own representation. But what Williams crucially suggests here is a process of acceptance of this fact – that individuals will come to realise that nothing can be done to address this social injustice and accept that they will never be heard by the institutions. As they do this, they are able to save the

energy and protect their mental health from protesting constantly but lose their platform to make themselves heard.

This process of emergence to acceptance appears not only in the tumultuous period of the 1970s in which Williams was writing, but in the Brexit referendum as well. Victor J. Seidler posits that after the result came in, the government continually shifted blame onto the working class who they believe voted for it. As an initial response, a few protests occurred, such as the Reverse Article 50 movement. Yet, many oppressed and anti-Brexit individuals cannot sustain this amount of protest and have come to “accept” that there is not much that can be done to stop the strong and rapid force of the damage caused by Brexit policies (Seidler, 2017: 117). To be content in their day-to-day lives, they must accept the jobs they are able to have, agree that the job market must mean that they are in competition with each other, and in the cases of immigrants to the country, understand that they will constantly be misunderstood and misrepresented by the British state. In turn, the British population must accept the new way in which government policies are run, and that without a means to protest their marginalisation, they feel isolated from their communities. We have seen this gradual acceptance in the films studied in the previous chapter. Characters have, in some way or another, come to accept their isolation as just a natural change that they must become accustomed to – that policies will continue to isolate them from other people, that their incomes and their class identity will consistently be in fluctuation, and crucially, that there is no foreseeable endpoint to this sense of isolation, as seen in the soundscapes that they consume. Most importantly, Williams believes that these working-class identities will constantly be in the process of emerging as the dominant class, but never actually achieve this goal. They will always be within this space of trying to become dominant - trying to protest and be heard, but never getting any meaningful attention or

promise of being listened to, very much like the situation after the time of Tony Blair's premiership. This idea of the inability to escape these conditions is echoed by economist Diane Elson, as she believes individuals are coming to realise that it is difficult to protest in a way where all their needs are met. In her study of the concept of value in an individual's labour, she writes that "[t]he problem is that the experience of capitalist exploitation is fragmentary and disconnected, so that it is difficult to tell exactly what is wrong, and what can be done to change it" (2015: 171). In essence, because individuals' relationships have become so atomised, it becomes difficult to point to an exact cause of what is wrong with the current manner in which labour is organised, and also difficult to pinpoint what can be done to make conditions better for an entire class of people. This notion that Elson describes is a reason why the class remains emergent, as there is never a way to advocate for change in a way that will satisfy everyone, or to advocate for a change in which every person will feel they are being heard. And institutions will use this to silence individuals, as Elson believes: "[s]ubjective, conscious and collective aspects of human activity are accorded recognition. The political problem is to bring together these private, concrete and social aspects of labour" without the interference of institutions "as to create particular, conscious collective activity directed against exploitation" (2015: 174). Thus, it becomes difficult to imagine a future in which people can be heard on a large scale, if they cannot point to a common issue to fix, nor be able to organise to be heard.

While these authors offer a vague vision of a future where the working class will not be heard and conditions will become more exploitative, economist David Harvey comments directly on what must be done for the working class to be heard. In his book, *The Enigma of Capital*, Harvey comments on how many other scholars ask whether it is possible for the upper classes to infinitely "reproduce its power in the face of the raft of economic, social, political and

geopolitical and environmental difficulties” and posits that the answer will always be “a resounding ‘[y]es it can’” (2010: 215-6). But Harvey argues that all hope is not lost for the working class, as for the upper classes to continually be able to assert power on a large scale for an infinite amount of time, there is a requirement that “the mass of the people to give generously of the fruits of their labour to those in power, to surrender many of their rights and their hard-won asset values (in everything from housing to pension rights) and to suffer environmental degradations galore, to say nothing of serial reductions in their living standards which will mean starvation for many of those already struggling to survive at rock bottom” (2010: 216). Harvey believes that the working class cannot bend so easily in times of strife, and that with enough intervention, there is a possibility of being the sympathetic class in media representations, even if they will remain emergent. In simpler terms, this means that with enough intervention, they may reach a point where they are portrayed sympathetically in the media, the arts, and get some support from the larger public in their protests. What the working class must do, according to Harvey, is to make “noise” – specifically enough noise to silence “political repression, police violence and militarised state control,” which requires the voices of many to unite in saying one thing as long as necessary. Only when these people are able to connect and find a means to use one united voice will the exploited classes be able to “stifle the ensuing unrest” and speak out against their exploitation and marginalisation in a convincing manner (2010: 216). Thus, Harvey’s vision offers some hope – that there is a hope for the working class to revolt against increasing exploitation and claim that their voices, that are so often sidelined, are legitimate. Most crucially, it involves social connection through the role of the voice, where individuals must use their voice to speak louder than institutions through a continuous protest. They must be able to organise and agree on causes and find ways to avoid the institutional interference that

Elson believes will occur. It must be done in an everyday manner, with individuals finding ways to protest with the tools that they are afforded.

What Harvey implies in his text is a method that we may use to study the future of the working class in Britain. Specifically, he refers to the success of the working class dominating their representation to the public through their ability to protest political marginalisation. In this contemporary point in the Brexit era, we are able to see that there are two potential paths that the working class can take in the face of the social damage that the Brexit referendum will cause – either the working class will be able to form together, use one united voice and protest against a system that oppresses them, as Harvey suggests, or they will falter in the face of an oppressive system that does not want to allow the working class to emerge and become the dominant class, as Elson, Hall and others suggest. In order to answer the questions of which path the working class is headed towards, let us turn back to affect studies to understand how class struggle is played out in an everyday manner in the face of an uncertain future, and how sound and perception play important roles in understanding how people either judge or connect with those who belong within their community. Through an appreciation of how sound and deference play into class uncertainty, we are able to measure to what degree they are successfully able to protest worsening political and social conditions.

Deference and Sound: Understanding the Future of Class in Brexit

As these two paths become clearer, it is worth assessing these theories from British sociological studies that focus on the classes as a whole and ask further - how do these protests play out in the sphere of the everyday, and what incites the individual to react to and protest these political changes? Key texts in the strain of affect theory and sound theory, as well as this project's study of recent British experiential realist films may provide an answer to where the

nation may be heading. In her book *Cruel Optimism* (which is defined as the individual striving for a more equitable world in which all are equals, which in turn acts against their wellbeing), Lauren Berlant speaks of a similar notion when describing how Americans were reacting to the turbulence of the late Bush-era, where marginalising policies were rapidly being placed into effect with little notice, or with little media coverage. She writes of this era being filled with “noisy affectivity,” or the ways that individuals become so overwhelmed by emotion in constantly changing politics, to the point that they become numb by new information, feeling alone in their sensations (2011: 224). This isolation is much like what the characters in the past chapter were experiencing, feeling through their sensations of sound that the world is changing rapidly, neither in a way they can understand nor be able to communicate with others. She writes that this leads to “[m]elodramatic political performance” in news media and in the public sphere, in which individuals “perform the scale and measure of just legitimacy” to these exclusionary policies but also leads individuals to suffer “from aural bloat that is out of control” (2011: 230). In other words, the public discussion of Bush-era politics involves a melodramatic and audified performance of emotional reactions to political events, where individuals begin to save their emotional capacity and make their soundscapes more comfortable by ignoring policies that do not directly apply to them. With all of this aural bloat, it becomes difficult to connect with others who are going through similar experiences, seeing the other as an equal when they are conserving their emotional labour for policies that involve them. But this aural bloat also inspires the opposite. With a soundscape that seems too busy, and emotions running at an all-time high, Berlant writes that there are a group of individuals who use their time tuning out from the government to consider what their place in society is, and “think about whose anger is deemed honorable and whose is deemed a threat; whose sentimentality is a sign of moral virtue and

whose a sign of weakness that needs to get regulated” (2011: 230). In doing this, the individual then thinks about who has “the formal and informal right to take up soundspace” (Berlant, 2011: 230). Through providing a constant soundscape of noise in political action, Berlant argues that the Bush government both stops individuals from reacting to, and processing, what they are hearing (numbed to perception of themselves and of others) and encourages them to consider the power of their perceptions and emotions.

It is worth extending this idea beyond the scope of America at the end of the Bush era. Indeed, it applies to Britain after the term of Tony Blair and the Brexit vote. As political tumult occurs, the British people realise that their emotions have worth, and that some are given more privileges than others, and that wealth allows them to occupy a soundscape. But this soundscape is not just deafening anymore, as Berlant believes. She writes that there is an “unclaimed experience” in this moment of auditory bloat, where individuals feel as if their voices might never be meaningfully heard by the state, they can be part of a “collective sensory detection” event, where they begin to realise that they may not be so isolated as they are led to believe (2008: 2). Through making a connection with others vocally, they realise that they may not be as isolated as they thought they were, as there are others who are having the same experiences as themselves.

But how can people exercise this connection through their voices and through sound, and how exactly can it be applied during a contemporary British era in which people are becoming further atomised from each other? Political historian Catherine Marshall writes that large shifts in political democracy such as the United Kingdom’s leaving of the European Union and its protections of certain rights makes for a lack of what she calls deference, a spin on Walter Bagheot’s definition of what human beings owe to each other. Marshall writes that deference is

regarded in a post-2016 political environment as “a gesture towards an equal, an act which is willingly performed as part of social custom. [...] It is not submission to a superior, nor is it necessarily only subordination to custom, but self-restraint for the common good, and to avoid open conflict” (2021: 1-2). In other words, deference involves the avoidance of conflict and the ability to find empathy in the other who they come to define as their equal. Marshall speaks of how deference is regarded in the era of Brexit and of Donald Trump’s presidency, in which individuals feel as if the world is much crueler than they once thought and become suspicious of neighbours who might have voted for a crueler world. When one does not know who their equals are, or becomes suspicious of those around them, such as the case with the Brexit referendum, their relationships start to decay over time. There is a use of emotional language in this text, referring specifically to a notion that the individual considers political movements through the emotions and perceptions they feel throughout the larger changes they experience. This is the case of class relations at the time of the Brexit referendum. While these political changes are worth academic scrutiny, it is also worth considering this emotional dimension of how people react to these larger political changes and how the relationships between average British people will change over the course of the Brexit referendum and its aftermath.

As Brexit policies threaten to change the quotidian lives of individuals, with their ability to cross borders, access goods, and find steady employment affected, many scholars, such as Hall and Elson, tend to believe that they are forced to act for themselves, unable to find sympathy in the other and thus remain in constant competition and conflict. Catherine Marshall argues that even though an individual’s conception of their own identity is changing, there remains some hope that individuals may be able to be sympathetic to each other as this era continues to threaten the British people’s wellbeing. She writes that “Brexit happened because all of a sudden,

thanks to the new constitution, people did not know what to be deferential to any more” (2021: 295). This sentence reads as too conclusive and too harsh, almost as if it is too sure that British individuals do not care about each other, that they must rely on their individual instincts to survive, and there is no path to escape this pattern of thinking. Yet, Marshall insists that there is hope past the Brexit referendum, as she believes that the British are not inherently cruel but confused over what they must do. She writes that “deference is not dead; it is just that the English—much more than the other nations of the United Kingdom—are in a state of confusion about where to apply it” (2021: 295). What Marshall highlights is not that the British individual is forced to be in a state of antagonism with the other, or that the upper class wants to eliminate the working class and vice versa, but that they have lost the ability to sympathise with each other when government policies force them to act selfishly. The latter half of this quotation suggests a sense of return, that perhaps there is a chance to find sympathy in one another. Like David Harvey, Marshall believes that there is a hope post-conflict, that there is a means for British people to connect with each other, and that there is a possibility they can go down the path of social change in uniting their voices together in a form of protest. What Marshall’s text suggests is that Brexit is not necessarily a death knell – or that individuals will constantly be locked within a system where there are many exploitative forces continuing to eradicate them. Rather, they are victims to a system that places them in competition, where those who have means can afford to live lives of privilege, while those individuals in the working-class precariat must continue to work in precarious conditions for meager earnings. These class boundaries of course exist, as we have seen in the previous chapters of this project, but it is necessary to acknowledge this grey area in class difference. While individuals are unsure of what to do due to the changing nature of Britain in Brexit, they become unsure of who they should be supporting and who is

working against them. Thus, what Marshall implies is that deference can be found through the attempt to make sense of the uncertain. What the British individual must do is find a means to seek connection in the aural bloat, as Berlant writes. Through thinking of who has a right to occupy the soundscape amongst this tumult, they may be able to find a connection with each other and discuss the ways in which they have been oppressed. Through this mutual recognition, we see these individuals finding the power within the recognition of their own sensations. It is thus important to consider, once again, the everyday aspect of the soundscape, and how it permits for a recognition of sensation, emotion, and indeed the other.

The field of sound studies suggests a manner in which people can express solidarity or understanding amidst never-ending class conflict and aural bloat. As Michel Chion writes, sound is a unique concept, as it is a mode of expression between one another, and not an object that can be owned exclusively by one person. He writes that sound operates as a “container with borders that delimit at the same time that they structure what they enclose” (2015: 27). In simpler terms, sound operates as a means of bringing people together to experience one common characteristic of the world around them. This method of sharing a sonic experience with others assists to create connections, as they realise the commonalities of a common experience. For example, experimental musician and theorist John Cage describes that the sounds of traffic he hears in New York serves to unite those who are living in poorer housing, as it was a common language within a shared space, “speaking” to all living in unmaintained architecture in the same way (1992). Chion also insists that most sounds are not universal, because an essential property of sound is that it “sits on the edge between order and chaos” (2015: 197). This quotation refers to the idea that “sonic perception is subject to jumps, to spots of turbulence, so to speak, which shunt us from one dimension to another – from the scalar discontinuity of tonic pitches to the

continuity of complex masses” (without precise pitch) or of glissandi” (2015: 197). In simpler terms, even if individuals are all placed in the same “container” of listening, they may not always hear sounds the same way (2016: 27). They may all acknowledge that the sound exists but can debate what it signifies or how loud it may be. Thus, while sound universalises the human experience as most people have a relationship to the sounds they listen to every day and can connect over the sounds they hear, it also serves as a disconnect between individuals, as they experience sounds in different ways, causing disagreements and conflicts over a concept which should appear as universal. Music and sound scholar Nick Crossley argues this point further, by claiming that, even if the “human actors are mindfully embodied” of the ways they are interpreting sound and attempting to connect with each other, there are differences in the “conventions” and “resources” that they possess to convey the sounds they are listening to, and the ways they are able to connect with each other (2019: 17). Thus, the ways in which deference is shown depends entirely on the resources available to the people who are producing and consuming these sounds. They can only connect with those who have the same resources as they do, and thus exist in the same sphere as they do. Thus, the deference they will show towards others, and the connections they will be able to form, will likely fall along class lines. It is worth investigating how this deference is shown based on class lines, and how they use it to cope with an increasingly changing environment that Brexit is causing.

In his work, Crossley notes that, as institutions in power perpetuate class, racial and gender differences, the “status homophily” (or, “the nature of the similarity in terms of status”) of the soundscape begins to disappear, as the sounds that individuals experience on a day-to-day basis are becoming radically different from each other due to an individual’s identity markings (2019: 151). When people do not have the means to connect with other people based on the

sensations they experience, or find others who are experiencing similar sensations, they begin to become isolated and accept the conditions that they are feeling as what is natural.⁴⁵ Whether it is the inclusion of music to silence the voices of those who are in pain in the workspace, the refusal of noise ablation technology in manual labour or the development of an office space to create silence between civil servants, these authors all highlight that, during times of political change, the soundscape of the individual at work becomes more isolated, as they struggle to figure out who they are, and find others to connect with. Here, in the case of the future of Brexit, it is clear that political change is creating a divide amongst individuals, where they are able to show deference towards those who share a class status and can find power in their emotions with those who share their experiences. They will be able to find power in locating their own status homophily and thus finding their own voices.

Now we have established that the status of class, self-identification, and self-recognition are changing in terms of class and how individuals show deference to each other, let us return to the object of this project's study. Recent cinema observes how individuals are struggling to cope with this confusion over deference and attempt to find a sense of togetherness within the confusion that Brexit has caused. While they are ultimately not able to reconcile their differences within their class, or indeed assert a strong sense of national identity, it is worth assessing how sound is being used in extremely recent examples. As we have seen in the previous chapter, class status is represented in cinema post-Brexit as a social structure in crisis – one that is consistently up in the air and at risk of changing. Because individuals struggle to know what to make of their own identities after the referendum, they feel they are suffering from the aural bloat of all the

⁴⁵ Authors such as Mark M. Smith (2001), Karin Bijsterveld (2008) and Veit Erlmann (2010) all study the effects of these wide sweeping changes of political ideology on the everyday labour of the individual, and how times of political turmoil causes the soundscape at work to change in turn.

noise they are consuming and have become accustomed to institutions preventing them from acknowledging their marginalisation in a loud and public way. These characters are presented with the two paths mentioned earlier in this chapter – they must either accept that it is difficult to escape the label of the emerging class without a large amount of labour and sacrifice, give into the aural bloat of the current political era, and remain voiceless (as Hall and Williams argue), or, use their similar experiences of sound to recognise and vocalise their own oppression, find connection with one another, and potentially find some ways of revolting against their circumstances (as Harvey, Marshall and Berlant suggest). Some are compelled to accept the aural bloat at the risk of damaging their own health through a display of emotions, as Omar accepts his routine at the end of *Limbo*, while others act against their circumstances, or as Zed does in his fights against his disease in *Mogul Mowgli*. As Brexit policies continue to harm working-class communities, it is valuable to ask whether characters such as these are ever able to escape their isolation, and if there is any sense of hope of social connection within their communities. While these policies are indeed concerning and the ways in which they will bring about income inequality are disturbing, this chapter is not set out to say the outcome of Brexit is entirely one of social isolation, or even that the British people have become entirely numb to the concept of connectedness as the consequences of Brexit continue to unfurl. Rather, this chapter suggests, through the study of two recent works, that Harvey's vision is not impossible – specifically in that there is hope for those who are becoming voiceless under the confusion of their class status to find a sense of a unified voice. The characters in these films are becoming acutely aware of the social changes to their communities and are using sound and music to reinstate some form of community. Through the most recent evolution of the British experiential realist film, we are able to see a new path emerging. Characters are not accepting their total lack

of agency, where a new status quo threatens to isolate them without any hope of finding a voice again, but they are also not causing total revolution against their oppressors. Rather, they are enacting minor changes in their lives to recognise others who share their experience and find connections. As characters recognise the power of their perceptions, their emotions, and indeed, their own voices, they find themselves partially able to use their voices as a means of sharing their experience and creating a sense of protest against the systems that are oppressing them.

One recent example that suggests that deference is not dead, and individuals have a sense of hope in finding communities of individuals who share their concerns over class difference and are starting to find ways to connect their experiences in the form of a vocal protest is *Ali and Ava* (dir. Clio Barnard, 2022).

III. A Cinematic Example of Deference Through Sound

Ali and Ava, directed by *The Selfish Giant*'s Clio Barnard, represents two working-class individuals from different communities finding solace in each other and learning that they should not be suffering alone. It surrounds the intertwining stories of: Ali (Adeel Akhtar), a young housing contractor from an Indian background who goes through life with a constant soundtrack of electronic music; and Ava (Claire Rushbrook), a middle-age and working-class grandmother who is considering her national identity and her familial relationships through the country music that she listens to when she is alone. Though they have little in common when they first meet, they realise they both use music to cope with their life situations, specifically with the grief they feel over their identities. Ali is mourning the loss of his relationship with his wife and finds that Indian and British electronic music allows him to assert a confident sense of identity and be more upbeat and there for the communities of working-class houses that he supervises. Ava is mourning the loss of her father, an Irish immigrant who had a strong connection to folk stories

and national politics and uses country music to contemplate her feelings. While they are both from separate experiences, they both worry about the future and changing political attitudes in one way or another, as Ali worries how his changing family structure will affect his social status amongst his community, and whether he will be able to make enough in terms of income on his own and Ava worries about how her changing family structure is falling into white nationalism as a means of coping with grief. Much like Zed (in *Mogul Mowgli*) or Omar (in *Limbo*), they find solace in music as a means of reflecting on their cultures and thinking about where they belong in the current social landscape.

At first, they only listen to music when they are completely alone, as to not reveal the weight of their emotions to anyone else. Yet as the narrative of *Ali and Ava* develops, the role of music changes. At the twenty-minute mark of the film, music serves a connecting function, where both characters listen to music together to socialise over their experiences and learn that they are not alone in their feelings of isolation. At their first meeting, they are dismissive of each other's musical choices, interrupting each other's music with their own voices, and using the resource of their own voice to insist that their music taste is the superior one. They are confused of who the other is, and indeed, the social background that the other is coming from. Yet, they realise the power of making a space that is entirely populated with the music they listen to. They listen to the radio, and both enjoy the track they are listening to – Ali for the upbeat tempo of the song that allows him to dance and Ava for the soulful lyrics that she is able to find meaning in. By both deciding to silence their own pre-judgements and play the music loudly in an enclosed space, they find that they are able to connect through the emotional dimension of the music, especially in response to ongoing changes around them. They share a voice in these instances, not only by singing the lyrics (as they do at 1:06:25), but they are also singing about the

prejudicial judgements they face together (as they do when listening to a country song at 25:07). In turn, they express Marshall's definition of deference, as they both realise that the Other is actually not worth being afraid of. From this point onwards, music becomes a common language they share with each other, and a means of finding a collective voice over the issues they are worrying about.

They continue to meet up and share tracks they think the other will enjoy. These meetings operate as a form for escape for both of them, as Ava becomes worried when her son increasingly behaves as a violent white nationalist as a result of "rampant immigration" in his area, while Ali faces more discrimination from white nationalists for being a landlord of some wealth from a non-white background. Through their music, they are able to find a common connection and share their worries, promising support to each other when they need it. While listening to Sylvan Esso's "Radio" together (at 26:35), they dance and share what their worries are. Later, Ali surprises Ava by helping her fix her house, and Ava helps Ali by being talking with the community he supports and promoting his image. After the scene when they decide to pursue a romantic relationship, and support each other through each other's personal struggles, the music becomes omni-present. In a consistent soundtrack of either electronic music score, country music score, or another soundtrack that they have picked, the film symbolises the music's ability to keep characters from seemingly different socio-economic circumstances in solidarity with one another. The music that they share plays over scenes in which they connect further, as they find elements of each other's backgrounds that they can relate to – Ali finds that Irish folk music reminds him of the type of music he grew up with, and Ava finds Ali's electronic music works as a tool to get her family to dance together. This same music is equally played over scenes in which they argue over what their relationship means for their individual

identities (as Ava feels isolated from her family and Ali feels that he is further slipping away from his wife and his tight-knit family) and whether their pursuing a sustained romantic connection could succeed in an increasingly judging society.

The fact that the playlist they built together continues to be played over all moments in their relationship suggests, that despite threats from outside, there is an unbreakable solidarity that they have built. As Sophie Monks-Kaufman writes in her assessment of the film's presentation of solidarity, the film "presents a romance that involves not escape of one's problems, but acceptance of another's" as "the more each learns what the other is going through [sic] the less space there is to hide" (2022: 84). Thus, this film presents the case that there is still a chance of solidarity between individuals from seemingly different social worlds and different classes, as they listen to music and find that they have points in common. The music operates as a means to express deference, and to protest the various people attempting to oppress them. The music always remains louder than the racist taunts of Ava's son, or other racists in the community. Through the soundtrack, the film provides hope of where the British people are headed after the Brexit referendum. It is evident that music and sound serve as tools to recognise the Other and think about who has been given the formal right to occupy a soundscape, as Berlant describes. They find solidarity in each other and are able to speak out about the oppression they face with each other.

Yet, this film is not entirely hopeful about the power their voices possess, as it also shows the struggle that they had to go through to be happy together. The racist taunts are consistently heard on the soundtrack, and there are many struggles that Ali and Ava had to go through to reach a point in which they are able to listen to music together, free of interruptions or other threats. The film painfully highlights how silence affects them as they feel isolated. The music

that so was so consistently played temporarily stops as they break up (as Ava's son threatens Ali's life). These scenes are jarring, as the film's soundtrack was so consistently filled with music. This jarring sensation continues as the film finishes with a louder return to music, as Ava confronts white nationalist ideology within her family and Ali finalises his divorce and commits to rebuilding a stronger relationship with the community of immigrants around him. As cellos and keyboards swell into a crescendo, the two meet atop a hill, where the final two songs of their playlist, Bob Dylan's "Mama You Been On My Mind" and an unnamed techno track composed by Ali play, they smile half-heartedly towards each other (at 1:29:56) – meeting each other on the same level. It is worth noting that, even though the return to music suggests a revival of their relationship, the ending of this film is open-ended, as they no longer sing with each other, voiceless in how to acknowledge each other. The audience also does not see how their relationship will fare in the face of the threats that they felt within their community. Barnard's previous film, *The Selfish Giant*, ends with a jarring sense of silence as its characters are unsure of how to go forward amidst the death of a loved one, and the prejudice they experience as working-class people. This cut is not completely silent and suggests some sense of solidarity, but also suggests that there may be no end to the prejudice they experience. While they are able to make each other happy, the audience member knows that their environment will continue to remain hostile towards them, as white nationalism and questions over national identity will continue to persist. Thus, what this film suggests is that sound and music can be used to find a common voice within individuals and find power and support within those interpersonal relationships. Yet, it cannot act as the sole force against the world around them, as the threats of Brexit (such as Ali's income, racism, and Ava's worries over her family dynamic) will consistently be present. Thus, this film demonstrates a way in which deference and connection

through sound can help provide a form of protest, even if it will not be successful in a long-term manner.

In looking at how sound and music are used in this film, a few aspects have begun to change in the British experiential realist film that reflects the ways in which class boundaries are changing in the British social sphere post-Brexit. The hopeful vision that Harvey, Marshall and Berlant have all written about is possible, but the voice that an individual has is ultimately left alone, without any means of revolting in a manner that is meaningful. They may be able to seek connection with each other and find deference with each other, but the hopes of a collective revolt is increasingly more difficult to achieve. From looking at these recent examples of British experiential realist cinema, we are able to glean two things about where the genre, and representations of Brexit, are going.

First, a sense of deference has clearly not left individuals altogether, as they use sound to find a sense of community with each other. While the onslaught of Brexit may make individuals feel as if they are lost and isolated within an ever-changing identity (or, indeed, implore individuals of different classes to ignore each other and focus on what might best suit them, as Laurent Berlant writes about post-Bush era politics), what recent British experiential realist cinema is exploring is that this sense of community is not entirely lost and that the deference that people show for each other within this time is still alive. The cinematic representation of voice is indeed being used to show how individuals have been fragmented and isolated from each other, as we have seen in the last chapter, but it is also being used to demonstrate how the sense of community can arise from a situation where people feel left alone by a racist or economically precarious society.

Second, this film suggests the potential of what the working class can do should they have the ability to organise. It shows a metric on which we are able to measure the success of the working class' ability to protest their situations. The characters within *Ali and Ava* realise the potential when they unite their voices or take time to listen to what each other has to say. The films also frame the power their voices have, should they be able to unite them. When Ali and Ava share their music and sing together, it becomes louder than racist or classist taunts that are being yelled at them. They may not be able to revolt against the systems that are oppressive on a massive scale, but they are able to find a sense of belonging by exchanging their ideas and finding a sense of connection amongst those who understand what they are going through. They are thus not giving up their sense of agency completely, as Elson and Hall suggest, as they are able to find small ways to protest against systems that want them to remain apart from each other. Currently, the representation of cross-class deference is minimal to non-existent in current British cinema but there are examples that show how the classes are communicating internally. British experiential realism is thus evolving in the post-Brexit era once more to represent the power that individuals have when they connect with each other and recognise their perceptions and their emotions as similar and real. Their isolation remains strong as capitalist society is built to keep individuals alienated from their labour, as well as their co-workers, but the potential for a collective voice through this deference seems more possible in recent years.

Thus, it seems that there is a third path emerging in the trajectory of Brexit – not one of total acceptance of a status quo that cannot be fought against, or a total revolution that will happen should a few people find a connection with each other and share their experiences. It seems that the working class, for the moment, will remain emergent, but there is a greater recognition for the power that music and the voice have to connect individuals and get them to

realise the injustices of what social and state institutions enact upon them. This may not be the largest spark of hope in a post-Brexit landscape that threatens to upend the social and economic lives of many, but it is important to acknowledge that deference is still alive, and individuals are not being completely crushed by the aural bloat of this political era. Rather, they are becoming aware of their sensations and emotions, and are recognising the power that their voices have. Surely the future is not just the “the rather bleak landscape” that Stuart Hall predicted after the era of Tony Blair, as there is a sense of deference (and thus power) that is found in sharing music and uniting voices (2007: 122). Identifying one’s class boundaries in the Brexit era is not what Raymond Williams describes as “actual isolation” but as “merely effective isolation within what is still unavoidable physical presence” (Williams, 2007: 101). To this end, it is worth investigating further how this sense of deference will develop in the experiential realist film in the coming years. While *Ali and Ava* uses sound specifically to show the ways in which communities have the potential to unite and find others who share their experience, sound is equally used to showcase the ways they remain divided over socio-political differences. There still remains a sense of uncertainty - that even if people are returning to a sense of deference, the threats imposed by increasing class difference between individuals remain strong. Indeed, some of the films studied in the previous chapters were made post-referendum election and demonstrate that individuals are becoming increasingly isolated. But in examining how this film showcases how British working-class individuals use sound to show deference and isolation, it is clear that there remains to be a lot of confusion over one’s identity, and the amount of care they can show to each other without harming their best interests. Ali, Ava, and the communities they live in all do not know what the best course of action is for their futures, but know they want to

do what is best for their communities, and not just themselves. And they exemplify the new kind of characters seen within post-Brexit cinema.

When assessing the future of Brexit, there is a need to think about the relationships between the classes and how they will continue to evolve. For the immediate future, it appears that individuals will remain isolated due to their ever-changing understandings of their own class status but are continuing to show deference towards each other. From looking at these films, it is clear that individuals are connecting, sharing their versions of strife and understanding the extent of their marginalisation as a social class. But they are not able to protest their marginalisation, as there are institutional and systematic barriers for them to be heard in a major way. They are the emerging class and are largely not heard by governmental institutions or the media, but they are finding means to connect over their strife.

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Filmography

4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days [feature film] Directed by Cristian Mungiu. Mobra Films, Romania, 2007. 113 mins.

45 Years [feature film] Directed by Andrew Haigh. Film 4/British Film Institute/Creative UK, UK, 2015. 95 mins.

About a Boy [feature film] Directed by Chris and Paul Weitz. StudioCanal/TriBeCa Productions/Working Title Films, UK, 2002. 101 mins.

Ali & Ava [feature film] Directed by Clio Barnard. Moonspun Films/BBC Films/British Film Institute, UK, 2022. 95 mins.

All or Nothing [feature film] Directed by Mike Leigh. Thin Man Films/StudioCanal, UK, 2002. 128 mins.

Archipelago [feature film] Directed by Joanna Hogg. Wild Horses Film Company, UK, 2010. 114 mins.

Atlantics [feature film] Directed by Mati Diop. Netflix, Senegal/France, 2019. 104 mins.

Bait [feature film] Directed by Mark Jenkin. British Film Institute, UK, 2019. 89 mins.

Billy Elliot [feature film] Directed by Stephen Daldry. Universal Pictures/StudioCanal/BBC Films/Working Title Films/Tiger Aspect Pictures, UK, 2000. 110 mins.

Billy Liar [feature film] Directed by John Schlesinger. Vic Films Productions/Waterhall Productions. 98 mins.

Blinded by the Light [feature film] Directed by Gurinder Chadha. Entertainment One, UK, 2017. 117 mins.

Brassed Off [feature film] Directed by Mark Herman. Miramax Films/Channel Four Films, UK, 1996. 107 mins.

Brexit: The Movie [feature film] Directed by Martin Durkin. WAG TV, UK, 2016. 81 mins.

Brexit: The Uncivil War [feature film] Directed by Toby Haynes. House Productions, UK, 2019. 92 mins.

Brideshead Revisited [feature film] Directed by Julian Jarrold. Miramax Films/Hanway Film/BBC Films, UK, 2008. 133 mins.

Bridget Jones' Diary [feature film] Directed by Sharon Maguire. Universal Pictures/StudioCanal/Little Bird/Working Title Films, UK/USA/France, 2001. 96 mins.

Cousins [feature film] Directed by Ainsley Gardiner. Vendetta Films, New Zealand, 2021. 98 mins.

Daphne [feature film] Directed by Peter Mackie Burns. The Bureau, UK, 2017. 87 mins.

Dockers [feature film] Directed by Bill Anderson. Prism Leisure, UK, 1999. 91 mins.

Downton Abbey [television programme] ITV Studios. 2010-.

Educating Rita [feature film] Directed by Lewis Gilbert. Acorn Pictures, UK, 1983. 110 mins.

Elizabeth [feature film] Directed by Shekhar Kapur. PolyGram Filmed Entertainment/Working Title Films/Channel Four Films, UK, 1998. 123 mins.

“Episode 1” *In My Skin* [television programme] Produced and directed by Lucy Forbes. BBC, UK, 8PM, 14 October 2018, BBC, 28 mins. Available at:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/p0871pn8/in-my-skin>.

Fish Tank [feature film] Directed by Andrea Arnold. BBC Films/UK Film Council/Kasander Film Company/Limelight Communication/ContentFilm, UK, 2009. 123 mins.

Forget Me Not [feature film] Directed by Zoltan Korda. London Film Productions, UK, 1936. 73 mins.

Four Weddings and a Funeral [feature film] Directed by Mike Newell. PolyGram Filmed Entertainment/Channel Four Films, UK, 1994. 117 mins.

God's Own Country [feature film] Directed by Francis Lee. British Film Institute/Creative England/Met Film Production/Shudder Films/Inflammable Films/Magic Bear Productions, UK, 2017. 105 mins.

Gosford Park [feature film] Directed by Robert Altman. USA Films/Capitol Films/The Film Council, USA/UK, 2001. 137 mins.

Herself [feature film] Directed by Phyllida Lloyd. Screen Ireland/BBC Films/British Film Institute, UK/Ireland, 2020. 97 mins.

I, Daniel Blake [feature film] Directed by Ken Loach. Sundance Selects/BBC Films/Wild Bunch/Sixteen Films/Entertainment One/Why Not Productions, UK, 2016. 100 mins.

Industry [television programme] HBO, 2020-.

Kes [feature film] Directed by Ken Loach. Woodfall Film Productions/Kestrel Films, UK, 1969. 112 mins.

Klute [feature film] Directed by Alan J. Pakula. Gus Productions, USA, 1971. 114 mins.

Last Christmas [feature film] Directed by Paul Feig. Feigco Entertainment/Perfect World Pictures/Calamity Films, UK/USA, 2019. 103 mins.

Limbo [feature film] Directed by Ben Sharrock. Film4 Productions/Creative Scotland/British Film Institute/Caravan Cinema, UK, 2020. 103 mins.

Listen to Britain [short film] Directed by Humphrey Jennings and Stewart McAllister. Crown Film Unit, UK, 1942. 19 mins.

London Orbital [feature film] Directed by Chris Petit. Illuminations Media, UK, 2002. 77 mins.

Look Back In Anger [feature film] Directed by Tony Richardson. Woodfall Film Productions/ABPC, UK, 1959. 98 mins.

Lord of the Flies [feature film] Directed by Peter Brook. Lord of the Flies Company/Allen-Hodgdon Productions/Two Arts, UK, 1963. 92 mins.

Lorna's Silence [feature film] Directed by Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne. Cinéart, Belgium, 2008. 105 mins.

'Lover's Rock' *Small Axe* [television programme] Produced and directed by Steve McQueen. BBC Films, UK, 9PM, 22 November 2020, BBC, 70 mins. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000prjp/small-axe-series-1-lovers-rock>.

Mogul Mowgli [feature film] Directed by Bassam Tariq. Strand Releasing/Pulse Films/Left Handed Films/BBC Films/Cinereach/VICE Studios/Ryot Films, UK, 2020. 90 mins.

My Beautiful Laundrette [feature film] Directed by Stephens Frears. Working Title Films/Channel Four Films, UK, 1985. 97 mins.

Native Son [feature film] Directed by Rashid Johnson. HBO Films, USA, 2019. 104 mins.

Notting Hill [feature film] Directed by Roger Michell. Universal Pictures/PolyGram Filmed Entertainment, USA/UK, 1999. 124 mins.

Rocks [feature film] Directed by Sarah Gavron. Fable Pictures/British Film Institute/Film 4 Productions/The Wellcome Trust, UK, 2020. 93 mins.

Skins [television programme]. Channel 4 Television. 2007-2013.

Room At The Top [feature film] Directed by Jack Clayton. Romulus Films/British Lion Films, UK, 1959. 115 mins.

Rustic Oracle [feature film] Directed by Sonia Bonspille-Boileau. Nish Media, Canada, 2019. 101 mins.

Sense and Sensibility [television programme] BBC/WGBH Boston, 2008.

Sliding Doors [feature film] Directed by Peter Howitt. Miramax Films/Paramount Pictures, UK/USA, 1998. 99 mins.

Succession [television programme] HBO, 2018-2023.

Sweet Sixteen [feature film] Directed by Ken Loach. Alta Films/BBC Films/Road Movies Filmproduktion/Scottish Screen/Sixteen Films/Tornasol Films

Swimmer [short film] Directed by Lynne Ramsay. BBC Films/Film4/London Organising Committee, UK, 2012, 17 mins.

The Chance of a Night Time [feature film] Directed by Herbert Wilcox and Ralph Lynn. Herbert Wilcox Productions, UK, 1931. 70 mins.

The Duchess [feature film] Directed by Saul Dibb. BBC Films/Qwerty Films/Magnolia Mae Films, UK/France, 2008. 110 mins.

The King's Speech [feature film] Directed by Tom Hooper. UK Film Council/Momentum Pictures/FilmNation Entertainment, UK/Australia, 2010. 119 mins.

The Loneliness of The Long Distance Runner [feature film] Directed by Tony Richardson. Woodfall Film Productions/Seven Arts, UK, 1962. 104 mins.

The Remains of the Day [feature film] Directed by James Ivory. Merchant Ivory Productions, UK, 1993. 134 mins.

The Selfish Giant [feature film] Directed by Clio Barnard. IFC Films/Pigment Movie Productions, UK, 2013. 91 mins.

The Wolf of Wall Street [feature film] Directed by Martin Scorsese. Red Granite Pictures/Appian Way Productions/Sikelia Productions, USA, 2013. 180 mins.

This is England [feature film] Directed by Shane Meadows. Warp Films/FilmFour, UK, 2006. 102 mins.

This Sporting Life [feature film] Directed by Lindsay Anderson. Julian Wintle and Leslie Parkyn Productions/Independent Artists, UK, 1963. 134 mins.

Upstairs Downstairs [television programme]. ITV Studios. 1971-1975.

Walkabout [feature film] Directed by Nicolas Roeg. Max L. Raab-Si Litvinoff Films, UK/Australia/USA, 1971. 100 mins.

Wimbledon [feature film] Directed by Richard Loncraine. StudioCanal/Working Title Films, UK/USA/France, 2004. 98 mins.