The Representation of the Northern Male Body in British Film and Television

Daniel Martin

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Department of Film and Television Studies

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the role of the male body in the construction of a Northern English place-myth in fictional film and television. As scholarship of the region's representation acknowledges, masculinity is dominant within the production of a Northern imaginary. However, critical discussion of this masculine coding frequently overlooks the male body itself. Consequently, this body has been produced as a taken-for-granted formation; an obvious figure carrying a limited set of meanings. In contrast, this thesis argues that representations of male embodiment are complex sites of meaning which must be read, textually, to be understood, culturally and historically. In its methodology, the thesis combines textual analysis with an examination of aesthetic, social and political contexts. By treating text and context as reciprocal, I chart how fictional representations of the male body both respond to and actively produce our sense of the North's meanings and values at specific points in time.

The first part of the thesis establishes an intellectual and cultural history, by asking what precedent exists for describing representations of male embodiment as specifically Northern. In Chapter One's literature review, I demonstrate how the Northern male body has pervaded scholarship on the region as a concept with an implicit but influential presence. Chapter Two examines the relationship between male bodies and the production of historical narratives of the North according to a canon of film and television texts. This is a critically complex task which requires, firstly, reproducing a canonical screen history in order to map how male bodies have mediated changing notions of Northern identity, and, secondly, critically querying the representational politics of a 'Northern' canon.

The second part of the thesis involves an investigation of contemporary representations of the male body. The primary field of investigation is the representation of male embodiment in texts produced between 2008 and 2020. This period has seen the re-emergence of the North as culturally significant in the mediation of a post-recession structure of feeling, in part through the popularity and controversy of releases such as *I, Daniel Blake* (2016), *Happy Valley* (2014 -), and *God's Own Country* (2017). Across three chapters, I examine three modalities of male bodily representation in this period, which I term, respectively: the deteriorated body, the youthful body, and the racialised body. By treating deterioration, youthfulness, and racialisation to be specific, if overlapping, processes in the representation of Northern masculinity, these chapters emphasise the rhetorical nature of these bodies and locate social and ideological meaning in the contradictions that result from this rhetorical specificity.

DECLARATION

This thesis is submitted in accordance with the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Film and Television Studies. I declare that the material contained within is all my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.

Daniel Martin

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the construction of a Northern male body in British film and television fiction. Paying attention to how images and discourses of male embodiment have shaped how the North of England is produced and made sense of within national culture, I interrogate the changing structures of feeling which the Northern male body mediates. I read this body as both a dominant icon in the representation of the North, imbued with symbolic capital owing to the region's association with discourses of "authentic" working-class masculinity, and a site of meaning and affect which is inscribed with contradictions around the changing status of class, gender, and national identity within the wider context of de-industrialisation and the transformation of Britain into a neoliberal society. In the context of contemporary British society, the representation of the male body both authenticates Northernness as a meaningful class identity and inscribes the difficulty of ever fully embodying Northernness when such an identity always refers to a lost past.

An instigating contention of this thesis is that the male body is an influential yet taken-for-granted formation within the production of what Rob Shields conceptualises as the Northern English 'place-myth'.[1] Although there exists a history of scholarship within sociology and cultural geography which examines men's performance of Northern identity, little exists on the representational body within the cultural production of a singular English North.[2] This is despite the fact that the North exists primarily as a cultural

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[1] Rob Shields, *Places on Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*, (London: Routledge, 1991), p.3

[2] See: Robert G. Hollands, 'From Shipyards to Nightclubs: Restructuring Young Adults' Employment, Household, and Consumption Identities in the North-East of England', *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 41, (1996). Simon Charlesworth, *A Phenomenology of Working-Class Experience*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Mike Savage, Gaynor Bagnall, Brian Longhurst, 'Ordinary, Ambivalent and Defensive: Class Identities in the Northwest of England', *Sociology*, 35:4, (2001). David Byrne, 'Industrial Culture in a Post-

imaginary.[3] As Shields argues, the North's foremost identity is imagined and symbolic, encountered through cultural discourses and operating as a container of myths and images.

Film and television representation has played an integral role in the construction of the Northern place-myth. From the British New Wave and soap operas such as *Coronation Street* through to contemporary debates about Britain's "left behind" regions sparked by the social realism of *I, Daniel Blake*, film and television has consistently produced knowledge around the North as a place and Northernness as a form of identity. Despite the cliched ambiguity of its imagined boundaries, the North has existed as a coherent place-myth – as I understand it, an imaginary which brings together various discourses, narratives, images and affects related to the history of the British working-class and what Ewa Mazierska calls the 'master narrative' of industrial boom and inexorable post-industrial decline – because of the spaces and the bodies we see on British screens.[4]

The Body

Industrial World: The Case of the North East of England', *City*, 6, (2002). Anoop Nayak, 'Last of the 'Real Geordies'? White Masculinities and the Subcultural Response to Deindustrialisation', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 21:1, (2003). N. Geoffrey Bright, 'The Lady is Not Returning!': Educational Precarity and a Social Haunting in the UK coalfields, *Ethnography and Education*, 11:2, (2016).

[3] Within scholarship, there is no consensus on the capitalisation of the 'N' in North, Northern, or Northernness. While many scholars choose to leave north uncapitalised to maintain a conceptual distinction from more formal British regions, and to retain a sense of the north's slippery relation to geographical space, this thesis follows the work of Rob Shields in conceptualising the North as a coherent imagination of place. Shield's use of capitalisation reflects his understanding of the North as a container of historically consistent ideas of place and identity, as opposed to just an adjective denoting direction. Similarly, as this thesis is interested in the body as *identified* and inscribed as Northern, terms such as North, Northern and Northernness will be capitalised.

[4] Ewa Mazierska, "Introduction: Imagining the North of England", in Mazierska (ed.) *Heading North: The North of England in Film and Television*, (Cham: Switzerland: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2017), p.4

Within the Northern place-myth the body's influence is obvious but has often eluded analysis. This oversight is significant because descriptions of the North's bodily-ness remain important to the popular myth-making of the region. If we look to the still widely read genre of Northern travel-writing, we find much acknowledgement of Northernness as a bodily category. In Stuart Maconie's *Pies and Prejudice*, the toughness and obstinance of the Northerner's body is a key stereotype of the region, one which Maconie makes light of when he writes that:

> All of this makes us different, we think; harder, flintier, steelier. We are the ones who turn the air-conditioning down in the meeting room, who want to sit outside the pub in October, who order the hottest curries, the strongest beer, the most powerful drugs.[5]

Similarly, in *The North: And Almost Everything In It,* Paul Morley uses metaphors of embodiment in his description of essential regional characteristics:

> And then there is the combination of the geology of the north and the emphatic earthiness of the people to produce voices that make sounds that seem to follow and be followed by the shape of the earth around them. In the south your voice leaves the ground, your accent fights away from the earth, as if you are using how to speak to avoid the dirt under your feet.[6]

In both books, this body is a natural extension of the harsh landscapes and grim weather which characterise the North. These popular accounts of the North rehearse at least a century's old history of

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[5] Stuart Maconie, *Pies and Prejudice: In Search of the North*, (Bodmin: Edbury, 2007), p.6
[6] Paul Morley, *The North (and Almost Everything in it)*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 33

cultural representation authored both from within and without, in which, as Katherine Cockin phrases it, 'the northern body' is contrasted with 'the southern brain'.[7] In these contemporary travel books, this attachment to an essentially Northern body is communicated with a degree of ironic distance – either in Maconie's comedic tone or Morley's self-consciously poetic prose – but both authors reference embodiment as part of how we can construct the North as a coherent place-myth with a singular sense of identity that offers the potential for self-representation.

As such popular work suggests, the North's bodily-ness is an obvious characteristic. In these examples, the body appears to be (what Rob Shields would refer to as) a primary 'place-image' for the North.[8] These are images derived from cultural stereotyping which fix places with an often partial identity in order to simplify various social and historical complexities. In Maconie's and Morley's work, for instance, a natural hardness and earthiness condenses centuries histories of Northern industrial and post-industrial. For Shields, the place-image is politically important because it is a site in which the potential polyvocality of meaning and feeling becomes 'mediated by normative discourses and power relations'.[9] Place-images reveal the active struggle of the construction of dominant narratives about places (and the wider social relations they mediate). It is for this reason, that the seemingly obvious 'place-image' of the Northern male body becomes a necessary object for cultural, political and (I argue) textual analysis. If the body holds a cultural currency in the production of the North, how

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[7] Katherine Cockin, "Introducing the Literary North", in Cockin (ed.) *The Literary North*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 15
[8] Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin*, pp. 25
[9] Ibid.

does contemporary film and television represent this body? To what extent can we describe the Northern male body as a singular and coherent form? What range of meanings and values does this body inscribe as Northern and why?

The Figure Within The Landscape

By paying attention to this body, my thesis diverges from much of the film and television scholarship produced about the North, which dominantly approaches the region's representation through the framework of space and more specifically landscape. This is a tradition of textual analysis which privileges issues related to location shooting, scale and distance, and the point-of-view inscribed within shots of urban landscapes, to unlock the changing historical meaning of the North and its representation. This is a history of scholarship in which the body is present but under-theorised, often referenced but rarely read.

The legacy of landscape as a critical paradigm for the study of the North predates film and television studies but is also intimately connected to this scholarly history. Richard Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy* – the seminal work of class sociology based on the writer's childhood city of Leeds – presents its account of working-class community as a 'landscape with figures'.[10] The central thesis of Hoggart's work is that working-class life once represented a rich culture – felt in the textures of everyday domestic life – that had been slowly eroded by the importation of global, mass culture. Hoggart's cherished account of a working-class past has been repeatedly cited as an influence on the kitchen sink realism of the British New Wave and (what Richard Dyer calls) the 'nostalgia for vanished virtues' reflected in the

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[10] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1957)

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seriality of the soap-opera *Coronation Street* (ITV, 1960 -).[11] This way of imagining the North – as a 'landscape with figures' – is thus influential but not a neutral description of representing place and people.[12]

Hoggart's writing came to have a profound influence on British film and television studies. If one were to name the seminal work of textual analysis for the relatively small field of Northern film and television scholarship, it would be Andrew Higson's 1984 essay on the representation of the Northern urban landscape in the British New Wave cycle: 'Space, Place, Spectacle'. The essay's key concept, 'That Long Shot of Our Town from That Hill', refers to a tendency of depicting Northern place via long establishing shots of urban townscapes that invite 'the external point-of-view, the voyeurism of one class looking at another'.[13] In such shots, the 'surface realism' inscribed by the industrial landscape both structures and masks a desire for 'visual mastery'.[14] While indexing a real location, the shot's framing and scale also invite an aestheticization of the landscape

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[11] Richard Dyer, 'Introduction' in Richard Dyer (ed.), *Coronation Street*. No. 13, (BFI Publishing: London, 1981), p.35. As will be discussed further, in the History of the Screen North chapter, in relation to the British New Wave, Terry Lovell has also argued that this nostalgia is dominantly masculine in its attitude. Hoggart's observation of an erosion in working-class culture is associated with a perceived shift in the constitution of working-class identity, from producers to consumers, which, as Lovell notes, assumes that 'work was…the defining feature of working-*men's* lives' and thus 'characteristics of the traditional working-class community and its culture were masculine, even when the spotlight might happen to fall on the community at leisure.' See: Terry Lovell, 'Landscapes and Stories in 1960s British Realism', in Higson (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema*, (London: Cassell, 1996), p.160

[12] In *A Phenomenology of Working-Class Life*, sociologist Simon Charlesworth responds to Hoggart's method, aiming his critique at the rhetorical logic beneath the concept of 'landscape'. As he argues, 'the [art history] idea of landscape substitutes the viewer's relation to the place for the people's own relation to it', producing a 'horizon of consciousness' which understands the social as something 'distant and antithetical' to the viewing subject. The result is a North constructed from outside and characterised by a stereotyped set of meanings. See: Simon Charlesworth, *A Phenomenology of Working-Class Experience*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 89-90

[13] Andrew Higson, 'Place, Space, Spectacle: Landscape and Townscape in the "Kitchen Sink" Film', *Screen*, 25:2, 1984, p. 18

[14] Ibid., pp. 4-17

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which, according to Rob Shield's reading of Higson, overwrites the specificity of place with a '*conventionalistic*' and 'folksy' set of Northern tropes, framing narratives of class conflict within a reified idea of North [author's emphasis].[15] Higson's analysis demystifies the middle-class voyeurism within the British New Wave and which can be traced to Hoggart's construction of the Northern community as a 'landscape with figures'. However, his essay helped instal landscape as an orthodox site of analysis, a tendency which has held ever since its publication. 'That long shot…' continues to be treated as a key to understanding the politics of specific representations of the North.[16] This privileging of landscape often determines a set of critical observations, revolving around notions of insider and outsider perspectives and the static construction of a region defined by pastness. While this scholarly attention to landscape demonstrates the methods by which the Northern place-myth is constructed in circumscribed terms, perhaps the scholarship itself has contributed to this limited range of meaning.

'Space, Place, Spectacle['s]' interrogation of landscape does not ignore the body, but it is vague in its invocation of the figure. On one level, Higson recognises the body's contribution to the production of a surface realism. The New Wave is read as coding 'authenticity' as much through the physical appearance of 'unknown' and 'unglamorous' actors as through the Northern

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[15] Rob Shields, *Places on Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*, p.218

[16] Indeed, in contemporary analysis of film and television, 'that long shot' often functions as the conceptual hinge on which a discussion of the representation of class and/or gender is enriched by a consideration of Northernness. Recent articles on contemporary film and television texts which centres its discussion of Northernness on long shots of landscape includes: Kristyn Gorton, "Feeling Northern: 'Heroic Women' in Sally Wainwright's *Happy Valley* (BBC One, 2014 -)', *Journal for Cultural Research*, (2016). Helen Wood, 'Three (Working-class) Girls: Social Realism, the 'At-risk' Girl and Alternative Classed Subjectivities', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 19:1, (2020). Beth Johnson and David Forrest, "Erasing Diversity: Mediating Class, Gender, and Race in *The Moorside*", *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 17:1, 2020.

spaces captured via location shooting.[17] Ostensibly, the body is involved in the framing of narrative space as a concrete historical place. However, the nature of the body's historical and conventional dimensions is deferred in Higson's analysis. Character is discussed in terms of its moral and psychological dimensions, while landscape is the object of fetishization usually associated with the cinematic body. In Higson's reading, the Northern landscape is inscribed with a distant 'otherness' so that it might be viewed as fetish and emptied of socio-historical meaning, while the character is attributed with an individuated 'bourgeois subjectivity', manifested in the desire for escape, which both narratively confirms the North's conventional grimness but also threatens its existence as distant surface.[18] In Higson's application of a psychoanalytic framework of form and ideology, it is the presence of the figure within the long establishing shot which edges the image away from comforting fetishism and towards a regime of voyeurism in which the North is less conventionally knowable. The essay thus constructs an ambivalent image of Northern embodiment in the figure of the New Wave protagonist. This is a body that is imaged on the border of convention and history, acting both as a signifier of the North's reified 'authenticity' and as a container of potential (if often narratively contained) change. Higson's essay recognises both elements, yet he, and those who engage with his theory, consigns the construction of place-myth solely to the landscape; how the body might operate as a site for the interaction of convention and history is rarely interrogated. The body – as image, surface, and subject – is overlooked.

This indifference to the body leaves certain questions unanswered. If we were to consider the body as a site where the conventionality of

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[17] Andrew Higson, 'Space, Place, Spectacle', p.4
[18] Ibid., p.11

Northernness comes to intersect with the narrative drives of change, desire and movement, then a new set of issues arise. Just from building on Higson's work, where the body both inscribes and threatens the knowability of the North, we can ask: how is social agency imagined, re-framed, and bounded within the Northern place-myth; what forms of agency are imagined as Northern? What are co-existing and conflicting constructions of time and history which structure the emergence of the North in different periods? What kinds of futurity are possible for Northern working-class communities? Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, what kinds of bodies and gestures are defined as Northern; what are the boundaries of Northernness and how open to difference are these boundaries? As this thesis endeavours to demonstrate, paying attention to the body is not important simply because it has been treated with indifference but because reading bodies offer different ways into understanding the production of North. Similarly, to focus on the body is not to dismiss the validity of these readings of landscapes, but rather to reconsider 'the landscape with figures' via an intimate reading of the figure.

A Re-Emergent North: The Post-2008 Period

In one sense, then, this thesis turns to the body in the belief that film and television scholarship has more to say about the meaning of the Northern-place myth in representation. The body allows us to reconsider these issues of agency, futurity, and the boundaries of Northernness as an identity. The body is established as important insofar as it allows one to intervene in this scholarship of the North, but this importance is given an increased urgency in the post-2008 context, in which the place-myth re-emerges in ongoing discourses about Britain and its state of historical impasse and decline. Tom

Hazeldine frames this as the re-emergence of 'the Northern question'.[19] Hazeldine opens and closes his political history of the North with reference to an accumulation of events over the previous decade which had 'propelled [the North of England] to the foreground of national attention for the first time since the socio-economic crisis of the Thatcher years.'[20] The shock Leave vote at the 2016 EU referendum represented the peak of this questioning. In the aftermath of the result, the North quickly became mobilised as an emblematic space for Britain's 'left behind' regions, standing for the communities which had been incapable or unwilling to keep pace with global progressive neoliberal Britain.[21] However, while Brexit provides the most clear instance of the Northern question arising in British culture, the terms of this questioning had taken shape throughout the decade.

In a discussion of the North's artistic and cultural history, Paul Dave surmises that 'the North re-emerges, post the 2008 financial crisis, as that which marks the hollowness of the neoliberal ideology of contemporary classlessness and the breakdown of the contemporary narratives of capitalism and progress.'[22] Dave's arguments for the political necessity of attending to film and television, and his consistent engagement with the intersections between cultural forms and social knowledge and feeling, provide a key influence for how this thesis reads the North. For Dave, film and television take on a heightened political importance in the current moment of capitalism because contemporary capitalist production is, more than ever, about the colonisation of social and cultural imaginaries. The

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[19] Tom Hazeldine, *The Northern Question: A History of a Divided Country*, (London: Verso, 2020)

[20] Ibid., p. 15

[21] See: Gurminder K. Bhambra, "Brexit, Trump and 'Methodological Whiteness': on Misrecognition of Race and Class", *The British Journal of Sociology*, (2017).

[22] Paul Dave, "Knocking-off Time in the North: Images of the Working-Class and History in L.S. Lowry and Mitchell and Kenyon" in Mazierska (ed.), *Heading North: The North of England in Film and Television*, (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 42

'neoliberal ideology' that Dave references is not only a set of political beliefs about the organisation of the economic and labour base, but also a pervasive structure of social self-imagination (a 'socio-symbolic order'[23]) that, elsewhere, Mark Fisher describes via the concept of 'capitalist realism'.[24] For Fisher, the twenty-first century global hegemony of capitalism had resulted in a situation in which 'not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it.'[25] As Dave's work shows, in this context of capitalist realism the *imagination* of forms of social existence, agency and futurity which do not align with, or else unsettle, the ideals of a neoliberal economic order become primary political acts.

While Dave observes the discursive context of neoliberalism and its failings as motivating the North's cultural re-emergence, his comment that the region '*marks'* [my emphasis] the breakdown of narratives of capitalist progress is ambiguous and complex. Namely, there is an ambiguity of political function contained within the verb 'marks'. Is the contemporary visibility of a failing North an emergent element of British culture's newfound capacity to imagine the 'gaps and ruptures'[26] in discourses of neoliberal progress, or are they simply a way of obfuscating social failures behind a reified master-narrative of Northern decline?[27] This question is

[23] Paul Dave, "Bypass, Obscure Forces and Ontological Anxiety", in Mazierska and Kristensen (eds.), *Contemporary Cinema and Neoliberal Ideology*, (New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 132

[24] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There an Alternative?*, (Winchester: Zero, 2009)

[25] Ibid., p. 2

[26] Alfie Brown, 'Opening Capitalist Realism', *LSE Review of Books*, (12th April 2017), <https://blogstest.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2017/04/12/lse-rb-feature-essay-opening-capitalist-realism-by-alfie-bown/>, accessed July 10th 2020

[27] In relation to this question, it is telling that Fisher pinpoints the 'defeat of the miners' in the colliery strikes of 1984 and 1985 which took place across South Wales and the North, as 'an important moment in the development of capitalist realism'. Fisher argues that the defeat of the miners was as symbolically significant as economic. He describes how 'the miners were cast in the role of the last actors in a doomed proletarian romance'. The symbolic importance of the North – as a space of working-class unionism which was

complex, concerning many issues related to the North and its relationship to realism, and I draw attention to it here less as something to be answered and more as a signpost for the political stakes that underpin a consideration of the North as it is textually produced in film and television. Thinking, then, about how Northern place-images, such as the body, are represented and open to change is important because the North plays a still significant role in how culture negotiates these ideological contradictions of the current moment in Britain's self-representation.

<u>Aims and Methodology</u>

The intention of this thesis is not only to examine the textual construction of the Northern male body, but to explicate its wider cultural meaning as part of the narration of class, race, gender, and capitalism in contemporary Britain. This thesis statement suggests multiple overlapping critical issues and so it is useful to state directly, here, the different key aims of this work. These aims can be enumerated as such:

1) To identify the dominant formal, affective, narrative, and thematic characteristics which govern the representation of the male body within fictional depictions of the North. To establish how the on-screen body is inscribed with the dominant signifiers of the Northern place-myth while, at the same time, showing the complex and various ways in which male embodiment and Northernness are brought together;

2) To examine how representations of male bodies relate to the changing social and historical discourses which reproduce the North. This aim

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colonised by capitalist realism and neoliberal progress – suggests a politically subversive potential to the place-myth, but whether this defeat (and the narratives of Northern failure which result from it) are simply another example of the co-option of working-class resistance is ambivalent in Fisher's work. This ambivalence is questioned and pursued throughout this thesis. See Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, p. 8

entails charting the development of representations of Northern men across the region's screen history; reading these changes according to the aforementioned dominant stereotypes of Northernness (specifically, the dominant regional master narrative of post-industrial decline) while also elucidating emergent meanings shaped by historically specific social contexts;

3) To assess the Northern male body in terms of its political function, by considering its role as a realist place-image which is used to narrate the changing structures of experience that characterise post-industrial Britain. Specifically, throughout the thesis, I ask how realist representations of Northern men clarify the changing conditions of neoliberal sociality and labour, and to what extent they circumscribe the expression of these conditions within a reified image of place, and a narrative of decline. This task involves considering the male body as it relates to already established political paradigms of Northern representation, such as; the region's otherness, its dominant construction from "outside", its iconic fixing as the space of the authentic and the everyday, and its white and masculine coding.

As this summary suggests, this thesis is a study of textual forms which I understand to actively participate in the construction of social knowledge about the North and nation. As such, the primary methodology is close textual analysis, supplemented by a consideration of the industrial contexts of production of the corpus texts, the cultural history of the North of England, and the relationship of texts to wider social discourses and sociological concepts.

The centring of formal analysis in a study of social and cultural meaning may invite the kinds of suspicion which continue to circulate around textual analysis as general practice. Such suspicion relates to the

adequacy of such a method for interrogating a 'politics of representation' and accounting for the relationship between on-screen representations and their material consequences in people's lived experiences and identifications.[28] We find this view within scholarship of the North, with a major critical concern in the topic being the nature and location of, as Mazierska calls it, the 'discursive power'[29] to produce images and narratives of the North; a concern which occasionally results in readings of the region as always functioning hegemonically as pre-determined by an outside agency and a Southern perspective.[30] While it is always valuable to ground our reading of texts in an awareness of the structures of industrial and political influence which shape screen representation, this thesis nevertheless makes the case for the primary value of textual analysis for understanding the North and its political influence.

As Richard Dyer argues, a fallacy in the charge against textual analysis is the belief that the movement away from text and towards a study of production, audience reception, or wider socio-historical context, will lead to a more transparent account of the construction of meaning and the

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[28] Anamik Saha provides a useful recent summation of this suspicion, in the context of his field of interest: on-screen representations of race and racism. Saha notes a growing cynicism, over the past two decades, from scholars of race and the media, towards a practice of analysis '[h]eavily influenced by postcolonial criticism, but coinciding with the rise in postmodern thought, [in which] textual studies of race and representation and popular culture as a whole…slip into uncritical and celebratory accounts of media texts' and which, blind to the structural workings of race outside of the text, produce political evaluations based on simplistic 'binaries of positive/negative, truthful/biased, stereotypical/authentic'. Saha's work foregrounds an analysis of the economic organisation of the industries which produce screen representation to avoid analysis which simply attributes meaning according to these binaries. Anamik Saha, *Race and the Cultural Industries*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), pp. 25-26

[29] Ewa Mazierska, "Introduction: Imagining the North of England", in Mazierska (ed.) *Heading North: The North of England in Film and Television*, (Cham: Switzerland: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2017), p.3

[30] This paradigm of 'inside' and 'outside' will be discussed in more depth in the Review of Literature.

workings of social power.[31] As Dyer contends, all of these areas of study require active 'interpretation'.[32] One cannot rigorously examine any of these areas without engaging in a form of textual analysis; the distinction is not between text and real social life but between different kinds of texts. Similar cases have been made for the value of textual analysis in relation to television, refuting the polarising tendencies of much television scholarship to frame its methodology as either an analysis of televisual aesthetics and style *or* an analysis of the televisual medium as communication, media, and culture. Charlotte Brunsdon's essay 'Problems with Quality' was a seminal rejoinder to the later tendency which is a holdover from television studies' debt to the methods of cultural studies during its early institutionalisation.[33] As Brunsdon informs us, an avoidance of textual reading overlooks the role that discourses of quality play in motivating the production of certain kinds of television texts over others, thereby neglecting a crucial dimension of the reproduction of social power. More recently, James Zborowski has argued for a greater recognition of the social within the reading strategies advocated within television aesthetics. The total separation of the textual from the social is a critical fiction for Zborowski, who poses that, 'if aesthetic analysis also involves an attempt to do justice to the specific ways in which an artwork…is trying to 'speak' to us, then…we find ourselves in the realm of the social.'[34] As Zborowski shows, appeals to already-signifying social meaning are an inevitable part of the descriptive process which underpins the interpretative work of close reading. The language of textual

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[31] Richard Dyer, 'The Persistence of Textual Analysis', *Kracauer Lectures in Film and Media Theory*, (Winter 2015/16) <http://www.kracauer-lectures.de/en/winter-2015-2016/richard-dyer/>,
Accessed 15th October 2021.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Charlotte Brunsdon, 'Problems with Quality', *Screen*, 31:1, (1990)
[34] James Zborowski, "Television Aesthetics, Media and Cultural Studies and the Contested Realm of the Social." *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies*, 11:1, (2016), pp. 11-13

30ortheption intuits the social as a force which both shapes the text and is recontextualised by the specificities of narrative and form.

Thus, the methodological demand facing the textual analyst is to interpret the specificity of certain textual forms and to describe the processes through which these forms become translated into socially significant meaning, feeling, and discourse. Nevertheless, this practice of close reading needs to reflect upon the benefits of selecting film and television texts over other kinds of texts. As Dyer frames it, this is a question of the 'persistence' of film analysis.[35] Why, despite the ongoing suspicion towards this methodology, does the reading of film and television texts remain an integral part of scholarly attempts to understand the politics of representation? In the specific context of the North, textual analysis persists as a pervasive and often unremarked upon feature of sociology and cultural studies methods, where references to Northern-set film and television abound.[36] We can say that the North is often encountered and described textually.

How these textual constructions of the North structure wider forms of social knowledge is a consistent concern of this thesis, but a broad influence for my conceptualisation of this relationship is the model set out by Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature*. Rather than see texts as second-order reflections of experiences and realities already determined within social relations, Williams argues that culture actively 'mediates' access to social reality. He asserts that 'language and signification should be treated as indissoluble elements of the material social process itself, involved

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[35] Ibid.

[36] A notable example is Karl Spracklen's essay on Northernness as a 'simulacrum', which begins with a reference to *The League of Gentleman*. See: "Theorising Northernness and Northern Culture: The North of England, Northern Englishness, and Sympathetic Magic", *Journal for Cultural Research,* 20:1, (2016), pp. 5-6.

at all time in both production and reproduction' of social power.[37] For Williams, mediation also more closely conveys how the historical relationship between culture formations and social experiences are neither fixed, in a shared present, nor entirely detached.[38] Rather, culture is comprised of the 'dynamic interrelations' of past and present meanings, values, and images.[39] Williams establishes a tripartite model of 'dominant', 'residual' and 'emergent' formations to describe this relationship. Where dominant denotes the hegemonic and most clearly visible formations within a present epoch, these formations always co-exist alongside 'residual' elements of culture, which are formed in the context of past social relations, but which still operates as 'an effective element of the present' (as opposed to 'archaic' forms which hold no connotative power in the present) and shape the cultural evaluation of present social existence.[40] Similarly, 'emergent' formations are always being introduced; suggesting experiences, meanings, and values which are forming and not fully captured in dominant structures of representation.[41] As we have already begun to see, the Northern place-myth corresponds particularly visibly to this paradigm of co-existing historical formations, as it imagines a social place in which pastness looms in the present. A core component of the methodology of this thesis is to demarcate these 'dominant', 'residual' and 'emergent' cultural formations. Through textual analysis, I seek to explicate the body as a site in which

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[37] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.99

[38] In fact, Williams notes a dissatisfaction with the term 'mediation' because it still seems to retain connotations of being a second order process between reality and human consciousness. However, for my own purposes, I think the difficulty of mediation as a term might usefully be bracketed. That we cannot quite describe the precise relation between culture, social knowledge and material experience can motivate the concerns of a formal textual analysis; of the description and interpretation of the meaning and social-ness of particular forms.

[39] Ibid., p.121

[40] Ibid., p. 122

[41] Ibid.

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residual meanings, appropriated from an industrial past, and emergent feelings and values actively structure knowledge around the contemporary meaning of class, gender, race, and Northernness.

In sum, this thesis considers what we can learn about the North as a place-myth and the body as a place-image, by performing a sustained textual analysis of bodily representations. However, to provide such attention, a necessary feature of this thesis' methodology is that it pays *close* attention to a *smaller* number of film and television texts. Rather than attempt a broad survey of all Northern bodies, that discusses their representation via generic or thematic overviews, this thesis rather selects a smaller range of popular and paradigmatic case studies, which I read in intimate detail; explicating their formal, narrative, and affective meaning To understand their political functioning. This methodological approach has made demands on corpus and structure.

Corpus

The lack of sustained scholarship on the Northern male body means that a potential corpus for this study could be limited only by the extent of film and television set in the North. However, a historical survey of all the bodies represented in Northern screen fiction is not only beyond the scope of this thesis, but also not one of its aims. Rather, this thesis investigates *the* Northern male body, in the sense that it examines how certain forms of embodiment become constructed as dominant. This emphasis on the construction of dominant cultural forms, as well as the methodological limits imposed by a sustained attention to specific texts, requires certain practical parameters for my corpus. These include an emphasis on male embodiment, a consideration of fictional texts, and an attention to film and television that can be broadly characterised as realist. Although all these parameters stem

from how British film and television produces a dominant image of the North, their influence on this thesis requires some reflection.

Firstly, as Dave Russell notes, '[t]he North has generally been coded as masculine (albeit in a more complex way than might be assumed) and set against a more effeminate South.'[42] For Russell, this coding is part of the romanticised and reified imagining of the place-myth. Where the North is represented as the iconic 'land of the working-classes' in Britain, it is most often with reference to a physically tough, stoic, and traditionally labouring category of masculinity. Russell is describing the North, here, as it is constructed within the framework of national culture; even though women have played significant roles in the history of the North, particularly in various local histories and local identities, the larger regional place-myth has been dominated by images of working-class men. In limiting my concern to this dominant coding, it becomes necessary to emphasise that my concentration on the Northern *male* body is not intended to uncritically re-assert its centrality to the North. Similarly, the thesis does not ignore the ways in which normative ideals of Northernness, working-classness, and masculinity have been negotiated through figures of women or children, nor does it dismiss the unequal and circumscribed terms on which women and children are allowed to represent the North. Instead, this thesis foregrounds masculinity in order to interrogate its hegemonic structure and (as Stuart Hall describes) the 'complex field' of competing cultural forms within which the Northern male body is reproduced as 'dominant'.[43] This is a critical

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[42] Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p.38

[43] Stuart Hall is describing a Gramscian definition of hegemony – the dominance of the ruling class and their ideology - whereby the operation of dominant ideology is constantly open to change and contestation. Hegemonic ideas, values and forms dominate must be won and secured through the operations of social discourse and cultural representation. This thesis follows this notion of hegemony as produced by actively competing forms. See:

process of demystifying the common sense conflation of Northernness and masculinity, one which complements existing feminist scholarship that turn to women's histories to challenge the masculinist imagining of the working-class North.[44] Where that scholarship emphasises strategies of marginalisation for women throughout the North's cultural production, this thesis argues that masculine embodiment – as a site of regional identity – has actually always been constructed from an uneven field of competing forms and discourses. Specifically, the iconicity of labouring masculinity in the Northern place-myth is one which is both actively and anxiously maintained across the region's screen history, never wholly aligning with the emergent meanings of Northernness. The constructed nature of masculinity is particularly pertinent to the thesis' concern with the historically specific meanings of the post-2008 North, in which the bodily capital of masculinity feels in question.

The second limitation of the corpus relates to the fictional nature of my chosen film and television texts. This may seem an odd decision methodologically considering how, already, I have made claims for the importance of the Northern male body to a wider politics of representation. This is a contention which is reinforced throughout by reading textual forms in relation to social discourses, and by turning to sociological concepts to elucidate this relationship. The structures of feeling that are analysed are not contained only in fiction. It is my hope that in identifying recognisable modalities for the representation of Northern male bodies, this thesis might provide a framework for analysis that can be extended into examinations of the visual, rhetorical, and affective strategies employed in genres such as

Stuart Hall, 'Culture, Media and "The Ideological Effect"', in Morley (ed.), *Stuart Hall Essential Essays Vol. 1*: *Foundations of Cultural Studies*, (Duke University Press, 2019)
[44] As we will see in the following chapter's Literature Review, these feminist interventions are some of the few instances in which the Northern male body is named *as a construct* for narrating the North and its history.

documentary, broadcast news and reality television. Over the last decade, all these genres have supplied images of bodies which have shaped public discourses around the economic and cultural decline of the North within the onset of austerity. The ideological function of abject bodies in news coverage of Brexit and documentary programmes such as *Benefits Street* (2014) has been the interest of sociological scholarship in recent years, but these genres have often provoked reflectionist readings, wherein the fidelity of these images to a social reality is repeatedly an issue. By contrast, my attention to fiction foregrounds the essentially imaginary nature of the North, and draws attention to the issue of how such bodies provide a primarily textual and rhetorical field of meaning for the production of knowledge about the North. The question of how these bodies relate to a social reality is less important than how these bodies actively mediate social knowledge about the North.

Finally, within this select concentration on fiction, I have chosen case studies which can all be defined as realist. Specifically, all the texts covered in this thesis resemble, to some extent, the features which Paul Marris outlines in his definition of the generic trend of *Northern realism*. For Marris, Northern realism consists of some combination of these features and themes:

> [A] documentary interest in the industrial urban districts; a realism which is in tension with melodramatic devices; the incorporation of elements of demotic speech; a continuing association between Northernness and the industrial working-class; a portrayal from a vantage point that is not wholly within; and a sense that a diagnosis of the condition of the North holds key to grasping "the state of the nation". [45]

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[45] Paul Marris, 'Northern Realism: An Exhausted Tradition?', *Cineaste*, 2:4, (2001), p. 47

An important element of Marris's definition is the conventionality of the 'realism' of this tradition. The North's association with realism is not due to any privileged relationship to a social reality. Rather, as we have already seen in the scholarship of Northern landscape, this realist association is the product of a network of historical discourses related to the North's imagination of class and industry. As Mazierska argues, not only 'is there a dominant story about the North' but also a popular 'consensus that this story should be told in a particular way, namely realistically'.[46] The North typically becomes a culturally valued place, in the representation of nation, when it is characterised in terms of 'real' and 'authentic' portrayals of the working-class. The preponderance of realist texts, throughout my corpus, is therefore partly a result of this consensus around the North and realism. This is not to totally ignore Northern place-images which are not wholly within this realist mode. Although there are texts which pertain more centrally to the place-images such as the romantic wild North or the comedic North which are not discussed here, the influence of these place-images is explored when they appear in my case studies.[47]

While this selective interest in realism is motivated by the object of study it is also complementary to the structure of the thesis. Rather than

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[46] Ewa Mazierska, 'Introduction: Imagining the North of England', in Mazierska (ed.) *Heading North: The North of England in Film and Television*, (Cham: Switzerland: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2017), p.7

[47] As Peter Davidson demonstrates in his discussion of historical and cultural context situating the poetry of W.H Auden, the romantic wild North – typically associated with cultural production that represents the harsh but beautiful landscapes of Cumbria and the Lake District – is rhetorically intertwined with the history of social realist documentary, specifically in terms of shared structure of feeling around the hardship of Northern life (either in terms of its landscapes or its bleak economic circumstances) and the underlying attitude that such a hardship requires a certain kind of strong masculine subject. Even if texts set in Cumbria do not appear as case studies in this thesis, this rhetorical tradition is evident in the texts which I do analyse. See: Peter Davidson, *The Idea of North*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), pp. 83-101

organising case studies according to a pre-determined criterion, such as differences of genre, mode, or medium, the structure of the thesis has been chosen to demonstrate the persistence of certain modalities of embodiment *within* and *across* modes of representation. While the conventions of realism and melodrama that Marris attributes to Northern realism provide structures for the expression of bodily meaning and affect, I contend that bodies themselves can mediate a horizon of meanings and feelings that moves across modes.

As I turn now to the structure of the thesis, it is worth spending a moment to consider what it means to observe "modalities" of embodiment. We can think about these "modalities" in similar terms to the concept of the "type", which has been a crucial term within star studies for the task of describing how certain star texts operate across genres to signify a structured range of meanings.[48] Moreover, as explored further in the Literature Review, this concept has been extended beyond this field, with scholarship on masculinity in British cinema using 'social types' to elucidate similar relationships between text and context, cultural formations and changing social and historical conditions. Like this work on type, I wish to foreground bodies as sites of meaning in themselves, signifying coherently across distinct representational contexts and modes. However, my usage of the term 'modalities' conveys a phenomenological complexity which is different from the discreteness connoted by the type. Modalities is used to refer not only to bodies as they are materially linked to specific characters – a visual

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[48] For example, Richard Dyer's chapter on the 'Star as Type' in *Stars,* models a method of reading stars as representing certain social types across their career in ways that, while flexible to be altered according to changing genre and social context, nevertheless determines certain meaningful limits. Insofar as stars become associated with types, they signify certain social meanings and values which remain logically consistent across a range of texts. Even while my thesis is not a star study, it sees bodies as functioning analogously across texts. See: Richard Dyer, *Stars,* (BFI, 1979), pp. 47-59

and narrative support for the psychological and social condition of individuated characters – but also to affective and kinaesthetic structures which are not necessarily subjectivised; patterns of movement, force, and intensity that circulate between bodies and are thus socially significant.

Chapter Outline

The structure of the thesis is guided by the three key aims outlined in the previous section. Although all these aims underpin the project of reading the Northern male body, they are differently emphasised across the thesis' two parts. In part one of the thesis – which includes Chapter One's Review of Literature and Chapter Two's Canonical History of Northern Screen Bodies – the first two aims are foregrounded. In this part, I ask: what precedent exists for analysing cultural representations of the North of England with reference to a formation that we call the Northern male body?

These chapters explore, respectively, scholarly literature on the North and the body, and canonical texts from the history of Northern film and television, to establish a coherent description of the Northern male body (its dominant physical features, gestures, actions and worldly projects) and the horizon of meanings associated with the figure. With the Northern male body so under-theorised, Chapter One's Literature Review tries to establish a critical framework by locating this formation relative to scholarship on the North while also considering relevant literature on the body. In Chapter Two, I examine the cross-historical coherence of the male body within filmic and televisual depictions of the North. I chart the developing construction of male embodiment across key periods of the North's visibility, by looking at depictions of men within canonical texts *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1959), *The Boys from the Blackstuff* (1980), and *The Full Monty* (1997). This chapter applies textual analysis with both a diachronic and synchronic outlook, which looks to delimit a set of common representational issues

across periods, while also examining how these bodies produce knowledge within the specific aesthetic and social contexts of their period. This chapter proposes the Northern male body to be both a *timely* and *dated* historical formation, which mediates contemporary anxieties about the changing structures of labour and community through the re-inscription of residual images of strong industrial labouring masculinity.

Although attending to a selective set of canonical Northern texts can be seen as a limitation, it is worth repeating that this thesis is not intended as a comprehensive historical survey. Through this focus on the canon, Chapter Two also introduces the political concerns of the thesis. The chapter concludes by looking at a text which is often excluded from accounts of the screen North: *My Son the Fanatic* (1996). Despite critical acclaim and an accordance with the accepted periodicity of key Northern film and television, *My Son* sits uneasily outside of the canon. The chapter ends by considering whether it is the bodies it visualises, and the way it narrates working-class male identity, that makes it difficult for established historical narratives of Northern decline. This final part of the chapter signals a key aim of the thesis, and one of its most important interventions, which is to explore how film and television has helped demarcate the limits of acceptable Northern identity through its circulation of bodies.

This third aim becomes more important in the second part of the thesis, which is comprised of three case study chapters that explore different significant modalities of Northern male embodiment in the post-2008 period. Across these chapters, the question of how the body structures the imagining of working-class experience, agency and futurity in neoliberal Britain becomes key. Chapter Three examines a formation which I label "the deteriorated body", as it features in two recent films by director Ken Loach – the Newcastle-set pair *I, Daniel Blake* (2016) and *Sorry We Missed You* (2019) –

as well as the Paddy Considine directorial debut *Tyrannosaur* (2011). The chapter connects the proliferation of images of older or ailing masculinities in these films with the emerging discourse of the North as representing the nation's "left behind" spaces. I pose that images of deteriorated masculinity become anxious sites for envisioning the causes and effects of contemporary working-class marginalisation. I read the deteriorated male body as being on the threshold of reified discourses of Northern decline and realist evocations of social immiseration. The chapter explores the contradictions of form and message in all these films, to position the deteriorated body as an emergent and politically ambivalent formation.

Chapter Four considers the youthful male body across various film and television texts: *Happy Valley* (2014 -), *The Selfish Giant* (2014), *Little Boy Blue* (2017) and *Brassic* (2019 -). Where the deteriorated body references a tradition of elegiac depictions of Northern men and their feelings of redundancy, the youthful body represents a more problematic formation. This is not only a body which cannot be so easily narrated in the register of physical decline, but the history of Northern representation is also one where youthful men are often the most idealised subject. A primary issue for this chapter, then, is the ways in which bodily representations negotiate between the residual symbolic value attached to young Northern men and the contemporary structure of feeling associated with the bleak futures and wasted lives of post-industrial communities.

Finally, Chapter Five interrogates the aesthetic and political implications around the increasing visibility, in the last decade, of "racialised bodies" in constructions of the Northern working-class. Despite the multi-ethnic history of many its towns and cities, race has been a marginal topic in scholarship of the screen North, with communities of colour often being overlooked in the assumption of the Northern place-myth's whiteness. The

chapter's case studies are the BBC single drama *White Girl* (2008), and the independent feature films *Catch Me Daddy* (2014) and *God's Own Country* (2017). Although each text places emphasis on a different kind of racial identity – from the white-working-class to the Muslim extremist to the Eastern-European immigrant, respectively – they nevertheless reflect a common concern with representing multicultural encounters that occur against the backdrop of precarity. This chapter is therefore concerned with questions of how and why race has become significant to the contemporary visualisation of the North.

As this chapter outline suggests, this thesis is interested in the Northern male body both for its aesthetic complexity and for its historical and political significance. By oscillating between survey chapters and more concentrated analysis of case studies, this thesis contends that we cannot understand either of its complexity or its historicity separately. Challenging assumptions, from popular culture and scholarship, that the North's bodily-ness is a simple stereotype, this thesis seeks to demonstrate how the body provides a cultural site for negotiating the changing conditions and upheavals of working-class life in Britain.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NORTHERN MALE BODY: LITERATURE REVIEW

The first two chapters of this thesis aim to provide a legible description of this body; establish a history for its representation; and begin to consider its rhetorical function within British film and television. In Chapter Two, I turn to film and television texts to trace the development of representations of men and determine a canonical construction of Northern male embodiment. This chapter, however, attends to scholarly literature produced about the region, to construct critical framework for writing about this body. If the chapter which follows it answers the question of what the Northern male body *is* –what bodies and bodily experiences get defined as Northern – this first chapter responds to the question of what the Northern male body *does* – in terms of the meanings, values, and affects it condenses. This order of critical tasks might seem backwards, but this is necessarily so, due to the Northern male body's enigmatic nature as a cultural formation. There is little scholarship that exists on Northern male embodiment, and almost nothing that explicitly names the Northern male body. In order to accurately describe this body, we must locate it within broader scholarship on the region, on gender and embodiment, and in other fields from film and television studies. This is the first step in making the case for the Northern male body as a significant site within British culture.

The first section of this review focusses on the North, beginning with a broader survey of the key literature on the region's place-myth. This survey then leads into a more concentrated discussion of the Northern male body. I provide an overview of the scholarship on this body by bringing together what little works exists across disparate contexts within cultural studies, English literature, and film and television studies. The second section of the review attends to the body as it has been approached within

other fields, ranging from cultural studies and sociological theories of masculinity and gender to the presence of the body in other areas of film and television studies. This section contextualises the Northern male body within the wider academic 'bodily turn' that has occurred in the last thirty years. It deals with debates within fields such as masculinity studies, social realism and affect theory to substantiate the political and critical importance of performing a similar 'turn to the body' within a discussion of the screen North.

<u>The Northern Place-Myth</u>

In *Places on the Margin*, Rob Shields defines the North as a 'place-myth' and provides a theoretical framework for understanding the social and ideological importance of the North as an imagined construct, a framework which dominates the scholarship on the North which has been written subsequently. The significance of Shields's work is in its elaboration of how space can take on a communal imaginary identity, which can structure and even overwrite how we understand social realities. Shields describes how the process of 'social spatialization', through cultural representation, reformulates pre-existing social and economic divisions into imagined spatial divisions which over time become essential to how the society as a whole makes sense of its own organisation.[49] In the context of industrial modernity, Shields argues that uneven flows of capital are reformulated into a binary structure of central and 'marginal' spaces. These marginal spaces signify communities which are 'left behind in the modern race for progress' but over time this marginality becomes constructed as ontological.[50] Rigid myths and stereotypes represent the deficiencies of spaces in ways that

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[49] Rob Shields, *Places on Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*, (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 7
[50] Ibid., p. 1

obfuscate the social, economic and historical specificity of regional communities. Within a national context, 'social divisions are spatialised as geographic divisions and…places become 'labelled', much like deviant individuals'.[51]

This process of spatialization and labelling is exemplified by how the North is imagined part of Britain. As Shields asserts, the Northern place-myth condenses an:

> uneven geography, the perceptions of social anomalies, the threat of class rebellion, the debasement of living conditions, the political challenge of the rising middle-classes [which] are reflected in the language used to describe the North: which constituted a spatial discourse which privileged the centre, London, and sought to re-establish the North as not only an economic but also cultural periphery around this core.[52]

As a contested and fluid geographical region, Shields understands the North to function primarily as a means of spatialising the myriad of social divisions in Britain into a single master binary of the North-South divide. This binary is necessarily hierarchical; the myths and stereotypes which circulate around the North primarily stress the region's deficiency in relation to the norm of London and the south. Moreover, also significant in the above passage is the reformulation of a history of industrialisation and contemporaneous upheavals in class relations into a simplified structure of core and periphery. In place of a more complex analysis of the class relations between, and within, regions, national cultural discourse has instead often essentialised

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[51] Ibid., p. 11
[52] Ibid., p. 214

the North as a homogenous 'Land of the Working-Class'.[53] Phillip Dodd echoes this understanding of the process of spatialization when he terms the North's cultural image as being a 'Lowryscape', based on a fixed iconography of grim industrial landscapes.[54] Represented via a rigid class identity, the relationship between working and middle-class existence in the North is disavowed; instead the North becomes a working-class space that must be escaped from if any mobility is possible.[55] These processes are strengthened by a parallel discourse of the North, one which frames the region as being a space that is, almost, a nation unto itself.

The North and the Nation

The hierarchical division between North and South is inarguably the central feature of how scholarship has understood the region's imagined identity. Rather than being simply a geographical divide, the North-South divide has often functioned to mark the North as an othered space entirely, even as a different nation. Stephan Kohl's study of the literary accounts of tours across England demonstrates that a conceptualisation of the North as an

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[53] Stuart Laing, *Representations of Working-Class Life 1957-1964*, (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 1986), cited in Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin*, p. 208

[54] Phillip Dodd, 'Lowryscapes: Recent Writings about the North', *Critical Inquiry*, 32:20, (1990)

[55] Shields' reading of the North suggests the blurring of class as a concept. We might think of this blurring in relation to the work of political philosopher Jacques Rancière, who has written about how the concept of class as comprised of two definitions which are actually conflicting but nevertheless conflated in their common social usage. For Rancière, class is interchangeably defined to as 'a grouping of people assigned a particular status and rank according to their origins or their activity', and 'as an operator of conflict, a name for counting the uncounted.' While the later definition contains echoes of Marxist notions of class consciousness, and the possibility for a dynamic model of social history based on responding to exploitation, the former suggests the fixity of class as the essence or origin of an individual. As Shields' definition suggests, the North contains the historical trace of the former notion of class but frequently presents it in a paradigm that echoes the second. Rather than define 'class' or 'working-class' in any one singular way, this thesis considers the Northern place-myth as constantly negotiating (sometimes obfuscating) this distinction. See: Jacques Rancière, *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy*, (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 83, cited in Imogen Tyler, 'Classificatory Struggles: Class, Culture and Inequality in Neoliberal Times', *The Sociological Review*, 63, (2015), p.499

ontologically distinct national space has pervaded cultural representation since the Industrial Revolution. Framed as a 'morally inferior England',[56] the smog-filled industrial Northern landscape is consistently rendered as a hellish contrast to the image of true Englishness, the prelapsarian rural Southern countryside.[57] Echoing Shield's assertion of the symbolic centrality of the marginal space-myth to national culture, Kohl's survey of literary tours demonstrates how the North has historically functioned to demarcate the imagined boundaries of 'Englishness' by symbolically accruing the negative qualities of social life that cultural producers did not want to define as English.[58]

This politicised relationship between North and nation is one structures Dave Russell's *Looking North*. The book's central thesis is that '"national culture", in terms of both the mentalities and the institutions that form them, has always largely been constructed from within London and its immediate environs and that the "North" has therefore been defined in that culture as "other" and ultimately, as inferior'.[59] For Russell, the North is predominantly understood through Southern perspectives, 'where the conscious deployment of populist "Northern" discourses and cultural practices by elite groups have long served a central hegemonic strategy'.[60] These populist discourses have contributed to a homogenous picture of the North; one coded as working-class, industrialised, masculine and white. One important consequence of this otherness is that, at particular times of social

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[56] Stephan Kohl, 'The 'North' of England: A Paradox?', in Ehland (ed.), *Thinking Northern: Textures of Identity in the North of England*, (New York, NY: Rodopi, 2007), p.94

[57] See also Stuart Rawnsley, 'Constructing the North: Space and Sense of Place' in Kirk (ed.), *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of 'The North' and 'Northernness'*, (Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate, 2000)

[58] Stephan Kohl, 'The 'North' of England: A Paradox?', in Ehland (ed.), *Thinking Northern: Textures of Identity in the North of England*, (New York, NY: Rodopi, 2007), p.98

[59] Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 8

[60] Ibid., p. 4

crisis, the North becomes an 'ideal space for the working out of issues relating to the contemporary condition of an England and culture dominated by the South and its middle-class'.[61] For Russell, the North's potency as a space-myth has, historically, been at its most intense during moments of acute social, economic, and particularly class anxiety. From the Depression of the 1930s, through to the shifting class dynamics because of rising prosperity during the late 1950s, to the growing inequalities of the 1980s; the North has acted as a spatial metaphor which could provide the appropriate symbolic distance through which to simplify and ameliorate these larger national issues.

Russell's assertion of the hegemonic relationship between the Southern London-centred perspective and the Northern imaginary has been highly influential. In fact, there is a notable trend in recent scholarship to interpret this hegemony as being even more oppressive and pervasive than even Russell understands it to be. Karl Spracklen's theorisation of the North and Northern identity as 'simulacra' is positioned broadly in agreement with Russell's argument that the North is the discursive product primarily of institutions and perspectives external to the region. However, the thrust of his argument comes from a disagreement with how Russell maintains the potential for an active self-representation of the North and Northernness from those within the region.[62] He sees Russell as overvaluing the insider perspective and creating a false dichotomy between the 'authentic' Northern culture of the region's writers and artists and the 'inauthentic' culture of those outside.[63] In contrast, Spracklen's postmodern understanding of the North as an entirely imagined 'simulacra' necessitates that there is no

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[61] Ibid., p. 28
[62] Karl Spracklen, 'Theorising Northernness and Northern Culture: The North of England, Northern Englishness, and Sympathetic Magic', *Journal for Cultural Research,* 20:1, (2016)
[63] Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004)

inherently authentic North. Spracklen argues that 'to be northern' is to 'put on a Baudrillardian *simulacra* of the north…a palimpsest on which one writes one's own ideas about what the 'true' North is. The North has no essential existence in this framework because all we can ever know and share are the myths and narratives of the simulacrum.'[64] The distinction between inside and outside is insignificant according to Spracklen, as the North has no essential social, cultural, or geographical identity. As such, even Northerners' own self-representation is colonised by dominant ideological attitudes and discourses. Spracklen argues that Northernness (even when invoked positively from an 'inside' perspective) is a discourse that functions to designate Others that the larger national community wishes to marginalise. He states that:

> in its role as *simulacrum*, 48orthernness serves only to exclude and
> marginalise people, whether it is the social and cultural exclusion
> imposed on northerners by those with political power in London,
> or the cultural barriers imposed by those who do not fit the
> stereotype of Northernness: those not white, not working-class.[65]

Echoing Shields's assertion of the ideological importance of marginal spaces to dominant culture, Spracklen's argument suggests how the North has functioned to express larger national hegemonic attitudes of racism and classism in a way that seemingly avails the larger nation of those attitudes, because the North itself is an excluded space and identity.[66]

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[64] Karl Spracklen, 'Theorising Northernness and Northern Culture: The North of England, Northern Englishness, and Sympathetic Magic', *Journal for Cultural Research,* 20:1, (2016), p. 10

[65] Ibid., p. 11

[66] In her doctoral thesis, Het Phillips also offers another example and extension of this argument about the hegemonic and instrumentalising relationship between North and nation. Following Russell's engagement with Edward Said, Phillips coins the term 'Northientalism' to describe the classist and racist aesthetics which surround the representation of the Northern male in popular culture. See, Het Phillips, 'Cultural

The analysis undertaken by this thesis is guided by the ideological reading of the North running from Shields through Russell and into Spracklen's recent work. This ideological critique of the North as a symbolic and imagined space that is culturally instrumentalised to express covertly national attitudes, anxieties and agendas is vitally important to my own reading of the on-screen Northern male body. However, where Spracklen tends towards a reading of the North and Northernness as symbolically compromised, my own reading is not quite so definitive. For Spracklen, the range of meanings expressed by the Northern place-myth seems to always support hegemonic notions of identity; the ideological value of the space-myth is entirely used up by hegemonic discourses. While acknowledging that the North is often defined by dominant classist, racist, and sexist meaning, this thesis, in its focus on the body – with its potentially excessive, affectively non-deterministic qualities – intends to ask whether the imagined North always does what dominant national ideology wants it to do? To begin thinking about this question, however, we need to consider the formation of the Northern male body specifically, and pay sustained attention to its dominant rhetorical and ideological structures. Might the body have untapped potential for reconsidering wider narratives of the North and nation?

The Northern (Male) Body

In his overview of Northern stereotypes, Dave Russell asserts that:

> The North has generally been coded as masculine (albeit in a more complex way than might be assumed) and set against a more effeminate South. The region is often perceived as, and in reality

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Representations of the Moors Murderers and Yorkshire Ripper Cases', (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 2016)

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has been, a site of much hard, demanding physical labour with one of its emblematic occupations, coal-mining, exclusively male from the 1840s.[67]

There are two important observations to highlight in this statement, as they are representative of the ways in which the Northern body appears throughout scholarship and thus act as the dominant themes for this survey. The first, is thematic, and the most straightforward: the Northern body is stereotyped as male and working-class.[68] As Russell elaborates, this coding of the North as masculine is not just abstract, but is iconically attached, in 'public perception', to physical characteristics associated with 'male work' and seen as 'an extension of th[e] experience of "daily graft"' found in manual labour.[69] The second observation is methodological and, although less emphasised by Russell, is crucial to understanding how this embodiment has been constructed. This is the parenthetical comment that a masculine coding is produced in a 'more complex' way than is assumed. Russell does not state who is assuming but he might well be describing scholarship on the North.[70] Although notions of embodiment reappear throughout the history of writing on the region, there is little analysis of the body, with what has been written appearing relatively recently. The critical potential of this contemporary scholarship will be discussed at the end of the section, but it is first necessary to provide a short account of the dominant themes and tendencies that define the more taken-for-granted history of the

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[67] Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 38-39

[68] For other cultural theorists who repeat this notion of the North's masculine coding, see: John Kirk, *Class Culture and Social Change: On the Trail of the Working-Class*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.18. Philip Dodd, 'Lowryscapes: Recent Writings about the "North"', *Critical Quarterly*, 32:2, (1990), pp. 21-25.

[69] Ibid., p.39

[70] It is telling that, even as Russell remarks upon the complexity of the North's representation as gendered and embodied, he himself only devotes a few sentences to this cultural process.

Northern male body. As we examine these themes it becomes apparent how the gendered coding of the North is often shaped by the apparent simplicity and obviousness of Northern bodies.

Thus, the first theme to note is that the North and Northernness are particularly bodily categories of place and identity. However, recognition of this bodily-ness ranges from overt to seemingly unconscious. Katherine Cockin draws direct attention to the importance of the body to the Northern imaginary in her survey of the travel writing that comprises the literary North. For Cockin, the body plays an important rhetorical role within the divide between North and South. She observes a 'strategic identification of the North with the strange and primitive [which] often implies that it is culturally bereft in order to preserve for the South not simply cultural prestige…but indeed the natural possession of civilization and humanity as a matter of evolutionary fact'.[71] As historians like Helen Jewell argue, this characterisation of the wild North has existed for centuries in British culture but intensified after the region's heavy industrialisation.[72] Similarly, for Cockin, literary journeys comprehend the difference of the industrial North through bodies as well as landscapes. Reading Orwell's formative description of the miners in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, she notes that:

> Orwell referred to the specialization and physical sacrifice of the miners on which we all depend. A complementarity is proposed whereby the northern body keeps alive the southern brain.[73]

Cockin's reading of Orwell is one of the few instances in scholarship in which relationship between Northern industry and the body is explicitly

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[71] Katherine Cockin, 'Introducing the Literary North', In Cockin (ed.) *The Literary North,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 13
[72] Helen Jewell, *The North-South Divide*: *The Origins of Northern Consciousness in England,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994)
[73] Katherine Cockin, 'Introducing the Literary North', p. 15

addressed so that its involvement in wider structures of social and cultural power can be understood. However, more often, the bodily characterisation of the North is only assumed within descriptions of the region's particularly sensuous nature. Stuart Rawnsley understands this association as grounded in the disorientating transformations of industrialisation represented by Northern towns which he describes as providing 'a sensuous geography of exclusion: where sight, sound, smell and touch were part of the new urban topology'.[74] Similarly, Susanne Schmid notes how sense was involved in the development of the North-South divide: 'the new turn to a benevolent, rejuvenating nature…as opposed to the dirty, corrupt, and unjust industrial city was a reaction to modernity.'[75] Across these different constructions of Northern embodiment, the same basic reifying structures are noted. However, what is interesting is rarity with which the body and sense are brought together in scholarship on the North. Where Cockin's reading relies on the body as object, Rawnsley's and Schmid's construct a sensuous subject. A major point of contention within my thesis regards the need to consider the sensuous body and the objectivity of the body as simultaneous elements in the Northern male body's construction. Paying attention to both elements of this dichotomy might reveal an unappreciated level of complexity in the North's construction and its processes of reification.

Until recently, the primary challenge against reifying constructions of Northern masculinity has come from feminist re-readings of canonical Northern texts, both literary and scholarly. These re-readings emphasise the exclusion of women from idealised representations of authentic working-

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[74] Stuart Rawnsley, 'Constructing 'The North': Space and a Sense of Place', in Neville Kirk (ed.) *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of 'The North' and 'Northernness'*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p.6

[75] Susanne Schmid, 'Between L.S. Lowry and Coronation Street: Salford Cultural Identities', in Ehland (ed.), Thinking Northern: Textures of Identity in the North of England, (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2007), p. 355

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class bodies. Carolyn Steedman begins her critical autobiography of her childhood as a girl growing up Lancashire, *Landscape for a Good Woman,* by asserting that the formative 'class analysis' represented by *Uses of Literacy* 'finds no place in the working-class iconography of motherhood' for women who's emotional life was not pre-determined by the matriarchal duty that Hoggart prescribes.[76] Steedman interprets Hoggart's fixation on the concrete materiality of working-class life, emblematised by the immediate recognisability of a Northern man's body, as evidence of the 'attribution of sameness' by the scholarship boy who longs for a past authentic culture.[77] In this sense, the exclusion of women is an exclusion of a set of experiences that might disrupt the homogeneity that Hoggart needs to authenticate his memories. Beatrix Campbell performs a similar revision in relation to George Orwell's idealised representation of the Northern miners in her book *The Road to Wigan Pier Revisited*. Campbell notes how Orwell's use of the miner's body as a metaphor for the agency of the whole British working-class depends on an ignorance of the presence of 'pit brow "lasses"' within the Northern collieries of the early twentieth century.[78] Like Steedman, Campbell reads this exclusion as expressive of an othering and instrumentalising gaze from the male writer. Where Hoggart takes the male body as a concrete fact to stabilise his own past, Campbell understands Orwell's fascination with the mining body as a fetishistic fixing that constructs a 'symmetry between men's work and masculinity'.[79] The obviousness of the Northern male body – as visibly exemplary of the values of working-class masculinity – is necessary for Orwell to authenticate his

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[76] Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*: *A Story of Two Lives*, (London: Virago, 1986), p. 6
[77] Ibid., p. 11
[78] Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited: Poverty and Politics in the Eighties*, (London: Virago, 1984), p. 80
[79] Ibid., p.81

knowledge of this otherwise distant classed world. Taken together, Steedman and Campbell's work is a feminist corrective which not only points to women's exclusions but suggests how such a re-reading can also disturb the othering classed gaze that often lies in the romanticism of male bodies. As my thesis argues though, a consideration of the historical multiplicity of masculinity is another route into disturbing the ideological and rhetorical structures that underlie the Northern male body's hegemonic construction.

The dichotomy between reified constructions of a masculine working-class body and a feminist corrective to such constructions is the dominant scholarly paradigm for how the Northern male body as a concept has been scrutinised throughout the twentieth century. However, recently, there have been a burgeoning interest shown in more complex formations of embodiment. Most pertinently, for this thesis, recent work in film and television studies has demonstrated the potential for using textual analysis as a method by which to deconstruct dominant narratives of Northern embodiment. This work approaches the North through different paradigms of identification – classed, gendered, and in reference to the dominant place-myth – but its attention to the specificity of text draws out several tensions between, on the one hand, material and generic forms, and, on the other, discourses and narratives about the region.

Het Phillips's work on the gothic North and gender, through her discussion of criminal narratives, is interested in how generic structures utilise images of the North as well as how they complicate the discursive certainty of those structures. In her thesis on the 'Cultural Representations of the Moors Murderers', she defines the Northern male body in relation to a wider concept of 'Northientalism', arguing that 'Northientalist discourses also [present] the Northern subject as just their body – their inherently

classed and gendered body, inscribed with 'Northern-ness''.[80] Phillips
describes this body's ideological function, in which:

> [the] totalising touristic gaze objectifies in the most literal sense:
> rendering the gazed-upon an object of derision and/or an object of
> desire. Both humour and lust trap their object in an externally-
> defined, cumbersome, unavoidable body, always in the frame and
> always the first thing noticed; a position reserved for the abject,
> for those society mocks and/or fetishizes: those defined by a
> physical use. When one is visible only as a body, one is invisible
> as a person; placed always on display, but only from certain
> angles.[81]

From here, Phillips explores how these abject qualities of the Northern male
body become imbricated with the generic tropes of true crime literature and
film to similarly display the body. This is a generic focus which becomes
interestingly developed in subsequent essay from Phillips regarding Maxine
Peake's particularly Northern stardom. Here, the association of
Northernness with body-liness and masculinity are rendered excessive by
Peake's embodied performance. Her performance of particular abject
criminal roles that are also definably Northern – notably Myra Hindley – is
read by Phillips as part of a complex expression of 'anxieties about
appropriate gender behaviour that haunt both the Gothic and discourses of
fear regarding working-class adult/child relationships.'[82] Phillips brings
together textual analysis, based in genre, with a reading of wider cultural

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[80] Het Phillips, 'Cultural Representations of the Moors Murderers and Yorkshire Ripper
Cases', (PH.D. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2016), p. 79
[81] Ibid., p. 81
[82] Het Phillips, 'A Woman Like That Is Not a Woman, Quite. I Have Been Her Kind': Maxine
Peake and the Gothic Excess of Northern Femininity' in Forrest and Johnson (eds*.), Social
Class and Television Drama in Contemporary Britain*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p.
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discourse in order to suggest the tensions that appear when the very material imaginary of the North clashes with the culturally embedded tropes of wider film and television drama. Her work evidences the potential to deal with the inscription of dominant discourses and its messy textual elaboration at one and the same time. Although the work under discussion in this thesis is primarily social realism, we will see that this too has its own thick set of meanings. By naming the Northern male body, Phillips's work provides an important antecedent to my thesis. However, if Phillips engages with the ideological consequences of thisbody's essentialism, her Northientalist framework risks reproducing the same essentialising structures that she herself critiques. Even though her scholarship addresses different iterations and contexts of Northern male images – from the 'thin' and 'sallow' body of Hoggart's post-war to the 'untamed' masculinity of the Yorkshire sportsman – Phillips tends to emphasise the same basic ideological function in operation: the essentialising of classed difference through the fixing of such difference onto a marked body via an unmarked gaze.[83] Certainly, this process of essentialising is important, but whether it determines the scope of the meaning of Northernness remains to be seen. However, to understand the possibility for a wider range of meaning, it is now important to broaden our concerns beyond just the "Northern" body.

The Body

By arguing that we need to re-consider the importance of the body to the construction of a Northern place-myth, this thesis can be aligned with the wider 'turn to the body' within the humanities. This bodily turn has been a dominant theoretical investment across a range of fields over the past three

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[83] Ibid, pp. 38-80

decades, extending beyond studies of media representation. As Chris Shilling argues in the introduction to *The Body and Social Theory*:

> From being a subject of marginal academic interest, the intellectual significance of the body is now such that no study can lay claim to being comprehensive unless it takes at least some account of the embodied preconditions of agency and the physical effects of social structures.[84]

The focus of this section of the review is on some of the fields in sociology and film studies that have taken account of the body. This is not a complete survey of these disciplines' 'turn[s] to the body', but rather a more mercenary engagement with relevant themes to begin to conceptualise the Northern body, specifically.

As Shilling's preliminary observation about the field suggests, an important critical theme which pervades, and often troubles, theorisation of the body is the relationship between the body as a materially generative subject and the body as object of social discourse. The former approach can be associated with phenomenological approaches which give primacy to the experiential elements of the body as the ground of social meaning. The latter camp is more methodologically indebted to Focualdian analysis of the body as an object of governmentality which exists primarily as a surface to be inscribed with discursive forms of power. As Shilling puts it, the result of this critical binary is that the body's multi-dimensional significance has tended to 'recede and slide from view' across cultural studies.[85] As we will see, the tendency to lose sight of the relationship between the experiential and the social still characterises a lot of the work within

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[84] Chris Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory*, (London: SAGE, 2012), p.1
[85] Ibid., p. 6

film and television studies which invokes the body. By contrast, the political impulse of this thesis relies on a constant attention to how the relation between affective elements of the audio-visual text and social discourses of region and gender produces the Northern male body as a site of ideological contestation.

Masculinity and the Male Body

In foregrounding the male body as an object of analysis, a principle aim of this thesis is to demystify the complex but (as Dave Russell's passing remark suggests) taken-for-granted processes by which the North is dominantly constructed as masculine in popular culture. In this sense, my work is theoretically indebted to approaches within cultural studies and sociology which have, over the past forty years, performed similar analyses of masculinity more generally. By briefly surveying this field of scholarship, this section of the chapter will more thoroughly explicate the discursive and material relations between masculinity and the male body, which will, in turn, come to underpin the textual analysis of the Northern male body in subsequent chapters.

Within the humanities, the most coherent field of study into masculinity is joined under the label of critical studies of men and masculinity. This is a field which developed from the feminist deconstruction of gender categories, and which also grew to encompass queer accounts of the social performativity of all gender identity. A grounding influence of these approaches is evident in the labelling of the field itself, which makes a critical distinction between 'men' and 'masculinity'. Collectively, this work partakes in a theoretical separation of the biologically sexed body and masculinity itself, which is understood to describe a larger set of social discourses or myths related to learned and

performed behaviours.[86] This separation of gender expression from the body is, first and foremost, necessary to understand masculinity as it is socially meaningful. As Raewyn Connell argues in *Masculinities* (a text to which I will shortly return), if we were to treat masculinity and femininity as biologically indistinguishable from sexed bodies, 'we would not need the terms 'masculine ' and 'feminine' at all... 'masculine ' and 'feminine' point beyond categorical sex difference to the ways men differ among themselves, and women differ among themselves, in matters of gender.'[87] Paying attention to masculinity as it functions discursively, as a mechanism of power and social capital in patriarchal societies, offers one the language for describing its meanings and values to men and women. This theoretical separation of masculine performance from the body has been shown as politically crucial in queer contributions to the study of masculinity. Jack Halberstam's *Female Masculinity* offers an account of how masculine gender identity has been performed by women and transmen across history. Rather than 'reduce down [masculinity] to the male body and its effects', Halberstam's queer methodology contends that alternative accounts of masculinity's social meaning, and its emotional and political significance, become 'legible when it leaves the white male middle-class body'.[88] Halberstam's work traces masculinity as its expression underpins various queer subject positions – from butch lesbians to drag kings – throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, and its methodology treats cultural representation itself – including cinema – as actively producing gender identity. Although *Female Masculinity's* queer methodology and corpus is far from my own, in its

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[86] For collected work on the field of critical studies of men and masculinities, see: Jeff Hearn and DHJ Morgan (eds.), Men, Masculinities and Social Theory (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990). For a more contemporary overview of the field, see: Brendan Gough, *Contemporary Masculinities: Embodiment, Emotion and Wellbeing*, (Palgrave Macmillan: Cham; Switzerland, 2018)

[87] Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, (Polity Press: Cambridge, 2005), p. 69

[88] Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, (Duke University Press: Durham,1998), pp. 1-2

analysis of the hegemonic masculinity of the Northern male body, Halberstam's treatment of cultural representation provides a guide for how this thesis considers film and television as partaking in the formation of boundaries of gender identity.

As well as distinguishing masculine identity from the male body, many scholars also seek to disrupt the terminology of 'masculinity' as a singular coherent concept. While some scholars outright reject the potentially homogenising term 'masculinity', Anderson and McGrath offer that other scholars use it 'to refer to a larger set of masculinities' which bear certain continuities and resemblances.[89] Here, it is important to stress that my own usage of *the* Northern male body does not assume a single coherent expression of gender, within the framework of regional identity, but rather gestures to a structure of discourses in which certain constructions of gender are dominant. This is an understanding of gender's discursive function which is influenced by the most seminal concept within the critical studies of men and masculinities: Connell's theorisation of hegemonic masculinity.

Typifying the influence of feminist reading strategies in sociological studies of men, Connell's work analyses masculine identities as they perform a hegemonic political function in Western patriarchal societies. For Connell, multiple masculinities exist in any given historical moment and within any given social and national context, and these masculinities are always open to change in their expression.[90] However, masculine identities are not horizontally co-existent, and thus cannot be neutrally described in the form of a typology of different characteristics. Rather, Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity proposes a hierarchical structure of relations between the different masculinities existing in a social order. Within this

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[89] Eric Anderson and Rory Magrath, *Men and Masculinities*, (Milton: Routledge, 2019), p.2
[90] Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, (Polity Press: Cambridge, 2005).

hierarchy, hegemonic masculinity describes the 'most culturally honoured way of being a man', a valorisation of certain practices of masculinity which 'require[s] all other men to position themselves in relation to it' and which 'ideologically legitimate[s] the global subordination of women to men'.[91] As this definition suggests, the hegemony of masculinity is two-fold: it is hegemonic within the hierarchy of masculinity and, in the Gramscian sense, it maintains a wider political hegemony towards a patriarchal domination of women. In his re-reading of Connell's concepts, Demetrakis Demetriou refers to these elements as 'internal hegemony' and 'external hegemony'.[92] These terms capture how certain practices of masculinity become internally valorised in relation to what Connell understands as 'subordinate' and 'marginalised' masculinities.[93] Externally, hegemonic masculinity defines the representation of ideal masculinity not because it carries an innate value, but because it embodies a configuration of social practice which is best suited for the needs of patriarchal society.

Furthermore, in conceptualising masculinity in relation to Gramsci's concept of hegemony, Connell provides a framework for understanding how and why normative expressions of masculinity change over time. Hegemonic masculinity is always in the process of change, and always negotiated in relation to potential contradictions of meaning and value offered by subordinate and marginalised masculinities. Connell highlights the prevalence of 'crisis tendencies' within cultural discourses – a theme which, as I will shortly cover, is discussed consistently in film and television

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[91] Raewyn Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept', *Gender & Society*, 19:6, (2005), p. 832

[92] Demetrakis Z Demetriou, 'Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique', *Theory and Society*, 30:3, (2001), p. 341

[93] For Connell, an example of subordinate masculinity might be working-class labouring masculinity, which is close but too excessive to be the ideal masculinity. Meanwhile, Connell suggests that performances of homosexual masculinity are more often 'marginalised', and culturally excluded from the most valorised hegemonic masculinities.

studies approaches to masculinity – in which narratives of masculinity in crisis function to re-negotiate contradictions between emergent practices of masculinity and the dominant social order.[94] For Connell, these crisis tendencies may genuinely 'disrupt' patriarchy, but more often they may discursively function to recuperate and 'restore dominant masculinity' by appropriating new ways of expressing its value.[95] The question of what changes in the expression of masculinity mean ideologically is a profound one for the field. While Connell's model of hegemonic masculinity remains influential, recent sociological work has sought to nuance his understanding of historical change to fit more contemporary forms of male experience and sociality arising in the neoliberal service economies of the West. Uniting this recent scholarship is a call to analyse more ostensibly positive performances of masculinity amongst young men and within intersectional frameworks, but the extent to which these expressions represent a change in the political function of masculinity is a point of debate.[96]

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[94] Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, (Polity Press: Cambridge, 2005), p. 84

[95] Ibid.

[96] Eric Anderson's 'Inclusive Masculinity Theory' outright challenges Connell's model of hegemonic gender. Anderson's work focuses on the determining influence of changing attitudes to sexuality in the West and draws causal relations between a decreasing 'homohysteria' in social and institutional contexts and 'newer performances of masculinity…founded upon emotional openness, increased peer tactility, softening gender codes, and close friendship based on emotional disclosure.' (Eric Anderson and Mark McCormack, 'Inclusive Masculinity Theory: Overview, Reflection and Refinement', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 27:5, (2018), p. 2). Here, softer bodily practices disrupt not just internal hegemony but also the hegemonic common-sense of male dominance. Other theories of contemporary masculinity treat the intersectional transformations of male identity less as a means by which patriarchy is challenged and more as a mechanism for eliding and therefore maintaining patriarchal power. The recent theorisation of 'hybrid' masculinity asserts that the transforming style of the performance of contemporary masculine identity does little to change the political substance of its social functioning. See: Eric Anderson, *Inclusive Masculinity: The Changing Nature of Masculinities,* (Routledge: New York, 2009). Tristan Bridges and CJ Pascoe, 'Hybrid Masculinities: New Directions in the Sociology of Men and Masculinities', *Sociology Compass*, 8:3, (2014). Demetrakis Z Demetriou, 'Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique', *Theory and Society*, 30:3, (2001).

These questions of historical and representational change are also profoundly important for the present thesis. How British culture negotiates the waning economic relevance of harder models of masculinity, associated with industrialisation and its attentive gendered roles such as the male breadwinner, is a question which pervades the analysis performed in this thesis. As my introduction makes clear, to pay attention to the Northern male body is to consider a site of cultural representation which is inscribed with intersectional meaning, and which operates as part of the construction of hegemonic knowledge about contemporary working-class identity and the gendering of its meanings, practices, and values. Indeed, a guiding contention which methodologically motivates the textual analysis of subsequent chapters is that it is precisely because the male body can be theoretically distinguished from masculinity that it operates as a site where the changing meanings of masculinity are worked through, often reaffirmed but also potentially subverted.

While much scholarship in the study of men and masculinities is joined by the contention that masculinity is ideologically distinct from the biological male body, this is not to say that the body is merely a passive object of discursive inscription. As Connell argues, there is an 'irreducible bodily dimension' to masculinity which cannot be overlooked.[97] In *Men and Masculinities*, Stephen Whitehead offers a layered reading of the male body's relationship to masculinity's discursive construction. On one level, Whitehead reads the male body's primary social function as being its reification of the gendered power and hierarchies discursively structured within hegemonic masculinity. He argues that 'in appearing whole and complete, the body does emit a powerful semiotic presence in the social

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[97] Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, (Polity Press: Cambridge, 2005), p. 51

world.'[98] The body is both a material signifier of maleness and, in patriarchal societies, one which is taught from an early age to enact postures, comportment and actions which prove its physical capacity, strength, and dominance above feminised bodies. Thus, the male body provides 'an ontological purchase' for the myths of hegemonic masculinities, inscribing them into physical action and giving the illusion of a natural gender identity.[99] Furthermore, the material actuality of the body provides a semiotic ground for organising not only a subject's gender identity but also various regimes of social power. Although masculinity is always intersectional in meaning and always socially and historically specific in its value, Whitehead notes that 'there seems to have been no time or place where body evaluation and classification has not served to reinforce or write not only the masculine-feminine binary, but also racialist…sexualist…and nationalist distinctions'.[100] For Whitehead, the body materially reifies these distinctions in its occupation of space and time. Notions of appropriately private and public, and inside and outside, are written through the body's physical capacities.

However, while the feeling of bodily presence provides an 'ontological purchase' for discourses of hegemonic masculinity, it also contributes to conditions of physical contradiction. This is because, as Connell frames it, gender is 'onto-formative' rather than simply ontological. By 'onto-formative', Connell means that gendered performances interact with the body, and take their logic from the body, but they are not wholly circumscribed by the actual biology of the body.[101] Social discourses supply myths of physical capacity that are excessive and which many men

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[98] Stephen Whitehead, *Men and Masculinities,* (Routledge; London: New York, 2006), p. 186
[99] Ibid., p. 194
[100] Ibid., p. 184
[101] Raewyn Connell, Masculinities, (Polity Press: Cambridge, 2005), p. 65

inevitably find contradictory to their own bodily experiences. In Connell's and Whitehead's work, disability and age, respectively, provide examples where the material reality of bodies – as they change with time and circumstance – results in a disruption of the 'seamless, constant, symbiotic relationship between…bodies and dominant discourses of masculinity'.[102] Recent work on working-class masculinity in Britain's neoliberal service economy has also seized on the experientially disorientating nature of wider socio-historical shifts away from the nature of working-class labour as physically demanding work. Steven Roberts's sociological study of men in retail employment shows how the loss of physical legitimation and symbolic capital gained through manual labour leaves young men having to consciously negotiate new forms of value to retain a feeling of masculinity outside of the traditional gendered markers of labour.[103] The response to the seamless breakdown of male bodily experience and normative discourses of gender is shown in Roberts's study to be disorientating and requiring active discursive work on the part of men. Chapter Four will explore the problem of representation for young working-class men in greater detail. I raise it here to foreground how the male body acts as a significant site in society and culture for the working through of historical change, precisely because the physical experiences associated with gender have the potential to onto-formatively undermine its social performance. It is worth considering these broader intersectional questions further by surveying how masculinity has been written about in film and television studies.

Masculinity in Film and Television Studies

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[102] Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, (Polity Press: Cambridge, 2005), p. 65

[103] Steven Roberts,. "Boys will be Boys…Won't They?: Change and Continuities in Contemporary Young Working-Class Masculinities.' *Sociology*, 47:4, (2013)

Despite being a topic of considerable interest since the 1990s, masculinity has remained a contested, and troubling, issue of approach for film and television scholars. In their introduction to the 2004 edited collection *The Trouble with Men*, Powrie, Davies and Babington frame this contestation within the methodological context of the field's emergence. As Powrie et al. observe:

> The empirical detail [of masculinity studies within sociology] was often far removed from the more abstract theorising of Film Studies, and seemingly did not have much to offer it…in this *longue durée* approach, the detailed specificities of textual work in Film Studies would have been overshadowed by global historical shifts extending well beyond the short history of film.[104]

This tension between historical and more abstract textual readings of male embodiment remains particularly pertinent to debates within British film and television. An enduring critique is that analysis of British masculinity tends to over-emphasise the socio-historical as it locates the meaningfulness of certain bodies.[105] These arguments will be considered in this section of the literature review. The focus, here, is on accounts of masculinity within a specifically British screen context. Although my intention to place the Northern male body within a wider perspective can lead to considerations of other national contexts – in which comparable images of masculinity have been produced within broadly similar social and economic histories – scholarship of British masculinity both provides a representative example of debates around

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[104] Phil Powrie, Ann Davies and Bruce Babington, 'Introduction: Turning the Male Inside Out', in P. Powrie, A. Davies and B. Babington (eds.), *The Trouble with Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema*, (London: Wallflower, 2004), p. 2
[105] See, for example, Sarah Godfrey, 'Nowhere Men: Representations of Masculinity in Nineties British Cinema', PhD Thesis, (East Anglia: University of East Anglia, 2010),

the on-screen male body and intensifies questions of the relationship between social histories and representational figures, which is an overarching concern of this thesis.[106] In attempting to contextualise the Northern male body's significance as a historical figure this survey is primarily concerned with how scholarship on masculinity conceptualises the relationship between male bodies and a construction of a national history.

The most comprehensive study of this relationship is Andrew Spicer's *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in British Popular Cinema*. Spicer's project is conceived as a departure from the formalist-ideological analysis associated with the theoretical paradigms of psychoanalysis and Althusserian Marxism, which underpinned the early analysis of the male body found in the journal *Screen*.[107] Spicer contends that the core problem of this methodology is its 'disregard for history' in its search for the essential psychoanalytic structures which pre-determine the viewer's relation to the male body within the text. He argues that this analytical method 'cannot account for causation and change' or 'why particular forms occur at certain moments and then decline'.[108] *Typical Men* provides an extensive account of the changing

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[106] For more general surveys and studies of screen masculinity, particularly those that take a more gender studies approach, see: Peter Lehman, *Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993). Peter Lehman (ed.), *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture*, (New York; London: Routledge, 2001). Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994). Constance Penley and Sharon Willis (eds.), *Male Trouble,* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

[107] See: Steve Neale, 'Masculinity and Spectacle', *Screen*, 24:6, 1983. Pam Cook, 'Masculinity in Crisis?', *Screen*, 23: 3-4, 1982

[108] This methodological intervention is foregrounded in Spicer's PH. D thesis which was subsequently adapted and published as *Typical Men.* Although Spicer does not explicitly signal his departure from this scholarship in *Typical Men*, it is nevertheless still clearly guides his approach to analysing masculine types as cross-historical cultural phenomena. See: Andrew Spicer, The Representation of Masculinity in British Feature Films, 1943-1960', (PH. D Thesis, University of Westminster, 1998), p. 1

images of masculinity across the post-war history of British cinema. Spicer conceives of this history as one of various and 'significant cultural male types', which he elaborates:

> As changing and competing forms, types allow us to understand gender in Foucauldian terms, as a cultural 'performance', which does not reflect 'reality' but is a discursive construction, the product of variable and historically specific sets of relations within contexts and with a complex relationship to social change.[109]

In grounding his reading of male representations in theories of gender as 'performance' – here, in reference to Foucault but elsewhere associated with Judith Butler's work – Spicer situates his work within a wider theoretical move away from the monolithic notion of 'masculinity' and towards 'masculinities' as various discourses which each relate to, but also depart from, hegemonic constructions of gender.

Moreover, this framing of masculine types as discursive forms which are comprised of variable meanings is key not only to how Spicer conceives of the production and/or disruption of gendered hegemony but also to these images' ambivalent relationship to a hegemonic construction of Britain and its history in the twentieth century. Spicer understands the on-screen male body as part of how British culture negotiates social change. By both analysing texts closely, in relation to their specific social contexts, and charting wider continuities, Spicer's methodology demonstrates the *processes* by which certain forms of masculinity were constructed and reconstructed to appeal to a changing sense of what British nationality meant. As his

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[109] Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema*, (London: IB Tauris, 2001), p. 2

survey shows, masculine types emerge as others fall out favour, and notions of what it means to be a British man are constantly worked through by film and television texts. Frequently *Typical Men* elucidates how the legibility of types, in terms of class or social milieu, is constructed in negotiation with residual dramatic forms. For instance, Spicer argues that the 'rebel' angry young men figures of the working-class cinema of the British new wave re-work the tonal and emotional terrain of the 'Byronic' hero figure of the Gainsborough melodramas with its seemingly opposite 'sexy Gothic aristocrat' protagonists.[110] Even though Spicer's cross-historical analysis is not repeated in this thesis, *Typical Men* nevertheless demonstrates the need to consider not only the continuities of a stereotypical Northern masculinity, but also how Northernness is overlaid with generic meaning in ways that infer their own historicity.

Where Spicer provides a broad perspective on the screen history of British men, most scholarship on masculinity is more bounded in scope, considering either single types, cycles of films, or thematic discourses. By far one of the most dominant discourses that film and television studies attends to is the representation of "masculinity in crisis". Although, as masculinity studies repeatedly asserts, men have been represented as being in crisis – of different kinds but of the same intensity – throughout the twentieth century, recent scholarship of masculinity has shown how crisis has intensified as the dominant discourse by which British masculinities are represented in the post-industrial context. This is a discourse which is particularly located in representations of working-class masculinity. In a series of essays, John Hill demarcates the different ways in which contemporary crises might

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[110] Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men*, p.148

be distinguished from previous moments of masculine representation, both in terms of the crises represented and in the ideological functioning of this discourse. In 'Failure and Utopianism', he draws a distinction between contemporary crisis and the post-war crises of masculinity associated with the working-class angry young men. He argues that the earlier period of films were marked by specifically class-based concerns, influenced by a New Left anxiety towards the importation of American mass culture and the 'embourgeoisement' of working-class life at a moment of post-war prosperity.[111] Hill notes that no such anxieties pervade contemporary iterations of these narratives, found most prominently in the popular Northern comedy-dramas of the 1990s. Rather he argues that by focussing on the working-class characters as a male group, 'the idea of working-class community is mobilised less in the service of class politics than as a metaphor for the state of the nation'.[112] Similarly, in his essay 'A Working-Class Hero is Something to Be: Changing Representations of Class and Masculinity in British Cinema', Hill notes that these films conflate older forms of working-class solidarity with outmoded and unreconstructed forms of patriarchal masculine identity.[113] Within the context of a British society that is guided by the cultural and political imperatives of neoliberalism, contemporary crisis of masculinity narratives operate to efface and undermine working-class identity in order to promote a new national subject who does not need class.

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[111] John Hill, 'Failure and Utopianism: Representations of the Working Class in British Cinema of the 1990s', in Robert Murphy (ed.), *British Cinema of the 90s.*, (London: BFI, 2000), p. 178

[112] Ibid., p. 180

[113] John Hill, '"A Working-Class Hero Is Something to Be?" Changing Representations of Class and Masculinity in British Cinema', in P. Powrie, A. Davies and B. Babington (eds.), *The Trouble with Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema*, (London: Wallflower, 2004)

Feminist scholarship on this cycle of films notes a broadly similar tendency, but, importantly, also emphasises how this reformulation of classed identity as gendered identity is also predicated on what Claire Monk refers to as 'masculinist reaction'.[114] Monk's work on what she terms the 'underclass' cinema of the late 1990s expands Hill's observation that 'crisis of masculinity' narratives operate to undermine class identifications, by situating these films in relation to New Labour's policies to promote 'Cool Britannia' and an attending emergence of a contemporary lad culture in which 'sexism and misogyny' gained an ironic 'acceptability'.[115] Admittedly, feminist scholarship is not unanimous in its critique of the apolitical masculism of the neoliberal 'crisis' narratives. As I will discuss further in my own analysis, work by Cora Kaplan on the figure of the 'working-class hero' considers how the generic structures of popular entertainment function in these films to foster an emotional engagement with male characters that highlights the injustices of post-industrialism and its effects on the working-class.[116] Nevertheless, the overriding reading of contemporary post-industrial representations of working-class men is that, beneath their veneer of class politics, masculinity in crisis functions as a discourse which aims to denude the relevance of class within a new national image of neoliberal Britain.[117]

A question these readings raise is can scholarship of on-screen masculinity in Britain move progressively move past these discourses?

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[114] Claire Monk, 'Underbelly UK: The 1990s Underclass Film, Masculinity, and the Ideologies of New Britain', in Higson and Ashby (eds.), *British Cinema, Past and Present*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 278
[115] Ibid.,
[116] Cora Kaplan, 'The Death of the Working-Class Hero', *New Formations*, 52, (2004)
[117] See, for instance: 'Nowhere Men: Representations of Masculinity in Nineties British Cinema', (Ph.D. Thesis, East Anglia: University of East Anglia, 2010)

Anna Claydon's book *The Representation of Masculinity in British Cinema of the 1960s* offers an interesting counterpoint to this tradition of reading on-screen masculinity according to discourses of crisis. Claydon responds to what she labels as the 'conventional dogma of a "crisis" of masculinity' as a problem which pervades not only texts themselves but also scholarship.[118] However, even if the 'crisis of masculinity' can be seen as a dogma which effaces more detailed and more encompassing analysis, it is nevertheless a term which holds currency within ongoing political and critical discourse. The term remains a stubborn issue in contemporary sociological studies of masculinity. [119]This area of debate marks an implicit yet key research question of my thesis. As my thesis approaches representations of the North in which discourses of Northern post-industrial decline pervade, crisis of masculinity narratives is an informing concern of my textual analysis. It is necessary then to maintain a critical awareness of the limiting nature of these narratives while paying attention to their ongoing prevalence in popular culture. Moreover, in the chapters that follow, the question of why these narratives reoccur is one of the key issues of theorising the Northern male body's historical significance. Thus, while remaining critically distant from the crisis of masculinity, one must engage with the issue of what meanings and values such a discourse renders culturally legible.

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[118] E. Anna Claydon, *The Representation of Masculinity in British Cinema of the 1960s: 'Lawrence of Arabia', 'The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner' and 'The Hill'*, (New York; Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), p.5

[119] For instance, Steven Roberts's introduction to the 2014 collection, *Debating Modern Masculinities: Change, Continuity, Crisis?*, attests to the fact that, even as the 'crisis of masculinity' has long been rejected by masculinity studies as a 'well-rehearsed theme' for the re-presentation of wider - and often post-imperial - social change, it remains a point of contention that must be returned to by scholars in order to reject all over again. See: Steven Roberts, *Debating Masculinities: Change, Continuity, Crisis?*, (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2014), pp. 1-16

However, if this thesis does want to retain a sense of the significance of the crisis of masculinity as a textual motif, Claydon's critique of crisis as a critical discourse does highlight an important gap in the coverage of working-class masculinities within British film and television studies. As Claydon notes, one of the dangers of the crisis of masculinity discourse is its collapsing of a multiplicity of masculinities into a singular gender ideal. She argues that the ideal of masculinity assumed within the discourse 'increasingly fail large portions of British society and disavows, as does much of our western culture, the role of Other masculinities – whether those be racially, sexually or politically differentiated from the White-Anglo-Hetero-Male'. This is a construction of an ideal national masculinity which also disavows historical change, by framing aberrant forms of masculinity – formed by, and responsive to, changes in the formation of class, race, and social identity in Britain – as problems of pathology. This tendency is particularly ill-suited to understanding British film within a contemporary post-colonial context in which cultural and ethnic hybridity necessarily invokes different performances and identifications with gender. Despite these changes within British society, film and television studies is sorely lacking when it comes to analysis which considers the function of race and racialisation within the construction of working-class masculinities. Working-class masculinities and "racialised" masculinities are often treated are separate objects of study.

The only existing study within British film and television scholarship that pays proper attention to the importance of whiteness is Neil Graham Slack's PhD thesis titled *A Cinema of White Masculine Crisis: Race and Gender in Contemporary British Film*. Slack situates his

work in the absence of a critical whiteness focus within British film studies and is drawn specifically to Spicer's and Monk's considerations of the re-emergence of masculine crisis during the 1990s, which, as he notes, emblematises a critical tendency to evidence crisis narratives in texts which centre white men, without ever acknowledging race itself. The analysis undertaken in my thesis shares Slack's intersectional approach to issues of whiteness, gender and class. Slack's work shows how race can be integrated within Spicer's methodology of constructing a history of masculine types, with each chapter of the book revealing different inflections of racialised masculine identity, from the idealised 'white male worker' to the 'alien' whiteness coded in relation to the Irish traveller, to the ethnically ambivalent 'black-white' figure of the Chav in the early 2000s.[120] However, from these categorisations we can emphasise a point of departure between this thesis and Slack's thesis, related to periodisation. Slack's study is concentrated on popular film from the late 1990s to the early 2000s. Although the thesis makes little direct reference to the political context of New Labour, it is clear from the types that Slack is reading British cinema as working through the class politics of this period. However, as I explore in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis – in my discussion of underclass youth and the white-working-class in Northern-set television drama – these emerging set of meanings related to whiteness have both intensified and altered in terms of their targets in the culture of post-recession Britain as we have gotten further away from industrialisation as a historical context.

Realism, the Social, and Embodiment

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[120] Neil Graham Slack, *A Cinema of White Masculine Crisis: Race and Gender in Contemporary British Film*. (PH.D. Thesis, University of Sussex, 2010)

As stated in the introduction, the North has a longstanding association with realism and the authentic Northern male body is typically seen as a key element of this association. However, this tendency to describe both the Northern place-myth and Northern bodies as realistic typically overlooks the shifting and complex conceptualisations of the relationship between on-screen bodies and the realist mode in British culture. More specifically, we can understand contemporary debates around the political and aesthetic aims of realist style to be rhetorically informed by readings of the body and its potential to mediate a realist address which befits a representation of Britain in the neoliberal moment. These debates centre around David Forrest's conceptualisation of a post-2000s aesthetic within British film that he terms 'New Realism'. These debates provide an important adjacent context for considering the historical specificity of the Northern male body in contemporary film and television. Moreover, by paying attention to how the on-screen body has implicitly, and often unintentionally, coloured the theorisation of New Realism, we can appreciate the importance of a consideration of the Northern male body to wider concerns regarding the representation of neoliberal Britain.

Considering that this chapter's wider aim is to produce a framework for analysing the Northern male body, it is outside of its scope to produce a full historical account of how realism and social realism have been debated, as categories, across British film and television scholarship. For the purposes of contextualising current scholarship, we might broadly describe these debates around realism as characterised by a reoccurring problem of definition: what is a realist mode of aesthetic practice and what is the relationship between realism and social realism as aesthetic traditions in Britain? The question of

realism's definition is consistently re-staged and re-framed across the history of British film and television scholarship. This is not only because, as Samantha Lay argues, 'what is regarded as "real" …and how it is represented is unstable, dynamic and ever-changing…[and] irrevocably tied to the specifics of time and place, or 'moment''[121], but also because realism is particularly important to the construction of a particularly British national culture.[122] This problem is folded into a second issue related to the political imperatives of realism as a mode of cultural production. As Raymond Williams contextualises it in his 'Lecture on Realism', this relates to a quality within a British tradition of 'realist drama' to be 'consciously interpretative in relation to a particular viewpoint'.[123] British film and television scholarship is marked by decades worth of debates regarding not only the textual forms and conventions that have been constructed as 'realist' in their address, but also in the strategies of political interpretation that are required from realist practice. I do not wish to enter these debates, so much as use them to consider what these debates allow or prevent us to know about the realist body as an aesthetic and political formation.

These questions of definition and political interpretation have dramatically re-emerged in recent scholarship, centred around the movement of British films which Forrest refers to 'New Realism'. New Realism groups together work over the past two decades by critically celebrated filmmakers such as Shane Meadows, Andrea Arnold, Pawel Pawlikowski, and Joanna Hogg. As Forrest describes it, New Realism

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[121] Samantha Lay, *British Social Realism: From Documentary to Brit-Grit*, (London; New York: Wallflower, 2002), p. 6

[122] For observation of this attitude, see: Ewa Mazierska, 'Introduction: Imagining the North of England', in Mazierska (ed.) *Heading North: The North of England in Film and Television*, (Cham: Switzerland: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2017), p.8

[123] Raymond Williams, 'Lecture on Realism', *Screen*, 18:1, 1977, p. 70

represents an increasingly prominent tendency among British filmmakers towards 'thematically diverse, expressive, ambiguous, and author-driven' work that resists the didactic socio-political tendencies of previous generations of social realist British filmmaking.[124] The work of Ken Loach is specifically implicated in this distinction, with Forrest arguing that New Realist films' 'focus on physical and sensory experience, their lyrical and often opaque treatment of location…are out of place in a social realist mould which depends on clarity rather than ambiguity for its meaning making.'[125] While new realism engages with much of the same quotidian scenarios and social milieus as past realist texts, such films typically disregard the social realist imperative towards clear political interpretation.

Forrest's designation of New Realism as a *distinctly* contemporary set of aesthetics for representing modern Britain is not under debate. In the wealth of criticism, both scholarly and popular, that has arisen around the works of directors such as Arnold, Meadows, and Pawlikowski we can infer a consensus that a strand of British cinema currently exists which, formally and narratively, operates differently than British film in other periods throughout its history.[126] Rather, in the tradition of realist debates staged around definition and political interpretation, the point of contention is the cause of this difference and degree of its distinction.

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[124] David Forrest, *Social Realism: Art, Nationhood, Politics*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing), p. 31

[125] David Forrest, *New Realism: Contemporary British Cinema*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), p.9

[126] See, for instance: Claire Monk, 'If You Can't Make a Good Political Film, Don't: Pawel Pawlikowski's Resistant Realism', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 9:3, 2012. Sue Thornham, 'Space, Place and Realism: *Red Road* and the Gendering of a Cinematic History', *Feminist Media Histories*, 2:2, (2016)

Clive Nwonka provides a much more pessimistic account of this new trend in British cinema. Nwonka is critical of its obsession with surface and individual psychology which he sees as reflecting a de-politicised, de-contextualised naturalism. Drawing a Lukácsian distinction between realism and naturalism, in which naturalism is characterised by a detached observation of the surface detail of everyday life, Nwonka argues that:

> To understand fully the dynamic and complex nature of inequalities and identities in realist film, considerations of how class divisions combine to produce specific detrimental effects on characterization are empirical issues that…must be re-engaged with through a more contextualized filmic practice that seeks to interrogate wider patterns of inequality.[127]

Nwonka is concerned with the lack of political interpretation that comes with this realism's apparent new focus on issues of individual subjectivity.

However, despite their differences, Forrest and Nwonka are joined in their inference of a retreating sense of the social within British realism. Crucially, in both theorisations of this new realism, the shift to a more intimate focus on the body is implicitly located as at the centre of this process. In claiming that contemporary realism avoids investigating wider social contexts, Nwonka also constructs a Marxist and/or Brechtian binary between emotion and social knowledge. In an analysis of *The Selfish Giant* – which I will return to in Chapter Four – he argues that the tragic death of a young boy 'succeeds in drawing out an

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127 Clive James Nwonka, '"You're What's Wrong with Me": *Fish Tank, The Selfish Giant* and the Language of Contemporary British Social Realism', *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, 12:3, (2014), p. 220

emotional, rather than critical response from the spectator'.[128] In Nwonka's reading, the tragic figure of the victim, materialised in a dead boy's body, betrays the film's inability to imagine any kind of wider social resistance. This binary between emotion and knowledge is critiqued by Forrest in his response to Nwonka, and yet his theory similarly locates the body as a site in which social meaning is denuded. In attempting to draw out the significances of New Realism's move away from more didactic models of social representation, he argues that such texts depart from more Marxist conceptions of social being in its foregrounding of:

> the physical nature of being in the world through the highly textured emphases on space, place and the very experience of landscape, and the haptic and sensory realm emphasise the feeling of everyday life in ways which are not necessarily dependent for their meaning on a fixed sense of broader, contextual verisimilitude.[129]

An emphasis on corporeality supplants the need of social commentary to give these texts their realist effect. Although Forrest ostensibly asserts the ongoing relevance of the social within the 'multivalent' structures of realist meaning in New Realist form, he nevertheless contends that such work is aligned with wider trends in global cinema through their 'universal and fundamental emphasis on lived experience'.[130] In describing an emphasis on the haptic as 'fundamental' and in constructing such a concept of embodiment as evading national boundaries, Forrest characterises New Realism as a turn away from the

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[128] Ibid., p. 217
[129] David Forrest, *New Realism*, p. 7
[130] Ibid.

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social and towards the sensuous body. In other words, Forrest invests in a notion of the body as outside of social signification.

Both Forrest's and Nwonka's treatment of the relationship between form and social knowledge has been challenged in subsequent scholarship on contemporary realism. However, their shared intuition that the foregrounded body signals a site of absence in realism's construction of social meaning is an interesting notion that this thesis will pursue further in its attempt to theorise the significance of the Northern male body. This not to agree with their analysis, but rather to pose that it nevertheless touches upon a shared sense of an ongoing structure of feeling – in which the relationship between physical working-class bodies and their social relevance is less clear - that needs further clarification. However, as Paul Dave argues, this requires thinking about realist form via a more historicised method. Dave responds to Forrest and Nwonka by arguing that:

> both make assumptions about the "social" in social realism that are insufficiently historicised…[For Forrest] the social is often reified as that which remains unchanging or constant (what he refers to as 'traditional thematic concerns')… Nwonka's guiding assumption is that the social substance, as traditionally theorised in Marxism…remains largely unaffected and available for politicisation through traditional cultural strategies of realism.[131]

In contrast, Dave reads the formal tendencies of contemporary British realism – its stylistic expression of space, time and movement – as an active mediation of the historicising logic of neoliberalism, in which the

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[131] Paul Dave, 'Bypass, Obscure Forces and Ontological Anxiety', in Mazierska and Kristensen (eds.), *Contemporary Cinema and Neoliberal Ideology*, (New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 122

ways of imaging structures of classed community and agency are ruptured. As Dave suggests, rather than render the body as a sign of a textual element that cannot be read, our initial sense of unease with the body's relationship to social meaning should signal that a process of concerted reading is required.[132] This thesis continues this kind of scholarly work, treating Northern male body as a site which is marked by difficulties and tensions that require a proper historicising of forms. To understand this further, though I wish to turn to how recent scholarship of cinematic embodiment has conceived of this relationship between bodies and social, historical and ideological meaning.

Affect Theory and the Politics of Screen Embodiment

The debates covered in relation to realism regard not simply questions of the socialness of realist style, but also questions regarding the socialness of the sensuous body. Such questions are also considered key by this thesis. As we have seen, the limited work which accounts for the Northern male body typically focuses on the prefix of Northern to emphasise the heavily stereotyped meaning of the figure. By contrast, I consider the question of how concepts of the body might change our understanding of the Northern. That is, rather than assume that the "Northern" circumscribes the "body", it asks how the experiential and sensuously realised body might introduce new meanings into the Northern imaginary. However, to ask this question, we must first account for how scholarship conceives of the experiential body in its relationship to structures of social and ideological meaning.

Over the past two decades, there has been a proliferation of scholarship concerning issues of cinematic embodiment and the

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[132] Ibid.

production of affective experience by screen media. In its formative
moment, this field of work developed variously from the philosophy of
Gilles Deleuze and the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, but
it was unified in its rejection of ocular-centric models of film analysis
which elided the embodied spectator from considerations of cinematic
textuality and address. This emerging scholarship on embodiment and
affect sought to delineate the ways in which audio-visual media
constructed meaning through a fuller appeal to the viewer's sensorium,
with sounds and images analysed for their tactile, haptic and visceral
qualities. Pertinently, this work also attended to affect as a realm of
experience that was unaccounted for within the dominant paradigms of
film analysis, and uncaptured by dominant ideological readings of
form and representation. Steven Shaviro's *The Cinematic Body* begins by
emphatically asserting its rejection of 'psychoanalytic film theory',
which he joins with poststructuralism in his critique of these traditions
and their 'reflex movement of suspicion, disavowal and phobic
rejection' of the sensuous pleasures of the film text.[133] Shaviro labels his
method as 'naïve', less concerned with issues of identification based on
ideological constructs of subjectivity and gender than in a passionate
description of the sensuous nature of film's address.[134] Similarly, Vivian
Sobchack's phenomenological emphasis on the viewing experience
contests the tendency of film theory to focus on the 'essentially
deceptive, illusionary, tautologically recursive and coercive nature of
the cinema'[135]. In contrast, Sobchack proposes that we consider
cinematic embodiment – a form of embodiment which is not contained

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[133] Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1989),
p.10
[134] Ibid.
[135] Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, (New Jersey:
Princeton University Press, 1992), p.17

by the spectator but flows chiasmatically between the sensuous surfaces of text and viewer – as a 'carnal third term' that 'escapes language and yet resides in it'.[136] Both Shaviro and Sobchack suggest that film's affective dimensions interact with linguistic and semiotic structures of meaning but also retain an element that is beyond semiotic forms of signification and their typical ideological readings.

Furthermore, this scholarship even uses affect to reconsider the socio-political import of cinematic representation, particularly in how it structures our relationship to on-screen bodies. In *The Skin of Film*, Laura Marks introduces the concept of 'haptic visuality', which she describes as 'suggest[ing] the way vision itself can be tactile, as though one were touching a film with one's own eyes'.[137] Marks lends this concept a political dimension by situating it against a Foucauldian history of ocular-centric visuality and its relationship to regimes of control. Marks characterises this latter form of visuality as 'typical of capitalism, consumerism, surveillance and ethnography'[138]. Marks's critique particularly focuses on the ethnographic implications of this form of visuality, where the physical separation of object and subject, and spectator and text, has ideologically structured the representation of other cultures in ways that implicitly inscribe a position of disembodied mastery to the viewer. Consequently, Marks argues that haptic visuality disorders and these regimes of power:

> A form of vision that yields to the thing, a vision that is not merely
> cognitive but acknowledges its location in the body seems to
> escape the attribution of mastery…What is erotic about haptic

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[136] Ibid., p. 60

[137] Laura Marks, *The Skin of Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses*, (Durham: Duke University, 2000), p. xi

[138] Ibid., p. 131

visuality, then, may be described as a respect of difference, and concomitant loss of self, in the presence of the other.[139]

Marks's notion that hapticity can potentially escape the ideological resonances of mastery between the viewer and the on-screen other is crucial to her overarching argument that intercultural cinema fosters different ways of negotiating cultural difference. This optimistic reading of affective representations of bodies has been influential within the field. Both Jennifer Barker's work on 'cinematic tactility'[140] and Jane Stadler's phenomenological theorisation of empathy[141] stress the possibility of an affectively 'mimetic' relationship between spectator and image. This relationship, in turn, leads to representations of characters which are not troubled by the same regimes of difference and othering which have historically characterised the on-screen body.

It is this optimistic reading of affect that underpins Forrest's observations on contemporary realist style discussed in the previous section. Forrest invests in the haptic as a 'realm' which is less burdened by ideological, cultural and socially specific meaning. However, can we really construct the textural, haptic, and affective elements of embodiment as that which escapes dominant forms of social signification? To place this question within the context of this thesis: does the sensuousness of the Northern male body escape the representation of the North which, as we have seen, is usually known from a classed and geographical distance? This question will be

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[139] Ibid, pp. 132, 193

[140] Jennifer Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009)

[141] Jane Stadler, *Pulling Focus*: *Intersubjective Experience, Narrative Film and Ethics*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2008)

considered throughout this thesis as necessary elements of the process of textual analysis.

More immediately, these optimistic readings of affect have been challenged by scholars from a perspective of cultural studies and from a position of more practical methodological concerns within film and television studies. In her essay 'Invoking Affect', Clare Hemmings provides a thorough account of the theoretical problem ranging across the work of many of the foundational theorists of affect who want to conceptualise affect as force that is outside or beyond social meaning and signification. For Hemmings, such theorists do not consider how 'affect [can] manifest precisely not as a difference [from social meaning], but as a central mechanism of social reproduction in the most glaring ways'.[142] Affect is not wholly liberated from structures of ideology, subjectivity and power that construct social identity. Particularly for those people whose social life is determined by a marginalised identity, affective experience is itself a circumscribed and limited potential, one which feeds into dominant ideological and linguistic positionings of the body.[143]

Theories of cinematic affect have been comparably critiqued within film studies. However, criticism which arises in film studies also draws attention to how the construction of affect as escaping dominant ideological structures is not only theoretically troubling but, just as importantly, analytically imprecise. This formative theory of cinematic embodiment is flawed by a difficulty for describing the political and cultural specificity of the film text. For instance, Lucia Nagib has

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[142] Claire Hemmings, 'Invoking Affect: Cultural Theory and the Ontological Turn', *Cultural Studies*, 9:5, (2005), p. 551
[143] Ibid., p.561

challenged the broad tendency of this field towards what she calls 'pure subjectivism', in which 'the films themselves are almost entirely eclipsed'.[144] As Nagib elaborates, this subjectivism impacts this field's ability to wrestle with the complexities of the ideological and political resistance that it typically poses. For instance, Nagib has responded to Laura Marks's work along similar lines to Hemmings, challenging the notion that affective evocations of embodiment construct an ideologically uncaptured and ethical sense of 'difference' between the on-screen and off-screen bodies:

> [Marks] goes on to say that "a look that acknowledges both the physicality and the unknowability of the other is an ethical look" (2002, p. xviii). This statement…fails however, to explain how otherness would survive within a scheme of "haptic criticism" in which the critic's look "takes the shape" of its object.[145]

For Nagib, such an account requires 'looking at films as modes of address'.[146] One must *read* the film's construction of 'physicality', a process of analysis which in Nagib's analysis of world cinema, is necessarily imbricated with cultural and national histories as well as the legacies of colonialism.[147] Crucially, this methodology does not preclude treating affect as a textual element in which subversive and aberrant political meanings are located – and more dominant structures of representation and signification are disordered. However, the scholar cannot take for granted the ideological structure (or lack

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[144] Lucia Nagib, *World Cinema and the Ethics of Realism*, (New York: Continuum, 2011), p. 25
[145] Ibid., p. 32
[146] Ibid., p.33
[147] Ibid.

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thereof) of the sensuous dimensions of film bodies. As Hemmings argues, sense and affect might just as well re-inscribe hegemony.

Conclusion

The first part of this chapter was concerned with the function of the Northern place-myth within a wider national culture. The dominant tendency of the North, as described by scholarship, is towards reifying and essentialising representations of class, gender, and race in Britain. In what little scholarship exists on the Northern male body, these reifying tendencies have been read as transferred to this form. By lending a material image to the Northern place-myth, the body is read as re-inscribing the naturalness of the North-South divide – with its adjacent constructions of gendered division and class hierarchy – into British culture.

However, in recognising the prevalence of this understanding of the North and its iconic body, this chapter has also sought to highlight the gaps in the critical theorisation of the Northern male body which, unknowingly, reinforce these processes of reification. The chapter has drawn attention to a consistent critical oversight towards the Northern male body as a formation that requires analysis. Furthermore, in its second half, it has engaged with other areas of film and television scholarship in which the body is ostensibly foregrounded but, in fact, involves less concerted textual analysis than the body requires as a formation. Across studies of masculinity, social realism, and affect theory there exists a prominent critical tendency to either take the body for granted or else construct it as beyond social and historical analysis. It is in opposition to this tendency that this thesis proposes the cultural significance of the Northern male body. This is a body which *must be read textually and historically*.

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CHAPTER TWO:

A SCREEN HISTORY OF THE NORTHERN MALE BODY

This chapter sets out to consider the changing representation of the Northern male body across different periods of the region's screen history. The chapter proceeds through close engagement with the textual constructions of male bodies; in their visual and textural qualities; their narrative and thematic functions; and their affective resonances. A major question which I engage with is how might we understand the male body as contributing to the changing meanings and values of the North in British cultural history? This is a question which necessitates a consistent consideration of how the male body operates a site of *historical* meaning. Within specific historical contexts, can we understand the Northern male body as a site where emergent structures of feeling interact with residual forms of cultural meaning, and what is this relationship? In sum, the aim of the chapter is to explore how the Northern male body both mediates wider histories and narrates its own.

An adjunctive, but no less important, question for this chapter is what role the canon itself plays in the production of structures of knowledge within British culture, and whether certain bodies are rendered more emblematic of the North than others. The chapter begins by thinking about what assumptions underpin the canonisation of film and television texts as important texts about the North. It traces dominant discourses and patterns of imagery that form a canonical history of the region's representation. However, the chapter ends by considering case studies that evidence a more uncomfortable relationship with discourses of the North and its history. The final issue I seek to raise is why some texts sit more easily in the history of the

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North on film and television than others. What might more marginal texts – and marginal bodies – tell us about the functioning of historical narratives and their underlying ideology?

Narratives of the North's Screen History

To begin exploring the body's place within a screen history of the North, it is first necessary to outline what a canonical screen history of the region looks like. When does it begin? What are its key moments? What is its thematic and aesthetic trajectory? While much has been written about the individual texts and the specific periods that this chapter covers, there are only a handful of attempts to produce a historical overview of the North in film and television.[148] Because this field of work is minor it is also coherent, producing a common historical account where reference points reoccur. In such overviews, three common narratives characterise how the North's appearances in British film and television are shaped into a legible history. According to these narratives, the canonical history of the screen North can be described as such: firstly, it is a history that is periodic. Secondly, it is a history to which the Second World War represents a significant threshold. Thirdly, it is a screen history that is both timely, with realist depictions of ongoing social change, and yet dated by its bounded set of representational conventions.

These summative claims require elaboration, beginning with that of the North's screen history being periodic. The North, of course, is a setting

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[148] My account of a canonical Northern screen history leans on four overviews. Within broader cultural studies, I take from Dave Russell's chapter 'Screening the North' in *Looking North* as well as Rob Shields survey of the North's cultural construction in *Places on the Margins*. Within film and television studies, my account of the North's canonical history refers to Ewa Mazierska's introduction in *Heading North* and Paul Marris's theorisation of the history of the "Northern Realism" tradition in his article in *Cineaste.*

used in texts throughout the history of British film and television. However, as Mazierska asserts, the region is 'marginalised' in terms of the quantity of work produced.[149] Because of this, histories of the screen North gravitate around particular periods when the region experiences an unusually intense moment of representation. The periods highlighted are most often the 1930s, the 1950s and early 1960s, the 1980s and the late 1990s. These periods of heightened visibility are typically explained in relation to changing economic circumstances or changing feelings about the meaning of working-class identity. For instance, Mazierska argues that 'the North typically attracted the attention of filmmakers during periods of economic crisis'[150], while Russell states that it is 'where cinematic traditions could be refreshed and post-war class relations and the rigidity of moral codes could be probed'.[151] Although the contexts of these problems change relative to their historical moment, the periodic nature of the North's representation means that the region is often represented as a place where British culture turns when social problems must be confronted.

However, this association of the region with social crises is a notably *post-war* phenomenon. Russell frames this historical duality as being both aesthetic and ideological: 'North on screen has tended to be either a comic place where daily hardship was softened by humour, or a site for debating serious moral, economic and social issues.'[152] This distinction is not definitive, comedy frequently colours even the most serious of social documents of the North, as is evident in the common use of black humour in

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[149] Ewa Mazierska, 'Introduction: Imagining the North of England', in Mazierska (ed.) *Heading North: The North of England in Film and Television*, (Cham: Switzerland: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2017), p.11
[150] Ibid.
[151] Dave Russell, *Looking North*, p. 184
[152] Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 181

1980s films such as *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1987) and *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985). However, Russell implies that one can draw a functional contrast between screen representations of the North before and after the Second World War. Russell's mapping of this threshold produces a contrast between a pre-war representation of the North, as an unproblematic unit of a larger national whole, and a post-war production of the North as a space which is coded as outside the nation. Exemplified by the George Formby's and Gracie Fields's comedies of the 1930s, he describes how 'there is a sense in which they made the North, or Lancashire at least, a key part and a fully paid up member of the nation… By making the two so obviously of the North but placing them outside of it, their films allow the region to infuse the national culture with the characteristic virtues of ebullience, spirit, wit'.[153] These comedies, then, reflected an ideological drive, in popular pre-war cinema, to produce a holistic national character in which North and South as two essential sides of the same imagined community.[154] This assumed threshold between pre-war and post-war Norths has significant, if rarely stated, effect on how critics have structured the history of the region in film and television. Often, the discussion of the North/South divide on-screen begins in the post-war, implicitly positioning the pre-war as a mostly aberrant period in a cultural tradition of Northern othering.[155]

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[153] Ibid. 183

[154] Stephen Schafer similarly characterises Formby's work as part of a "cinema of reassurance" within Britain in the 1930s. In the context of economic depression, and the impending threat of war, popular British film relied heavily on 'humorous caricatures of working-class characters' as a strategy within a broader 'escapist cinema'. Such comedic stereotypes offered audiences working-class representation, while avoiding the potentially troubling social issues that might be associated with the condition of that class. See Stephen Schafer, *British Popular Films 1929-1939: The Cinema of Reassurance*, p.52

[155] For instance, Russell argues that the representation of the North as an othered space has always been inherent to national culture and was merely repressed by the film industry before the war. He uses the initial censorship of Walter Greenwood's novel *Love on the Dole*, in 1936, by the British Board of Film Censors as suggestive of this repression. Despite the novel's success, the BBFC denied the film's production until nearly a decade after its publication, initially describing it as a 'very sordid story, in very sordid surroundings'. See

In describing its periodicity and its consistency of tone since the post-war, one gets the sense of the screen North as holding an ambivalent relationship to the notion of history as linear and progressive. In social realist fiction, representations of the North are *timely*, in terms of narratives that are associated with moments of social crisis, and *dated* in their deeply entrenched formal and thematic structures which consistently return to the historic material of industrial capitalism as a lens through which to view the present. The timeliness of the screen North is related to the region's appropriateness to what Raymond Williams summarises as an aesthetic mandate of realism to define itself through 'social extension and the emphasis on the contemporary'.[156] John Hill, for instance, argues that the New Wave's claim to realism rested on its introduction of new representational content into British cinema. Hill argues that the cycle exemplified a realism in terms of an 'injection of new content (new people, new problems, new ideas)'.[157] British cinema relied on the North's association with crisis for its sense of being at the cutting edge of contemporary social realities.

John Hill's reading of the British New Wave uses a distinction between content and form to make an implicit distinction between the screen North's characteristics of timeliness and datedness. While the films distinguish themselves as realist based on the newness of their content, their form is often classically 'orthodox' and even reactionary.[158] This form and content distinction operates within the specific discussion of one period of the North's screen history, but when we want to map the wider history I would argue that this distinction is not visible. As we will see, periods such

also: British Board of Film Censors, "Scenario Reports", (London: British Film Institute Library), p.42, cited in Caroline Levine, 'Propaganda for Democracy: The Curious Case of *Love on the Dole*', *Journal of British Studies*, 45:4, 2006, p. 847

[156] Raymond Williams, A Lecture on Realism, *Screen*, 18:1, (1977), p.66

[157] John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-1963*, p. 59

[158] Ibid.

as the 1980s included significant stylistic innovation. Rather, the way in which Northern social realism has been written about more widely suggests that the contradiction of timeliness and datedness is rather part of the rhetorical structure and set of place-images that pervades Northern fiction. The images and characters of Northern fiction, as much as the stylistic tactics of representation, can be read as both directed to an immediate present and yet made meaningful via the iconography taken from the past. For instance, Paul Marris's 'Northern realism' describes conventionalised North that consistently presents social 'realities' characterised as masculine, working-class and perceived at a distance.[159] For Marris, Northern representation struggles with the process of renewal that is necessary for any realist text to reach its contemporary social moment; depictions of social change operate 'in and against' these conventional myths.[160]

As these three narratives suggest, the canonical history of the screen North implicitly understands the region to be marked by a confrontation between past and present. By tracing a canonical screen history, I have begun to suggest the structures of representation and social mediation that images of the body participate within. The Northern bodies that follow are most marked in the post-war, they relate to specific periods, and they are both realist in their moment but symbolic of a wider mythology of class and capitalism.

The Canon and its Problems

The remainder of this chapter is involved with the task of surveying canonical Northern texts for their construction of the male body. What

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[159] Paul Marris, 'Northern Realism: An Exhausted Tradition?', *Cineaste*, 2:4, (2001)
[160] Ibid.

follows is analysis of four texts covering three key periods of Northern representation in post-war film and television. The task is therefore in depth and yet selective. This selectivity is appropriate in relation to the nature of the canon as an object of study. As Paul Marris argues, despite the relatively limited visibility of the North in film and television, when texts do appear they are often individually taken as giving 'some kind of key to grasping "the state of the nation"'.[161] I too will be treating individual texts as offering emblematic instances and images, demonstrating how the North as an imaginary interacts with texts' relation to structures of feeling within their contemporary moment.

However, although this selective approach is methodologically appropriate, this is not to say that it is critically transparent. By being selective in relation to a canon, I do also wish to draw attention to the boundaries and exclusions which operate as part of the construction of a canonical history of the North. Three of my case studies might be considered as part of this history because they are emblematic and *popular*. The importance of these texts to the canon derives from their widespread attention upon exhibition, and their immediate appraisal as work that captured something both new and common within the region.[162] These texts are: *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), *Boys from the Blackstuff* (1981) and *The Full Monty* (1997).

In the last case study of the chapter, I query the selective nature of this canonical history with a focus on the work that resides in the margins of the North's on-screen history. I focus on one text in particular: *My Son the Fanatic* (1997). Although this text falls within the supposed limits of the North's

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[161] Paul Marris, 'Northern Realism…', p. 47

[162] This is a definition of a popular canon that aligns closely with Marris's definition of the tradition of Northern realism in film and television. Marris traces a popular tradition along films that were all commercially and critically successful on release.

canonical history, and to certain degrees engage intimately with the
representational forms of the region's cultural imaginary, it has been side-
lined in the aforementioned overviews of the region's key texts. By ending
the chapter with a consideration of these non-canonical texts, I wish to draw
attention to the discourses and ideologies which structure the boundaries of
the North and Northernness.

<u>*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*[163]</u>

In his reconsideration of the aesthetic significance of social realist cinema of
the late 1950s and early 1960s, Peter Hutchings briefly situates the British
New Wave cycle within a cultural history of working-class representation.
Hutchings states that while these films placed a 'focus on the working-class',
this:

> was not the working class as envisaged by Grierson
> documentaries - noble workers, worthy cogs in the social
> machine. Instead the New Wave's working-class heroes were
> aggressively individualistic and materialistic and often anti-
> establishment as well.[164]

While providing a common reading of the British New Wave, as
reproducing newer images of a more affluent working-class, the terms of
Hutchings' historicising can be extended to inform our understanding of the
changing bodies associated with the working-class. Separating the New
Wave figure from the Griersonian 'cogs in the machine', Hutchings
emphasises a different working-class image from the labouring body that

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[163] *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* will henceforth be abbreviated as *SNASM*.
[164] Peter Hutchings, 'Beyond the New Wave: Realism in British Cinema, 1959-63', Robert
Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book,* (London: BFI ; Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York :
Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 304

Kathryn and Philip Dodd relate to the documentary tradition of the 1930s. The pair note a 'fascination with the construction of strong virile working-class male bodies' in the films of documentarists such as John Grierson, Alberto Cavalcanti and Humphrey Jennings.[165] In these films, the male body engaged in difficult labour is rendered specular and made into a symbol that could 'incarnate the nation'.[166] In contrast, Hutchings's analysis suggests that, by the New Wave, this is no longer the body subordinated to the productive needs of the nation. However, the force of the New Wave hero that Hutchings describes as '*aggressively* individualistic' still seems to suggest a virility and intensity as central to how the working-class male is understood and configured in British cinema.[167]

The British New Wave emerged from a burgeoning interest in the spaces and subjects of the Northern working-class that had been developing in the arts and in wider culture since the early 1950s. As Terry Lovell argues, by the time of *Room at the Top's* release in 1959, there was already a significant 'structure of feeling' around the importance of working-class culture and the need to attend to it in the face of the changing material circumstances and values in post-war urban life.[168] Within this intellectual context, an emergent tradition of Northern and Midlands-based drama gained national attention and subsequently provided many of the stories and characters that would be adapted for the screen by the New Wave's directors. The work of playwrights and novelists such as Alan Sillitoe, John Osborne, Stan Barstow and Shelagh Delaney comprised the 'Angry Young

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[165] Kathryn Dodd and Philip Dodd, 'Engendering the Nation: British Documentary Film 1930-1939', in Higson (ed.), *Dissolving Views*, pp. 44-45

[166] Ibid., p.47

[167] Peter Hutchings, 'Beyond the New Wave: Realism in British Cinema, 1959-63', Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book,* (London: BFI; Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 304

[168] Terry Lovell, 'Landscapes and Stories in 1960s British Realism', in Higson (ed.), *Dissolving Views*, (London: Cassell, 1996), p. 159.

Man' cycle of social realist representation. In cinema, the Angry Young Man cycle is typically associated with a group of films released between 1959 and 1963, most commonly grouped as: *Room at the Top* (1959), *Look Back in Anger* (1959), *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), *A Taste of Honey* (1961), *A Kind of Loving* (1962), *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962), *This Sporting Life* (1962), and *Billy Liar (*1963). Not all these works are homogeneous in theme, narrative, or even the gender of their main characters (*A Taste of Honey* notably focusses on a young woman). However, the dominant narrative tendency of these films is to express contemporary anxieties about the loss of traditional working-class work and community through characters and images that signalled a new youthful and alienated masculinity. Larger social and political transformations were condensed into individual stories of male social and moral defiance.

Just as the emergence of the New Wave came out of a wider sense of an emerging working-class culture, so too its reconsideration can be placed within a wider reconsideration of the cultural terms of visibility for the working-class in post-war British culture. Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy* featured prominently in this reconsideration. In the decades after its release, *Uses of Literacy* has been characterised as historically emblematic of a moment in time in which working-class culture returned to visibility, but in forms that were depoliticised and non-threatening to a bourgeois political ideology. Richard Dyer understands *Uses of Literacy* as representative of a moment in which class became detached from its political context in popular culture. He argues that, for Hoggart, 'the very thing that defines class as class - their work (in relation to the means of production in a capitalist society) is missing. Class becomes *only* a matter of life-style'.[169]

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[169] Richard Dyer, *Coronation Street*, (London: B.F.I. Publishing, 1981), p. 3

This suspicion of a depoliticisation of working-class life inevitably found its way into re-evaluations of the British New Wave, and define what I believe to be *the* dominant critical narrative of the cycle.[170] This conflict can be summarised as the stylistic force of an emerging national art cinema versus the political inertness and ideological conformity of a depiction of the working-class North authored from without. This conflict is still predominant; in recent years, scholarship has tended towards a recuperation of the New Wave based upon a reaffirming of the aesthetic innovation and complexity within the individual films themselves. Both David Forrest and B.F. Taylor argue for the need to re-examine these films as complex works of art, concerned with the representation of singular subjective experiences with no pre-determined relationship to their wider milieu of working-class life at the time.[171] These works represent a recent readdressing of the balance of critical reading of the New Wave, back towards its stylistic context and materiality. By contrast, my intention is not to resolve this conflict by either affirming or denouncing the aesthetic value of the New Wave films. Instead, I want to suggest that this conflict points to a tension in the texts themselves, a tension that is inscribed, in part, through the male body. To refer to Peter Hutchings's characterisation of the New Wave, this is a tension which exists between the rebellious energy of a new youthful working-class body, and the sense of a traditional stable working-class space that does not sanction this body.

Arthur Seaton: Working-Class Hero

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[170] The dominant historical narratives of the New Wave's political relevance as a cultural movement are found in: John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-1963*, (London: BFI, 1986) and Andrew Higson, 'Place, Space, Spectacle: Landscape and Townscape in the "Kitchen Sink" Film', *Screen*, 25:2, (1984)

[171] See David Forrest, *Social Realism: Art, Nationhood, Politics*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 39-80. B.F. Taylor, *The British New Wave: A Certain Tendency?*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006)

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Saturday Night and Sunday Morning is one of the exemplary texts of this new figure of the Angry Young Man. Adapted from Alan Sillitoe's novel, the film centres on a young factory worker in Nottingham, Arthur Seaton (Albert Finney) who pushes back against what he perceives to be the conformity of working-class domestic life. Defiant that he won't be "ground down" like his father and the generation of working-class men who sacrificed themselves for the national cause during the war, Arthur repeatedly declares his interest only in the immediate hedonistic pleasures represented by the weekend: drinking and girls.

From the very first sequence, the youthful body of Arthur is established as a site of display and tension. The film begins in the interior of a factory just before 'knocking-off' time on a Friday. Beginning with an establishing shot that reveals an expansive factory floor organised in rows of working men at their machines, the camera begins tracking rightwards through the crowds, seemingly following the steps of a foreman who is walking around and delivering the week's wages. However, the camera swiftly departs from him and comes to focus squarely on the young figure of Arthur at his lathe (Fig 2.1 and Fig 2.2). The camera's initial locating of Arthur stresses his social typicality, his is a body that is revealed to us as firmly embedded with the logic of capitalist labour: one of many inside the factory floor space, and made visible to us according to the delineating movements of a foreman. At the same time, however, he is invested with a focus that attests to his particularity. Despite its apparent naturalism, the high-key lighting picks out Arthur's face and torso from the bleaker drearier background of the factory floor. Moreover, the camera, while motivated by the movements of the foreman, suddenly becomes autonomous in its tracking, to emphasise the figure of Arthur.
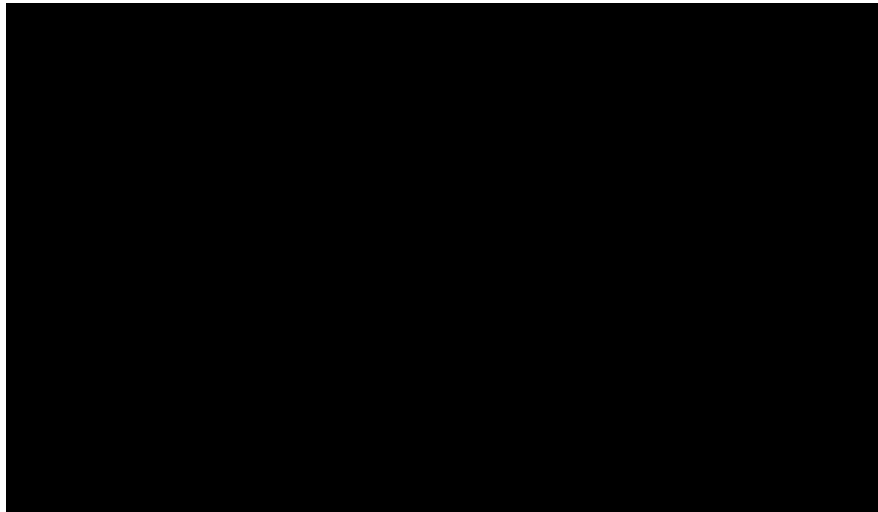
Fig. 2.1
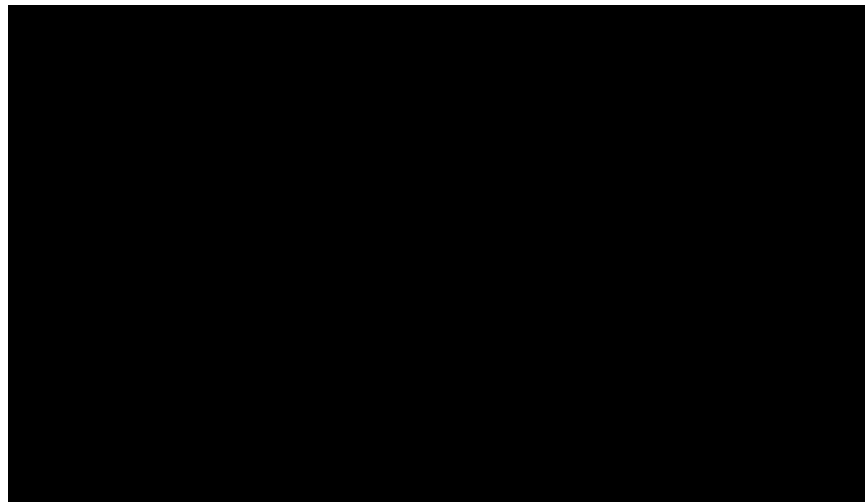
Fig. 2.2

As the scene continues, the mise-en-scene expresses the imbrication of the economy and logic of the industrial production process, and the strong physicality of the male body. After the initial establishing shot locates Arthur at his lathe, the scene cuts to a series of close-ups, approximately from Arthur's point-of-view, which relays the repetition of the physical tasks that he performs. The close-ups are organised to mimic the itemised nature of Arthur's work: we see Arthur push a button to turn on the lathe; he turns a wheel to open up the machinery's press; he places a pipe into the press; he takes out another pipe and tightens its ends with a wrench; finally, he deposits the pipe into a box before the voice-over counts it off at 'nine

hundred and forty-five' of his day's work (Figs. 2.3 and 2.4). Each close-up is framed to render the action as a single and isolated task, with the whole process of physical labour appearing schematic and abstract. Moreover, the framing of this series of close-ups suggests that this form of itemised labour does not just produce the commodity itself, but also 'produces', in the sense of regimenting, a particular kind of body. Although the work itself is ostensibly the focus of the shots, Arthur's upper body repeatedly enter the frame and becomes the object of vision. As we see him tighten the pipe with his wrench, the task itself becomes briefly obscured by Arthur's broad forearms that fill the foreground. In these brief glimpses, our attention vacillates between the action being performed and the strong vascular arms that perform them. This opening thus simultaneously reveals Arthur as a typical working-class figure, within a recognisable economy of body and labour, and an extraordinary and singular individual.
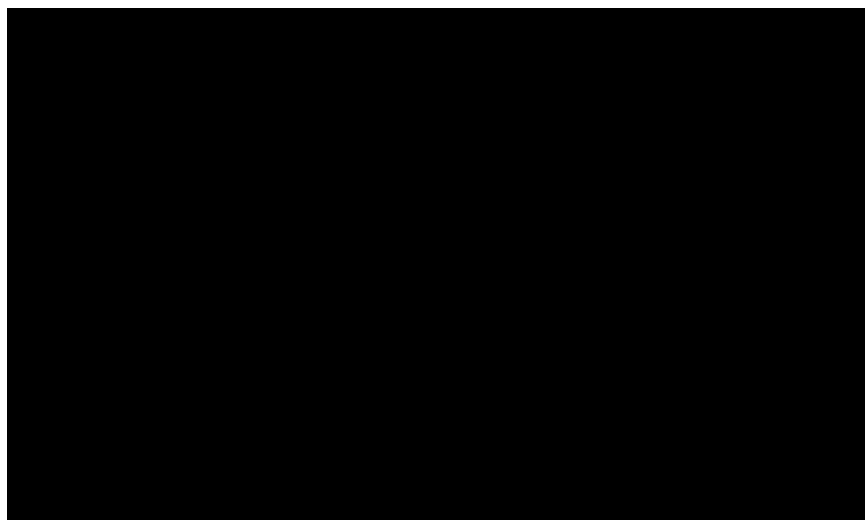
Fig. 2.3
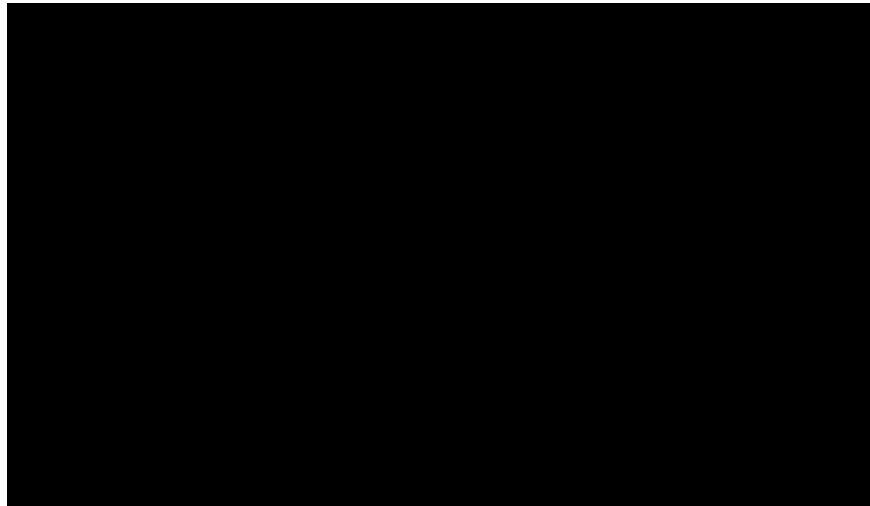
Fig. 2.4.

The physical power of Arthur is also evident in the scene in the pub at the film's beginning, as we see Arthur enjoy his leisure for the first time. The scene highlights the physical extremes that Arthur's body is capable of enduring; from winning a drinking contest in which he effortlessly downs pint after pint until a sailor nearby must forfeit, to the moment that he collapses down a flight of stairs with a perverse grinning joy. Christine Geraghty's analysis of the scene highlights the extent to which the mise-en-scene is constructed, in these moments, to reinforce a valorised image of Albert Finney according to notions of hard masculinity. In particular, the camera privileges Finney's body in moments when 'he holds his body stiffly', or when his face is 'stern and challenging' to his drinking competitor.[172] For Geraghty, this performance of stiffness and sternness is intended to relate Finney to a tradition of tough and stoic working-class masculinity, his 'hard' and 'impassive' facial and bodily gestures demonstrate 'a masculine capacity for control'.[173] On one level, the scene therefore seems to celebrate its working-class protagonist as a model of

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[172] Christine Geraghty, 'Albert Finney: Working-Class Hero', in Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim (eds.), *Me Jane: Masculinity, Movies and Women*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), p. 63
[173] Ibid.

masculine virtue, particularly in relation to his embodied strength and vitality.

However, as Geraghty argues about the film's overall approach to representing Arthur Seaton (and Albert Finney) as a working-class hero, this valorisation of the tough masculine body is primarily a static commodifying process. In particular, Geraghty argues that the need to make Finney's body open to an 'erotic contemplation' appropriate for a young movie star leads to a representation of a particular kind of 'static masculinity' that is appealing to the camera's gaze, but not particularly relevant to the conditions of working-class society that the character of Arthur lives within.[174] The film's intense focus on physical vitality and power threatens to fix Arthur's agency at the level of the body, an agency which is detached from the kinds of social agency that Arthur desires to have. Despite Arthur voicing a rebellious attitude, actual intervention in the world around him is often beyond him. Geraghty draws attention to Arthur's social passivity in the second half of the film, where he is unable to cannot help Brenda (Rachel Roberts), the married woman he is sleeping with, when she becomes pregnant.[175] Because a film like *SNASM* perpetuates a social realist framework in which the individual is constrained by the standards of working-class life, the masculine agency we see is embodied 'outside the narrative' by Finney's star status, and thus implicitly excessive in relation to Arthur's actions within the narrative.[176] Arthur is a virile powerful body with no proper agency or purpose.

Geraghty's reading rightfully recognises the feeling, conveyed by the film, of a circumscribed social agency in tension with a visually iconic

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[174] Ibid. pp. 65-66
[175] Ibid., p.69
[176] Ibid

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physical agency. However, her suggestion that the later construct of agency is extra-diegetic – a tension which is unresolved by the text – is not consonant with the film's presentation of Arthur. In minor formal details which capture and convey Arthur's body, *SNASM* draws attention to the question of what agency means in this moment of working-class history. Specifically, the film seems to formally ask what the distinction is between physical extensive action and a more abstract concept of social agency.

We can see how Arthur's body inscribes these questions by returning to the pub scene. In this scene, there are two moments in which ostensibly unintentional and anti-social acts are rendered as conscious decisions. After winning the drinking competition, Arthur stumbles over across the bar with a pint which he drunkenly spills over two older patrons, before walking out back to the top of the staircase which he collapses down. In both cases, the editing suggests that these actions are intentional, with low-angle shots of Arthur's upper-body and thinking expression beforehand suggesting their conscious performance. In the latter action though, this relation between physical motion and conscious action is particularly mystified. Beginning with the low-angle shot at the top of the staircase, it is initially unclear whether Arthur is contemplating falling or else drunkenly trying to steady himself (Fig. 2.5). Suddenly an elliptical edit brings us to a reverse-angle where Arthur's body is already in motion of falling (Fig. 2.6). The elided moment here – between cognition and action – creates a disjunction between Arthur's physically excessive activity and an apprehension of a knowing individual agent. This confusing relationship between bodily action and motivation runs throughout the film. Notably, a later sequence shows Arthur being messily beaten up by a pair of squaddies – brothers of Brenda's husband – that culminates in an unclear image of a bloodied Arthur with a faint, ambiguous and .

As these opening presentations of Arthur's body suggests, the question of working-class agency and its relationship to physical action produces an ideological tension which we can read within the formal and narrative logic of *SNASM*. Rather than see this tension as either extra-diegetic, or the consequence of a depoliticised representation of the Northern working-class, I would argue that this tension is itself inscribed on Arthur Seaton's body. Through Arthur's excessive and contradictory embodiment, the film draws attention to a problem of defining working-class agency, and its proper economy. As we will see, this rhetorical separation between physical action and social agency becomes a repeated concern in the North's canonical screen history.
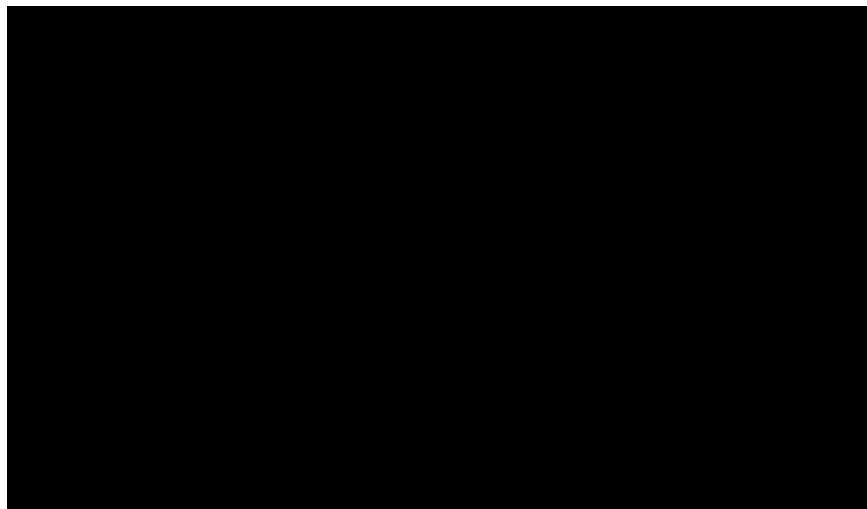
Fig. 2.5
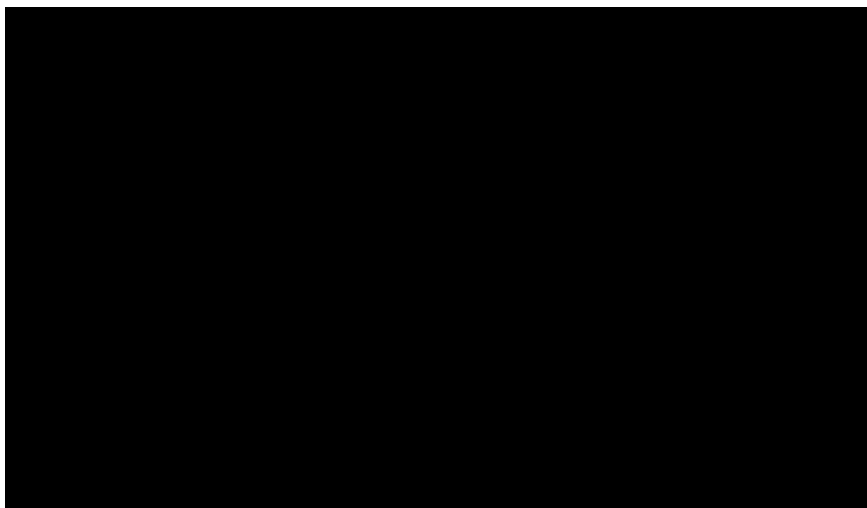
Fig. 2.6

Boys from the Blackstuff

In an essay comparing the British New Wave to what he terms the 'Brit-Grit' social realism of the 1980s, John Hill argues that the realist mode had come to reflect a 'perception that the "decline" of the traditional working-class identified in the earlier New Wave films has reached a certain terminus.'[177] For Hill, where that earlier decade of representation had captured a working-class in flux, moving away from traditional structures of work and community, the 1980s marked a point where that traditional working-class community was no longer plausibly present. If the North re-emerged in this decade, it emerged as the space to make the loss of this way of life felt.

As Hill remarks, the on-screen North is a '[N]orth now blighted by unemployment and poverty and that stands as testimony to the corrosive effects wrought by the 'two nations' policy of the Thatcher regime.'[178] The period, marked by the neoliberal market-based policies of Conservative government, and Thatcher's denial of the importance of regional or working-class protection, reflected a renewed sense of divide between North and South.[179] In the cultural response to this national division, the North is treated as the appropriate space for the representation of the nation's 'have-

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[177] John Hill, 'From 'New Wave' to 'Brit-Grit': Continuity and Difference in Working-Class Realism', in Higson and Ashby (eds.), *British Cinema: Past and Present*, (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 251

[178] John Hill, *British Cinema of the 1980s*: *Issues and Themes*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 167

[179] For a political science and sociological discussion of the perceived widening of regional inequality between North and South, due to the policies of Thatcher's government, see: Ron Martin, 'The Political Economy of Britain's North-South Divide', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 13:4, (1988). Jim Lewis and Alan Townsend, 'The North South Divide: Regional Change in Britain in the 1980s', (Paul Chapman, London, 1988). David Smith, *North and South: Britain's Economic, Social and Political Divide*, (London: Penguin, 1989) p. 272. Bob Jessop, Kevin Bonnett, and Simon Bromley, 'Farewell to Thatcherism? Neo-liberalism and New Times', *New Left Review*, 179, (1990), p.92. Tom Hazeldine, *The Northern Question: A Political History of the North-South Divide*, (London: Verso, 2020), pp. 159-177

nots'. For Hill, the changing iconographies of the North, the rundown housing estates and the abandoned factories, provide an iconography for the expression of a region and class cut adrift.[180] One way in which social realism made sense of the significance of a declining North was through the changing experiences and attitudes invoked by images of men. As Hill notes, 'the male myth' of the 'young, virile working-class hero' was still a prominent aspect of film and television, and yet, without the legitimation of the sorts of industrial labour and employment that shaped the myth, it became increasingly invoked as representing exhausted values.[181] Social realism of this decade charts a 'weakening of the ideologies of masculinity which have traditionally underpinned work (pride in hard, physical labour) and also trade union power.'[182]

However, an important implication of Hill's analysis is the ideological contradiction of the on-screen male image. While the continuing presence of a physically performed masculinity attested to the nostalgic values of a purposeful working-class agency, it did so primarily to mark the loss of those values from the contemporary experience in Conservative Britain. Social realist works of this period paradoxically legitimated *and* dismissed the ideological relevance of the 'male myth' of hard, virile agency as a model of Northern working-class identity. Within British film and television, the virile male body was both a continually valued body, in terms of its signification of lost working-class ideal, and a body whose economic, social and political agency was questioned.

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[180] John Hill, *British Cinema of the 1980s*, p. 166
[181] John Hill is talking specifically about the film *Vroom* (1988), but his overall analysis points to the continues evocation of traditional virile working-class masculinity throughout the 1980s cinema. Ibid., p. 170
[182] Ibid., p. 167

This complex and ambivalent representation of the male body should also be understood within the changing industrial circumstances of British film and television leading into the 1980s. For although social realism was still a central mode in British film and television drama, its representational boundaries were changing. The decade represented a key moment in the production of an increasingly mainstream visual culture authored from regional and minority perspectives, that altered the formal and narrative content of social realism. This alternative visual culture stemmed from a vibrancy in national television production. These alternative perspectives in British production had already been established in the previous decade. The BBC's 'English Regions Drama Unit', set up in the 1971 at Pebble Mill studios in Birmingham, was founded to right criticism that the BBC was too London-centric in its programming. Over the next decade, the unit expanded to other sites in the North, providing support for writers who could provide a more regionally focussed and specific form of television drama. This diversifying of social realist drama was further actualised through the advent of Channel 4 in November 1982, in response to the findings of the Annan Committee, in 1977, that more alternative programming was needed on British television. Positioning itself as a 'publishing house', Channel 4 was committed to a decentralising of television and film production among smaller producers, directly promoting the inclusion of minority and regional voices in British visual culture.

As Paul Marris notes, these changes to production helped destabilise the homogenous picture of the North forwarded in the social realist mode. As Marris argues, the 1980s saw fundamental changes in narrative and form. Firstly, there was a willingness to 'put women instead of men at the centre' of Northern-based narratives, exemplified by the critical success of *Letter to Brezhnev* and *Rita, Sue and Bob Too;* films which weaved themes of female

sexual autonomy into more traditional (masculine) Northern narratives of redundancy, unemployment and the desire to escape.[183] Furthermore, this period of Northern film and television also innovated by challenging the individualist bent of previous eras of social realism, confronting 'social contradictions' that went beyond the representation of the agency and psychology of individual characters.[184] But, at the same time that more radical elements were introduced, this alterity was not total. As Richard Paterson argues, in the case of the English Regions Drama Unit specifically, the ambition to fund complex and alternative regional projects was not always matched by funding. Television drama that seemed in tune with dominant social structures of feeling, and male perspectives, still found funding easiest.[185] Thus, while television proved to be a democratic force, expanding subject matter and style, this was a moment marked by ambivalence as much as it was by the potential of the new.

Boys From The Blackstuff: Yosser Hughes

Within this context of television drama, with an increasing ambivalence towards the stereotypical male consciousness of social realism in Britain, the series _Boys from the Blackstuff_ (1982) stands as seminal Northern text of the decade. Set in Liverpool on the cusp of the instalment of a Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher, the series is comprised of five serialised plays which follow a group of unemployed labourers – Yosser (Bernard Hill), Chrissie (Michael Angelis), Loggo (Alan Igbon), Dixie (Tom Georgeson) and George (Peter Kerrigan) – who are forced to supplement their dole through clandestine and unstable employment. Written by celebrated Liverpudlian playwright Alan Bleasdale, and directed by Phillip

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[183] Paul Marris, 'Northern Realism: An Exhausted Tradition?', _Cineaste_
[184] Ibid, p. 49
[185] Richard Patterson, 'Introduction' in Patterson (ed.), _BFI Dossier 20: Boys from the Blackstuff_, (London: BFI, 1984), p. 2

Saville, the programme was an immediate success. Airing initially on BBC2 in October 1982, such was its popularity that the series re-aired on BBC1 almost immediately after the completion of its final episode.

As Paterson argues, the programme's success could be partly attributed to its functioning as a 'male melodrama', expressing the frustrations of Northern working-class adrift in an increasingly post-industrial economy with little job opportunities. [186] Specifically, it is the character of Yosser Hughes who functions emblematically for this absence of masculine agency. His famous catchphrase 'gizza job' became a slogan for the struggles of working-class life. As contemporary critics identified, the cultural phenomenon of Yosser was, in part, due to the character's address to different understandings of working-classness in the early 1980s. David Lusted argues that Yosser's construction functions on multiple registers of class knowledge and taste, appealing to audiences across the country. Lusted argues that Yosser's 'tragic working-class hero' appealed to 'the working-class male audience for the combination of masculine power, loyalty and swift justice…and the middle-class audience in general (for whom Yosser is a tragic victim) to arouse social conscience'.[187] Like Hill's reading of the discourse of the 'male myth', Lusted describes Yosser as representing a popular amalgam of physical agency and social powerlessness.

This reading is also evident in Kevin O'Sullivan understanding of Yosser as an example of the 'symbolic transfer of [a working-class] viewer's frustration to a character who then unleashes his frustration in the form of

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[186] I reference Paterson's use of melodrama, here, practically. In subsequent discussions of the deteriorated body a more precise theorisation of what melodrama means in the contemporary representation of Northern masculinity is considered.
[187] David Lusted, 'What's Left of Blackstuff?: Political Meaning for a Popular Audience' in Richard Paterson (ed.), *BFI Dossier 20: Boys from the Blackstuff*, (London: BFI, 1984), p. 41

violence'.[188] O'Sullivan's reading of violence is reflected most evidently in Yosser's act of headbutting which the character performs throughout the series, both to hurt others and to hurt himself. Yosser frequently headbutts walls to release the anger he feels at his social agency being constrained in some way. For instance, in Episode 4 ('Yosser's Story') his children are taken away by the state because his house in such disrepair due to Yosser's unemployment and his consequent declining mental state after being unable to find a job. In a key moment, Yosser bursts in on the mental health doctor who he believes to know where his children are, and after not getting an answer then begins to repeatedly headbutt the wall of her office in desperation. As O'Sullivan's analysis suggests then, Yosser seems to externalise through physical action the intense frustration over his lack of agency to better his own social circumstance. In this sense, Yosser can be seen as providing insight as to why social realist texts mobilised a traditional image of physically strong masculinity to express the decline of the Northern working-class. Yosser embodies a kind of physical agency which the increasingly de-industrial economy of the 1980s can no longer use as labour.[189] The values of physical power and justice that Lusted interprets in Yosser points to a continued potential in the working-class man to work, the

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[188] Kevin O'Sullivan, 'A Look at Boys from the Blackstuff' in Richard Paterson (ed.), *BFI Dossier 20: Boys from the Blackstuff*, (London: BFI, 1984), p.38

[189] This emphatic presentation of this dislocation between action and external social motivation has correlatives in other realist television of the 1980s. It is beyond the practical limits of this essay to draw an extended comparison, but a similar investment in the cathartic but socially impotent release of physical action is evident in the final scene of the single play *Road* (1987), directed by Alan Clarke for the anthology series *Screenplay* (1986-1993). In this sequence a group comprised of two male friends – Brink (Neil Dudgeon) and Eddie (William Armstrong) – and two female friends – Louise (Jane Horrocks) and Carol (Mossie Smith) drink and trash the already derelict living room of the men's terraced house. The four move wildly and scream their frustrations with their life and with the unfairness of society before eventually being collectively stilled (to an almost catatonic degree) by the music of Otis Redding. Like *Boys, Road* avoids a purely naturalistic treatment of the body, and instead heightens our sense of the symbolic importance of movement and action as expressions of negative and futile agency.

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maintenance of personal qualities that society once recognised, but that are no longer utilised by an unfair society.

Chrissie

While Yosser provided a point of identification for viewers at the time it is important to note that the programme increasingly complicates his response to his loss of purpose through how it depicts other characters and their navigation of working-class identity after industry. Alan Lovell importantly notes how Bleasdale conceived of the programme as a social document which nevertheless resisted what the writer saw as an instrumentalising depiction of the working-class found in the didactic and political work of 'outsiders' like Ken Loach.[190] This ambition is evident in the way that the show approaches characterisation in structure, which, in focussing on a particular character each episode, follows the repercussions of unemployment and economic precarity across both domestic and working worlds. This structure characterises these men as involved in an amalgam of different roles and relationships. By following them across different social spaces, the show broadens the notion of working-class community to include the family, and thus broadens its examination of the effects of structural unemployment to women and children.

This alternative feeling of Northern masculinity, and relation to agency and community, comes to the fore in a later episode, 'Shop Thy Neighbour'. In this episode, we see Chrissie caught between crises in his home life and in the public world. Under investigation for benefits fraud, 'Shop Thy Neighbour' details the strain that these dire economic circumstances are putting on Chrissie's role as husband and father. Unable

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[190] Alan Lovell, 'The Context of British Social Drama', in Richard Paterson (ed.), *BFI Dossier 20: Boys from the Blackstuff*, (London: BFI, 1984), p.25

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to feed his children, Chrissie's relationship with his wife Angie (Julie Walters) is in rapid deterioration. Their arguments culminate in a moment in which Angie expresses all her frustration at Chrissie's masculine and Liverpudlian attitude of accepting his lot with good natured acceptance and humour. Angie cries:

> I've had enough of that 'if you don't laugh you'll cry'. I've heard it for years. This stupid soddin' city's full of it. Well why don't you cry, why don't you scream, why don't you fight back, you bastard.

What is particularly important, in relation to Chrissie's relationship to masculinity, is the way in which Angie's speech relates crying and screaming with fighting back. Angie's words frame "crying and screaming" as positive forms of action. We can re-phrase this into bodily terms. Whereas laughter is a sign of typical hard body, staying strong and resolute and not letting the world get to you, crying is an example of a softer masculinity, being openly affected by the world and reacting to it. Angie's call for Chrissie to cry is a call to no longer be held to the myths of hard masculinity, to his sense of duty as patriarch, to rather be open to softness and to work together with her.

In the climactic scene of 'Shop Thy Neighbour', we see an apparent reconciliation between Chrissie and Angie that is based upon a repudiation of hard extensive masculine agency. This repudiation comes from Chrissie's reactions to his own desperate slaughter of a pet goose. During another war of words with Angie, where the bleak reality of Chrissie's inability to provide the food for the kids' dinner is again brought up, he frantically rushes down stairs, loads a shotgun, and in front of a horrified Angie shoots his geese. In one sense, this action is Chrissie finally performing the action of a breadwinner,

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putting food on the table in the manner of a hunter-gatherer. The way in which Saville stages the shooting is almost a parody of phallic masculine agency (Fig. 2.7). The shooting itself then seems to be a heightened moment of externalising masculine agency, quite literally it is Chrissie gaining a feeling of agency and control over his world through the imposition of his will and action onto his immediate surroundings.

However, the staging of the aftermath drains any of the positive values of this kind of masculine agency. Rather than cut away to the goose's carcass, which would be to show the audience the product of his actions, the camera remains fixed on Chrissie's reactions. In stark contrast to the purposefulness of the act of shooting, this reaction shot of Chrissie reveals a profound indecisiveness, communicated in terms of his stance, which begins to sway haphazardly as Chrissie looks from side to side not knowing how to act next. The extensiveness of the body becomes a body that appears to collapse inwards, wrapped up in its own feelings of hopelessness and expressing this in terms of movements which have neither determination nor reason. From here, Chrissie throws the gun to the ground as if in disgust at the ultimately meaningless killing, before sitting down on a crate besides Angie at the backdoor and beginning to weep into his hands (Figs. 2.8 and 2.9) This act of crying is the catalyst for Angie to forgive him; she kneels, and the two embrace hands in a moment of collective emotion.
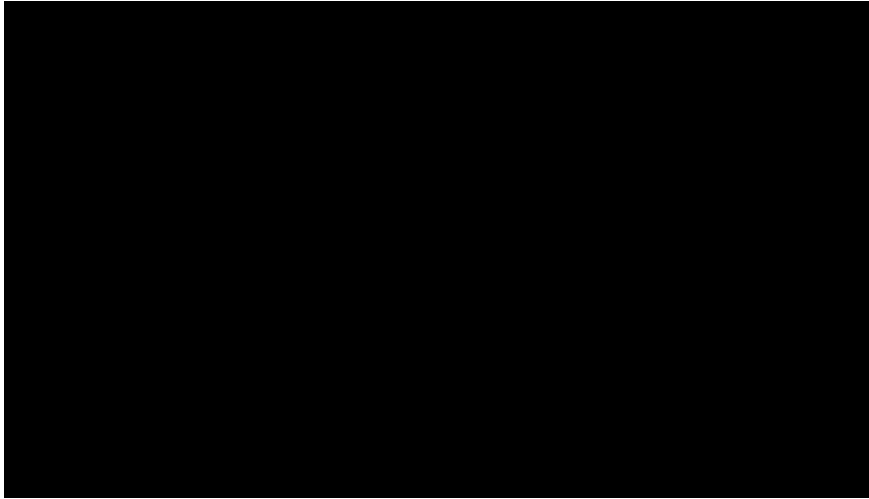
Fig. 2.7

Fig. 2.8
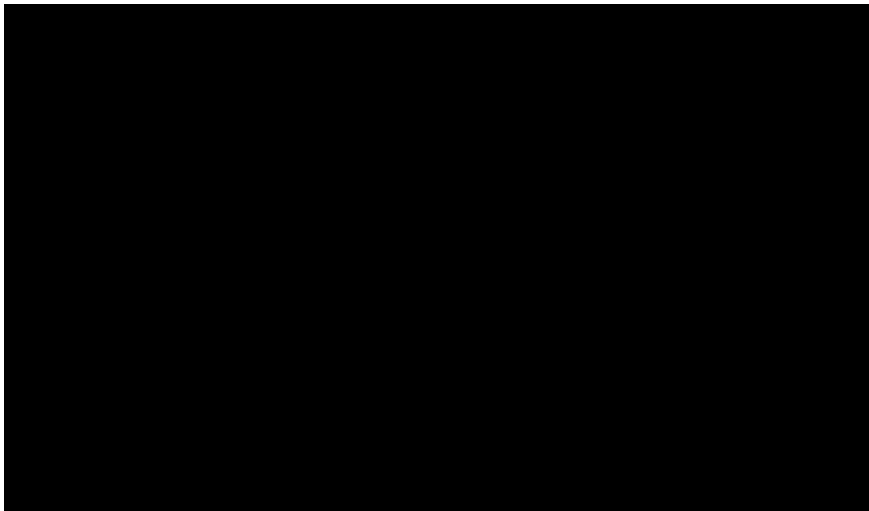
Fig. 2.9

This moment should be read as a gesture towards a mode of masculine action that is based not on hard extensivity, but a softer solidarity, one that crosses gender divisions. In representing this, I would argue that the show does offer a vision of a potentially alternative working-class politics, one that cannot be reduced to traditional images of hard Northern masculine action. As John Hill states, a problem of British social realism is its adherence to a classical narrative realism in which 'the making of things happen' requires that 'individual psychology' is framed as the driving force behind political agency and not 'more general social, political and economic relations.'[191] In this scene however, Bleasdale and Saville subvert this correspondence between political agency and individual action. By refusing to show us the goose as a product of Chrissie's actions, and instead focussing on his subsequent lack of purpose, the director indicates the inability of individual action to deal with the wider social problems of unemployment and poverty. Even if Chrissie has put food on the table for that night, the staging leaves us under no illusion that anything has been solved. By subverting the social realist notion of individual action as capable of changing economic relations, the show suggests the absence of wider social and political reform, the absence of a larger political intervention that is needed in the working-class industrial North.

George

If I am arguing that through Chrissie *Boys* disavows masculinist notions of physical agency, how does this disavowal interact with wider themes across the North's representational history: namely, decline,

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[191] John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-1963,* (London: BFI, 1986), p.57

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loss, and the impossibility of escape? Is the rejection of 'hardness' and of more individualised images of agency, merely the acceptance of the North's irreparable decline?

David Lusted appears to make this argument in his criticism of the series' engagement with traditions of working-class politics. Specifically, he points to *Boys'* representation of Snowy Malone – a friend of the boys and vocal Marxist who dies on a building site in the opening episode – as indicative of a 'systematic evacuation by death of the labour militancy' through which *Boys* 'effectively dates the tradition from which it comes, leaving a political absence' for the characters.[192] This is an absence which he sees as translating to the attitudes of the narrative, itself:

> *Boys From the Blackstuff*, sadly, disconnects the political from the history of labour activism by antiquating that history, evacuating from it women and the contemporary, leaving the challenged viewer immobilised.[193]

Although, he is referring to the viewer, this reference to the programme's immobilising politics is telling in its bodily metaphor. Implicitly, Lusted's argument amounts to this: that *Boys* communicates the inadequacy of old forms of working-class political agency – associated with the proletarian Northern man – but, in fixating on the death of this figure, by rendering this body immobile, the series fails to provide the viewer with the means through which to imagine how the working-class might move on from these antiquated forms.

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[192] David Lusted, 'What's Left of Blackstuff?: Political Meaning for a Popular Audience' in Richard Paterson (ed.), *BFI Dossier 20: Boys from the Blackstuff*, p. 41
[193] Ibid.

In relation to this question of the programme's political emptiness, it is important to consider how the series concludes: on the death of George Malone.[194] A former docker and militant Labour organiser, George is already terminally ill by the beginning of the series. Although physically incapacitated, he nevertheless wants to work and help provide for his adult children who are themselves struggling for employment in Liverpool's barren post-industrial economy. He remains on the periphery of the series' many plots, a figure whose continuing dignity in seeking work becomes a tragic reminder of the absence of the old structures of working-class solidarity and political power fostered by trade unionism.

The title of the series' last episode, "George's Last Ride", refers to the character's final moments. On the verge of death, George takes one last trip around the docks. As he is pushed around in a wheelchair by Chrissie, George recounts stories of the waterfront where he spent most of life toiling and organising alongside his fellow working-class Liverpudlians. The sequence ends at the Albert Dock. A thriving global trade port during the industrial revolution and once the bedrock of the city's working-class identity, the scene provides visual evidence of the Dock's state of total disaster in 1981. The programme comprehends Liverpool's dereliction not simply through its location photography but also on George's aged deathly body. Asking Chrissie to stand him up, George looks out over the dock and delivers a speech about his still

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[194] George is played by well established Liverpudlian actor Peter Kerrigan, and Kerrigan's own past work lingers in the biography of the character. Kerrigan's first acting role was as a striking docker in *The Big Flame* (1969), a sparsely realist depiction of strike action, and its political repression, written by Jim Allen and directed for *The Wednesday Play* by Ken Loach. In this scene, Kerrigan's intertextual stardom seems to express not only longing for a now lost proletarian working-class but also for a lost form of televisual realism which engaged directly with Marxist political ideology.

ongoing dreams that his city and his class might prosper. Framed in close-up, we see only George's face as he says his final words through laboured breaths: "I can't believe that there's no hope…I can't." As he speaks these words, George's face itself seems to visually symbolise the dying state of the Albert Dock. His pallid skin is drained of blood just as the dock has long been drained, cut off from the River Mersey (Figs. 2.10 and 2.11). The scene concludes with George's death, an event which is invested with monumental pathos. The scene continues, cutting to an aerial long-shot of Chrissie who frantically sprints along the Albert Dock's quay, leaving the old man's body in search of help. As Chrissie runs, the shot zooms out to show the full scale of the boggy Dock's dereliction. This is the last shot of George, and it can be read symbolically – with the death of George and the decline of the Albert Dock reflecting the 'passing of a moment' in Britain's 'socialist, labour tradition'.[195] However, while George's death clearly inscribes a sense of irreversible loss, the shot doesn't quite pronounce finality, as it is important to consider that this is also Chrissie's shot.
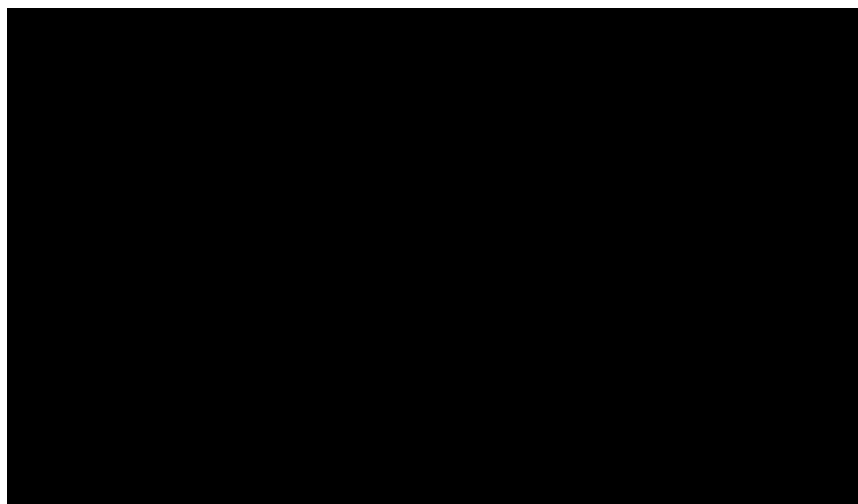
Fig. 2.10

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[195] Robin Nelson, *TV Drama in Transition*: *Forms, Values and Cultural Change*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p.54
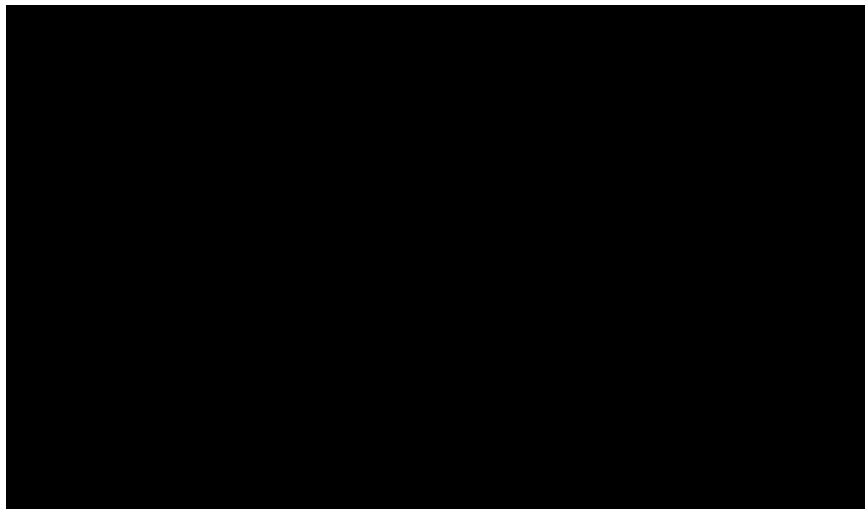
Fig 2.11

Although the zoom outwards seems to relate symbolically to George's death, it is in fact more closely aligned with Chrissie's movements. Chrissie runs for help along the dock but his progress feels impeded by a matched zoom that always leaves more space in front of him and never allows him to reach the edge of the frame (Figs. 2.12 and 2.13). This zoom pushes out in synchronisation with Chrissie's movements, but at a contradictory tempo: the slow retreat against the frenzy of Chrissie lends a knowing quality to the narration, underlining the futility of individual action in response to wider forces of Liverpool's decline. Like with the ending of 'Shop Thy Neighbour', physical externalising movement is undermined here. George is gone, and Chrissie's attempts to 'do something' through running for help cannot change anything.

However, even as Chrissie's running appears narratively futile, it is nevertheless thematically and politically provocative in a way that resists the immobilising readings which David Lusted applies to the text. If George's dead body is a symbolic body, related to the wider space of the Albert Dock in such a way as to suggest the absolute correspondence between the loss of a certain type of man and the loss

of form of working-class agency, then Chrissie's is a different type of body. His running returns the Dock to being a navigable space; a space one moves through, interacts with, and (even as a remote possibility) can change. Here, in the aftermath of George's death, *Boys* both accepts the bleakness of the scale of the post-industrial North's problems and poses the question of what actions are now feasible after the loss of the old working-class.

Across the series, *Boys From the Blackstuff* speaks to a moment in which old models of masculine agency no longer make sense. However, although the series lends weight to the destruction of this way of life, it does not use the body solely as an emblem of the fatal decline of Liverpool or the working-class. Rather, through its representation of Chrissie's difficult navigation of his own embodied relationship to values of masculine agency, the series suggests that new forms of sociality are possible, if difficult to currently imagine, but that they require leaving behind masculinist performances of working-classness. The series' reflects the complex ideological negotiations at work within British culture in the 1980s, where the mourning of the loss of one way of life is registered deeply, while, at the same time, provoking artistic work to represent alternative ways of knowing what class, gender and the North mean after industry. However, as canonical histories of the North indicate, this alternative spirit is much more difficult to locate in the popular male comedies of the 1990s.
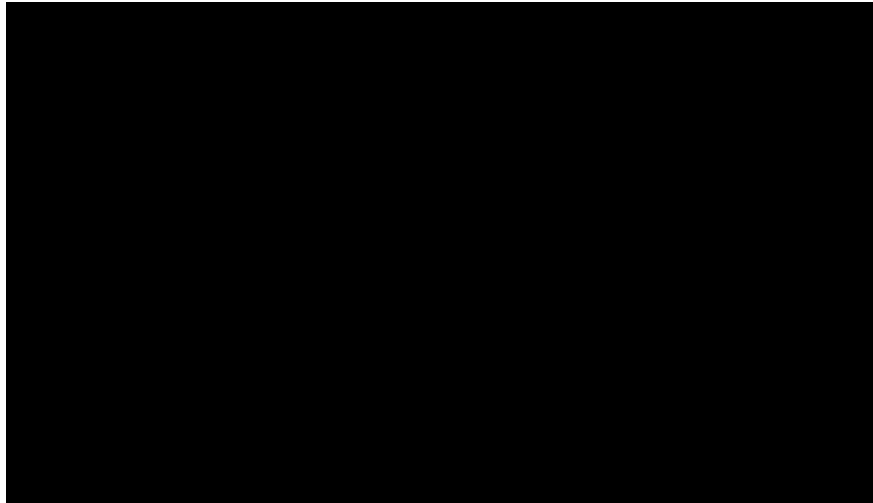
Fig. 2.12
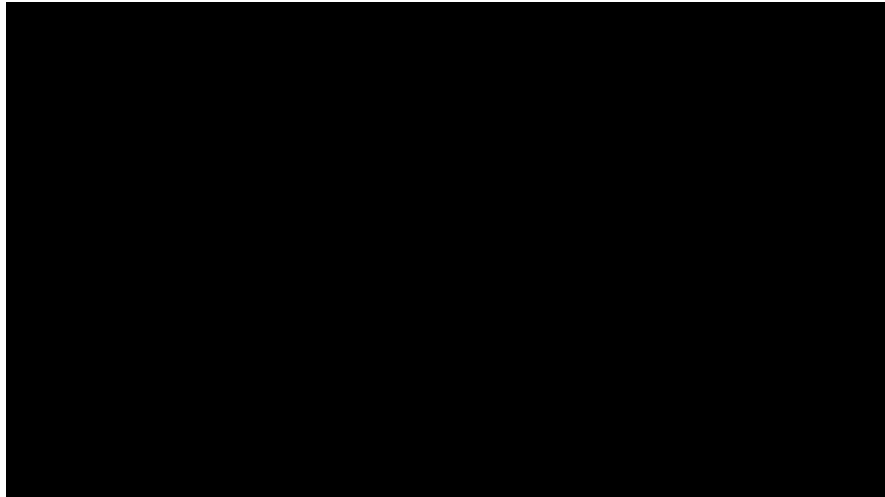
Fig. 2.13

The Full Monty

If the canonical Northern texts of the 1980s can be broadly defined as bleak documents of a process of de-industrialisation which was felt as still ongoing, then we might define the North of the 1990s by a small group of films which deal with "what comes after". The bodies which populate the canonical Northern films at the end of the millennium are bodies navigating the afterlife of traditional forms of industry. However, unlike the blunt fatalism of *Boys from the Blackstuff*, the Northern cinema of this period is

characterised by its optimism about the aftermath of post-industrial decline. The decade saw the emergence of a popular brand of Northern realism commonly associated with the films *Brassed Off* (1996), *Billy Elliot* (2000) and *The Full Monty*.[196] As Hill puts it, these films 'revolve around the recovery of pride and self-dignity in the face of economic adversity and social decay.'[197] All three films take place in the context of the collapse of various Yorkshire industries, and centre on the working-class men whose sense of communal identity is imperilled by the breaking up of the traditional structures of industrial labour and unionism. While the work is certainly gone, the films nevertheless narrate the hopeful possibility that worth, community and agency might be retained through alternate forms of sociality (the eponymous brass band in *Brassed Off)* or alternate forms of labour (stripping in *The Full Monty*). Moreover, as Cora Kaplan argues, key to these films' apparent optimism is their mobilisation of 'entertainment'[198] as a mode within which 'social reality' is both 'sharpened' and 'sugar-coated' by plots that both pay attention to the difficult realities of post-industry and, at the same time, use those realities as pre-texts for comedic and occasionally escapist plots.[199]

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[196] These three films are considered were the most popular Northern-set films of the time and have been repeatedly centred in discussions of this period's themes and politics. Outside of these three, other examples of popular Northern cinema that use the decline of working-class communities as the backdrop for entertaining and personal narratives include: *Gabriel & Me* (2001) and *Purely Belter* (2000). Although this period is constructed as a re-emergence of men at the centre of the North, Penny Woolcock's films *Tina Goes Shopping* (1999) and *Tina Takes a Break* (2001) are examples of women-led Northern-set realist comedy that is often ignored in the canon. As I discuss at the end of this chapter, the partiality of the canon also effects what kinds of male bodies are treated as paradigmatic in this period.

[197] John Hill, 'Failure and Utopianism: Representations of the Working Class in British Cinema of the 1990s', in R Murphy (ed.), *British Cinema of the 90s*, (BFI: London)

[198] Kaplan herself does not use the term 'mode' but her description of entertainment as 'both form and content', and her argument that entertainment distinguishes these films from earlier periods of kitchen-sink realism, certainly seems to suggest a more specified application of entertainment than simply as denoting popular cinema. See Cora Kaplan, 'The Death of the Working Class Hero', *New Formations*, 52 (2004), pp. 94-95

[199] Cora Kaplan, 'The Death of the Working Class Hero', *New Formations*, 52 (2004), pp. 94-95

Of this group of films, *The Full Monty* best encapsulates this turn to optimistic and entertaining Northern realism. The story focuses on Gaz (Robert Carlyle) and his friend Dave (Mark Addy), two middle-aged men living in Sheffield who are without work and facing a crisis of identity after the steelworks closes. Like the Northern narratives of the 1980s, the film expresses the hopelessness felt by men whose days are only filled by standing in dole queues and signing on. However, in *The Full Monty*, Gaz and Dave express their feelings of obsolescence in relation to gender. What the film expresses as most horrifying for Gaz is not the lack of work, necessarily, but that, in a world without industrial labour, women have seemingly taken over the public sphere: they're working in the service jobs, they're running their own nights at the social clubs, and they're even (as one scene makes comedic light of) using the urinals. Thus, the film constructs a world where Gaz and Dave are less driven to find work out of financial necessity, and more out of the desire to regain a lost masculine pride. The film's central scheme – in which Gaz and Dave form a stripping group, alongside other middle-aged men, and promise to bare all for one night only at the local club – provides the entertaining conceit on which gendered agency can be regained and revived through new forms of work and performance.

As this plot synopsis suggests, *The Full Monty* foregrounds the male body as a site of social change. The film's investment in the body as a visually and symbolically significant site of meaning has attracted a plethora of critical attention in the decades since, and has, specifically, located the film at the junction of studies of masculinity (particularly within feminist film criticism) and studies of the changing economic and political landscape of

the 1990s.[200] Within the historically directed focus of this chapter I want to approach this criticism by asking a specific question that I believe cuts across areas of discussion: to what extent does *The Full Monty's* representation of the male body reflect new ways of imagining Northern working-class identity?

<u>*The Full Monty*: New Labour and the North</u>

In the narrative movement of Gaz and Dave from labourers to performers, the film thematically relates a hopeful potential for working men to re-train their bodies for new kind of labour in the neoliberal economy of services, a theme that suited the spirit of New Labour forward-looking enterprise and egalitarian opportunity. The arc of the men turning around their social obsolescence through entrepreneurial spirit and an untapped bodily potential was described by Tony Blair as reflecting a 'real British spirit and enterprise and initiative.'[201] The film seemingly encapsulated a cultural integration of the Northern male figure into the modernising image of Britain, it emphasised an ostensibly entrepreneurial body as an image of hope for disaffected working-classes. This fit with the Blair mantra that personal enterprise could lift even the most desolate and forgotten within the nation.[202]

However, this depiction of an exciting modernising Northern England was questioned by critics in the years following its release. Subsequently, *The Full Monty* has been seized on in scholarship as a text which expressed a

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[200] For criticism of the film's approach to masculinity, see: Jack Halberstam, 'Oh Behave: Austin Power and the Drag Kings', GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies, 7(3), (2001)

[201] H. Lawrence, and A. Waple, "Blair Finds the Moral of *The Full Monty*", *Sheffield Star*, 30th January 1998, p.3, cited in Kelly Farrell, "Naked Nation: *The Full Monty*, Working-Class Masculinity, and the British Image", *Men and Masculinities*, 6:2, (2002), p. 132

[202] Tony Blair famously gave a speech in 1997 declaring: "The Britain of the elite is over. The new Britain is a meritocracy." Quoted in Imogen Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2013), p. 153

structure of feeling at the end of the millennium, a cultural moment which was both post-industrial and yet still obsessed with the industrial North as a representational space. John Hill, for instance, read *The Full Monty* and *Brassed Off* as 'delayed 1980s films', because of their continuing interest in unemployment and the weakening of the ideologies of traditional working-class masculinity.[203] Hill's notion of these films as 'delayed' suggests something of how these films represent a North as a world that is both noticeably *after* industry, and yet held back by the same kinds of people, experiences and values that British film and television has commonly associated with industrial working-class life.

Yet, Hill's comment suggests too simple a correspondence between social realism in the 1980s and the attitudes and strategies of the more popular entertainment of the 1990s. For many critics responding to Hill, while the 1990s shares the 1980s interest in economic marginalisation and gender, its representation of these social issues is markedly different because a treatment of class and gender that is de-historicising in nature. For Claire Monk, *The Full Monty* reflected a cultural tendency to sublimate class divisions into simpler, and less historically embedded, forms of division based primarily around gender. The film's foregrounding of shifting gender relations allows the narrative to provide a sense of pathos and achievement, in men triumphing over women, while not having to address the nation's still existing economic disparities.[204] While stripping does not solve their long-term unemployment, it does resolve the personal crisis of masculine

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[203] John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 167
[204] This reformulation of class divides and social inequalities into other forms of identity is, as Ewa Mazierska tells us, an important ideological objective of 'neoliberal class politics' enacted through culture, as a way for 'political elites to exploit identity politics' and foreground forms of community that elides economic division. See: Ewa Mazierska, *From Self-fulfilment to Survival of the Fittest: Work in European Cinema from the 1960s to the Present*, (New York: Berghahn on Film, 2015), p. 199

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pride. Thus, *The Full Monty* 'translates an intractable real-life crisis in male economic and social roles into a more diegetically resolvable crisis in the relations between men and women.'[205]

In Cora Kaplan's reading of *The Full Monty*, she notes how the film's symbolic transference of class identity into gender was imbricated with a wider rhetorical antipathy towards class politics undertaken by New Labour.[206] Kaplan places *The Full Monty* in the discursive context, arguing that the film emphasises masculine community, through the importance of the men working together to re-earn their pride, as the emotional heart of working-class life. For Kaplan, this transcendence of class that nevertheless remains attached to traditional forms of masculine community (which exclude women), creates a depiction of post-industrial life that is paradoxically progressive and reactionary, and which 'neither mourns the past, praises the present or looks forward to the future'.[207]

The Residual Labouring Body

Following on from this substantial scholarship, I want to argue that in *The Full Monty* these tensions are mapped quite explicitly onto a male body that is caught between different imaginings of Northern symbolic value. This is essentially a problem of imaging a new kind of Northern male body for a modernising England and a changing economy of services. If Gaz and Dave retrain for a different kind of work, the way in which the film frames the bodies still constructs them with a Northern masculine identity in which the labouring body is the natural state of working-class men. This is an

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[205] Ibid., p. 281

[206] Blair's declaration, in 1999, that 'the class war is over', has been viewed as indicative of the party's decoupling of 'economic inequalities from the conceptual and political language of class'. See: Imogen Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, (London : Zed Books Ltd., 2013), p. 153

[207] Cora Kaplan, 'The Death of the Working Class Hero', *New Formations* 52, (2004), p. 107

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identification which these kinds of men cannot expect to escape from even in the face of its decline.

We are brought into the world of *The Full Monty* through a commodified iconography of the Northern landscape. As Julia Hallam argues, this commodification was, in fact, a strategy for the film to achieve the kind of global success for which it was celebrated. Hallam writes that 'the working-class films of the mid-1990s occupy an ambiguous cultural terrain. They celebrate locality, yet at the same time they *commodify the cultural identities of economically marginalised communities* [my emphasis], re-packing their experiences for sale in a global marketplace.'[208] Hallam locates an ideological contradiction within the industrial project of marketing a new kind of modern and global British national cinema. For a Northern-based film to have global appeal, it is reliant on pointing to well-worn narratives and images of the declining North. The economic marginalisation is not so much examined by this cinema as treated rather as a fact of the place. The body too, is involved in this initial commodification, which is made evident in how the film relates the men's bodies to the traditional urban Northern landscape. As commentators at the time noted, *The Full Monty's* depiction of Sheffield is very much reliant on an iconography of Northern urbanity that closely resembles the imagery of the British New Wave. For Catherine Pepinster, the film's attachment to images of 'dereliction' and 'deserted factories' reinforced an unchanging North borrowed from films like *'Room at the Top* and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning.'*[209] Despite its tale of 'men

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[208] Julia Hallam, "Film, Class and National Identity: Re-imaging Communities in the Age of Devolution" in Ashby and Higson (eds.), *British Cinema Past and Present,* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 270

[209] Catherine Pepinster, "Sheffield's really a post-industrial paradise: Many in the city are cross at its bleak portrayal in 'The Full Monty', *The Independent*, (7th December 1997), <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/sheffield-s-really-a-postindustrial-paradise-1287320.html>, accessed 18th March 2019

struggling against adversity' in a modern world, *The Full Monty* stereotypes the North as an anachronistic industrial land.[210] While Pepinster here notes a separation between the entrepreneurialism of the male body and the datedness of the world they inhabit, I want to suggest that the film, in its opening especially, ties the body and the landscape together to implicitly suggest their natural correspondence.

On multiple occasions, a sequence begins, or transitions, via an establishing shot that are overtly references 'that long shot of our town from that hill'. In these shots, the hills and factories surrounding Sheffield form a background which draws our attention away from the characters momentarily to allow a lingering appreciation of the landscape. The first such shot occurs in the opening scene. The film begins with Gaz, Dave, and Gaz's son Nathan (William Snape), stealing disused steel girders from their old factory in order to make money to supplement their dole. While trying to escape with their score, Gaz and Dave end up on a rusted car in the middle of a derelict canal. When Nathan walks off in frustration, midway through the task of ferrying the men across via a makeshift plank, we get a sudden comedic extreme-long-shot of the two men adrift in the canal on top of the car (Figs. 2.14 – 2.15). There is at least a clear symbolic message to the shot: Gaz and Dave are sinking in a world in which they are no longer of use, much like the car they are atop. However, this symbolism reveals a lack of tension between the poles of 'inside' and 'outside', that Higson sees as communicating an individualist agency within 'that long shot of our town'. In fact, the depoliticising tendency that Higson prescribes to this shot is more appropriate to a film like *The Full Monty*. In the New Wave, Higson recognises how these establishing shots narrate a tension between individuals and their social world. Even if they place the spectator at a

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[210] Ibid.

pleasurable distance, these long shots nevertheless suggest a distinction between an inside and outside of the urban space which 'represent[s] the extent to which the protagonist is trapped within the city and the intensity with which he or she desires to escape.'[211] This comes about from the feeling of the body as not belonging to that urban space. By contrast, there is no obvious tension between a narrativized body and spectacular landscape in these shots in *The Full Monty*. Rather, the film repeatedly fixes the body as continuous with its desolated urban landscape. Quite literally, Gaz and Dave are *within* this landscape, there is no possibility of their perspective being outside. For the pair, the oppressive deterioration of the world around them does not signal the need for escape, as is the case for the New Wave protagonists, rather their figures are made as representative of the terminal decline of the North. The comedy of the shot is heightened by the fact there is no resolution, we don't see how the men escape. This is a form of comedic entertainment prefaced on a characterisation of such men as physically incapable of escape.
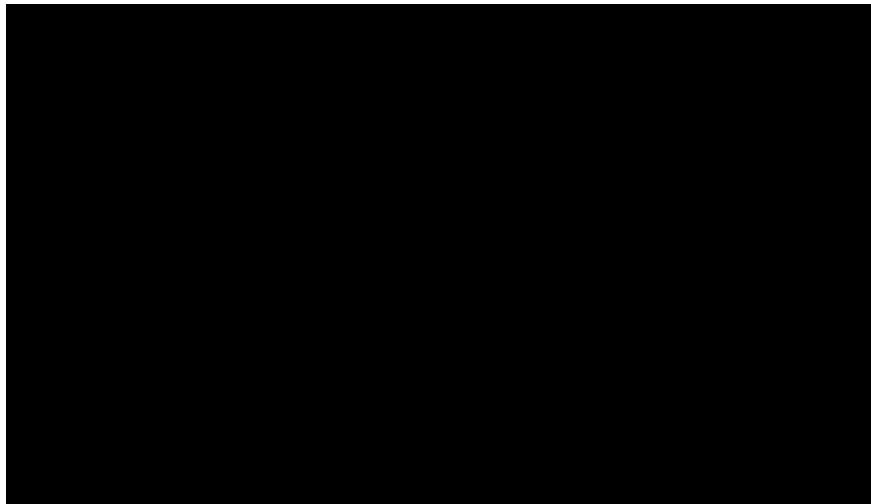
Fig. 2.14

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[211] Andrew Higson, , 'Place, Space, Spectacle: Landscape and Townscape in the "Kitchen Sink" Film', Screen, 25:2, (1984), pp. 14-15
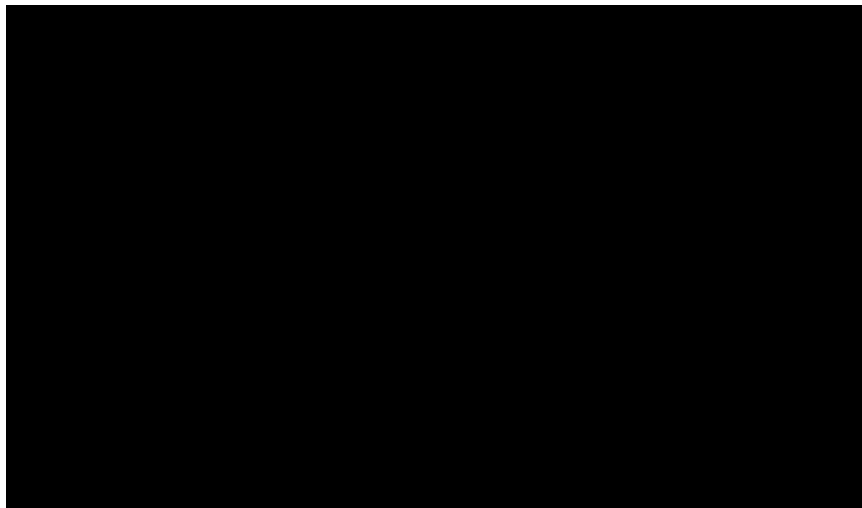
Fig. 2.15

It must be said that as the film progresses, these shots 'of our town from the hill' become less frequent. One might interpret a narrative and thematic purpose to this pattern, whereby stripping allows the male body to transcend this association with the scrap of the declining working-class world. However, the terms on which the narrative supports the men's increasing agency and enterprise is important. The film does not actually support the idea that escape into other forms of work is possible or preferable. Modern patterns of employment are repeatedly framed as serving no purpose - Gaz heckles another economically struggling man, Lomper for guarding an empty factory - or else precarious in a world where Sheffield is a small part of a multinational flow of production and consumption - as implied by Gaz's refusal to work for minimum wage in the 'black hole of Calcutta' of his ex-wife's factory.

However, with its narrative driven by the conventions of popular entertainment, *The Full Monty* must attempt to imagine a positive alternative to its characters' unemployment and its world's dereliction. The film does this not necessarily by imagining *alternative* forms of work, but rather by suggesting that traditional masculine embodied labour can be repurposed for a different kind of consumption. The male body of industrial labour can

itself be the commodity. The value of the men as symbols of industrial labour becomes the key to their post-industrial enterprise. As the narrative progresses, the film does not subvert the commodification of the Northern male body, but rather it narrativizes that commodification as the route out.

While the men re-train their bodies, the correspondence between these bodies and the industrial landscape remains. What alters is the way in which the body relates to this space. Significantly, the abandoned steel mill which had previously employed Gaz, and many of the men who join him in stripping, becomes the site in which the men come together, and practice their routines. The frequency of the mill as a site for dancing reinforces the film's attempt to re-purpose the spaces and bodies of traditional Northern industrial work.[212] Most significantly, the mise-en-scene of these sequences constructs a relationship between body and space that suggests a potential for the men to transform both to be regain an economic and embodied purposefulness and agency.

When we first see the mill in the film's opening scene, the camera is often kept at an extreme distance, with high angle long shots establishing the total emptiness and decay of the once busy factory floors. After undertaking the decision to strip, the film revises its representation of the men relative to this factory space. Where previously the space dwarfs the male body, increasingly the delineation of the factory space becomes motivated by the economic goals and drive of the group, as they begin to use their body for performance. The key scene evidencing the transformation of this space is

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[212] Narratively, *The Full Monty* justifies the mill's reappropriated use through Lomper's occupation as security guard, which means he has the access keys. Furthermore, the mill makes practical sense as large and abandoned space that the group can use freely and, importantly, in secret.

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the final dress rehearsal of the stripping routine; the first time we see the men dance for an extended period.

In this rehearsal, the factory space becomes a makeshift theatre. The family of one of the dancers, Horse (Paul Barber), is brought in and placed on some old sofas in the middle of the factory floor, and the men file out from an office in the back which functions as the curtain dividing on-stage from off-stage. Before the dance, we get a series of longer shots that makes visible the cobbled together appearance of this set-up. However, once the dancing begins, this impression dissipates, as the performing body transforms the space around it. The sequence is composed nearly entirely of interior shots which are close-ups of the performing bodies; there are no interior shots which re-establish the emptiness of the space, instead the diegetic space seems to become subordinate to watching the male body at work. Moreover, the editing of this sequence delineates the factory space according to a shot/reverse-shot pattern; shots of the men dancing are frequently cut into the female audience responding, with the wider sense of a space being elided through shallow focus that renders the relationship between performer and spectator as governing the spatial logic of what we are seeing (Fig 2.16). The mise-en-scene reflects the successful transformation of the factory into a space of theatrical performance, one that reflects the purposeful agency of the body at work. This sense of the body engaged in moving performance is also key here in terms of suggesting an active rather than passive masculine embodiment. A dominant strategy is for the looks of the female audience, Horse's family, to be cued, first, by the active gaze of the performer aware that they are eliciting a reaction (Figs 2.17 and 2.18). As such, the performing body is an active and extensive body. Thus, with the factory setting referencing world of labouring bodies, and the editing and shooting of bodies emphasising successful performance, the scene conveys

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the potential for men to re-invent industrial labour into an entrepreneurial labour.
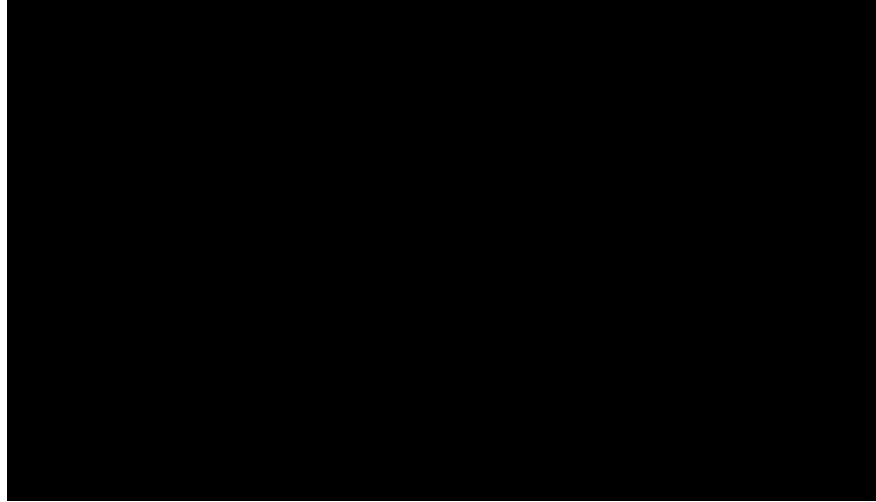
Fig. 2.16
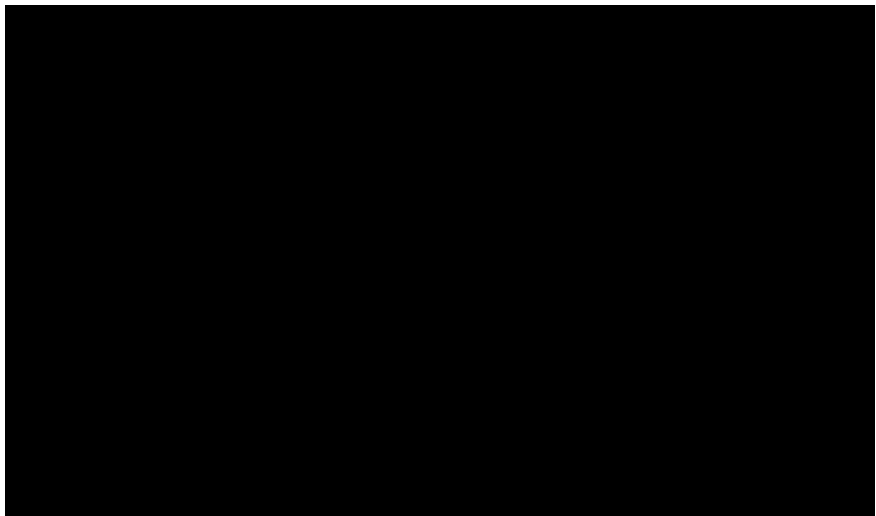
Fig. 2.17
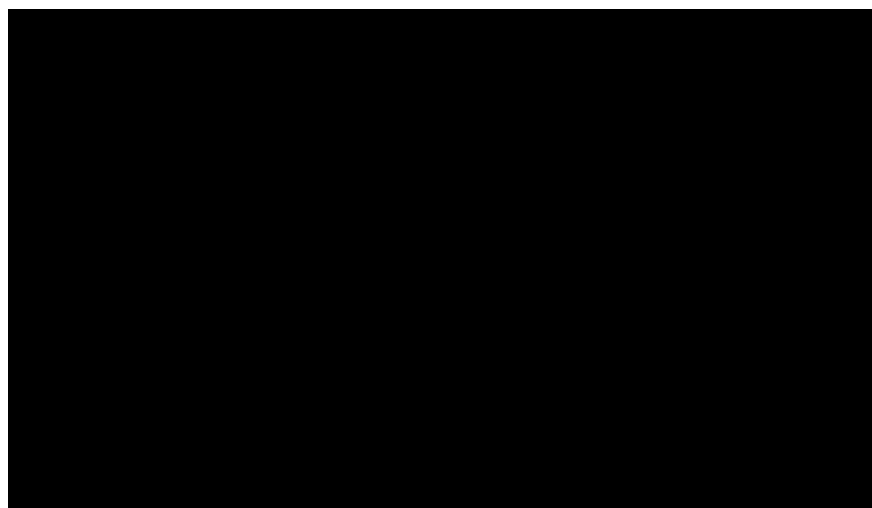
Fig. 2.18

The feeling of order and agency attached to the body in this dancing sequence is further emphasised through how it is contrasted with other bodies and other spaces that are intercut into the musical sequence. Most interestingly, the action of the men dancing is cut away from mid-scene to a brief shot of Dave working his job as a guard at a supermarket. Too anxious about his weight to perform as a dancer, Dave had left the group just prior to this dress rehearsal to take up the work offered to him by his wife, at the local Asda. Finding employment as a minimum wage security worker, Dave represents another potential future for the kinds of bodies and spaces that might proliferate in the North at the end of the twentieth century. Pepinster's article asserts that this kind of future was already the dominant reality in Sheffield. As Pepinster responded to the film, 'there have been successful attempts to transform Sheffield. Historic buildings have been cleaned, new sports venues have opened, and the unemployment rate has fallen.'[213] Interestingly, this argument ties together the rise of employment with the transformation of Sheffield's historic spaces into 'clean' modern spaces of

[213] Catherine Pepinster, "Sheffield's really a post-industrial paradise: Many in the city are cross at its bleak portrayal in 'The Full Monty'

retail and leisure. Thus, for contemporary commentators like Pepinster, the future of the North is represented by men like Dave.

Yet, as he appears in this scene, Dave seems to represent a highly unsuitable image for working-class male labour in the North. In only the brief image we see of him, the sequence details the lack of purpose and meaning that a man derives from labour that is not physically intensive. Whereas the factory floor space of the mill is repurposed by the group to highlight and embolden the physicality of the male body, Dave's body feels a lot less purposeful and active in relation to its surrounding space. We are provided only a momentary glimpse of Dave ambling through the supermarket aisles, shown via a tracking camera that does not stop to detail what he is doing, what work he is accomplishing, but rather keeps moving as if Dave were of no importance. Where the act of stripping provides a clear focus for the relationship between body and space- where the physical activity of the body orders and makes sense of the space around it- Dave is just as lost in this modern workplace as he was in the empty desolate factory at the beginning of the film. Using both long-depth of field and staging Dave in the middle-ground, as if he is simply caught in the space rather than organising it as the stripping men are, the shot de-emphasises Dave's importance to the framing, capturing instead the flurry of shoppers moving around him (Fig 2.19). Punctuating the dance sequences, Dave here suggests how alienating the contemporary service world of Britain is to a man who derives his worth from his body. Where *The Full Monty* imagines a possibility of working-class men finding a place in modern Britain, it is only in forms of work where the body as an act of labour is centred.

In reading how the film centres the physicality of the male body within the context of industrial labour, I am arguing that *The Full Monty* evidences a circumscribed representation of the entrepreneurial body of

New Labour. If the film suggests the potential for men to re-train their bodies, it cannot imagine them outside of the commodified context of the labouring body of Northern history. As we have seen, although this commodification is ameliorated and justified by the optimistic frameworks of the film's entertainment, this continuing attachment to a particular image of working-class subjectivity is troubling when we consider its transhistorical force. The film effectively forestalls questions of 'what comes after' by returning to this body as a site of cultural capital and value. A more immediate concern raised by this conclusion, is what about those bodies that cannot access the capital associated with traditional images of labouring masculinity? This is a question which takes us outside of the canon, and it is here that the chapter will now turn.
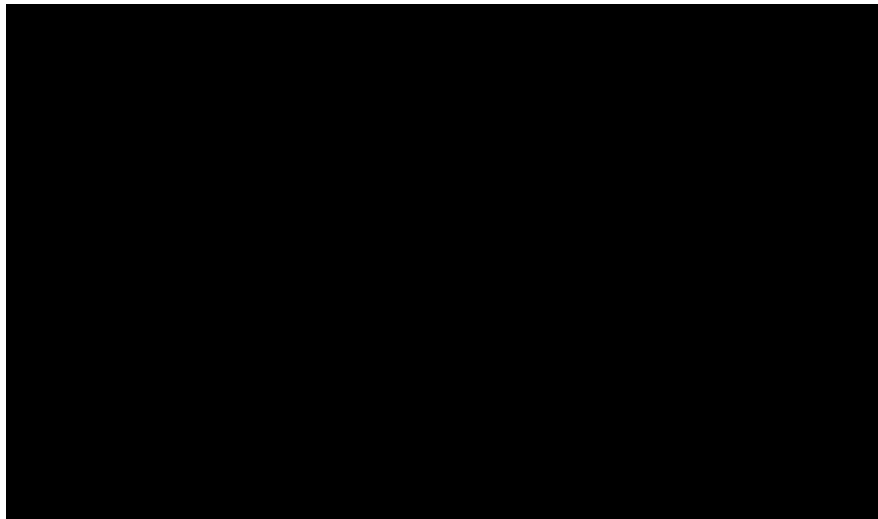
Fig 2.19

Non-Canonical Northern Bodies

The bodies covered, so far, participate in a dominant history of the screen North in the 20th century. They have been selected from texts which are unanimously recognised as nodal points for revealing the historical shape of the region's representation; texts which capture the state of the region at

specific historical junctures. However, as Spracklen reminds us, an important part of the function of Northernness is how it '*exclude[s] and marginalises* people' [my emphasis] either via the 'social and cultural exclusion imposed on northerners…or the cultural barriers imposed by northerners on those who do not fit the stereotype of northernness'.[214] The construction of stereotypes that comprise a common Northern imaginary operate in tandem with a careful policing of forms of identity which are '*not'* Northern or perhaps (as we will see) '*less'* Northern. In the histories of the screen North which currently exist, much more emphasis has been placed on the first type of exclusion suggested by Spracklen, and less on the second. For scholarship to perform the important work of constructing a canon from a minor area of film and television production in Britain, the question of which texts are, themselves, *excluded* and *marginal* to this history is undertheorised.

The final case study in this chapter is a text which is ignored in popular and critical accounts of the North's screen history: *My Son the Fanatic* (1997). This is a film produced during a period of heightened Northern representation and, as we will see, deals with a setting and issues that are particularly current to its moment of production.[215] In what follows I want to chart what is problematic about *My Son the Fanatic*, relative to notions of Northern screen history, and see how this elucidates wider issues with constructions of Northern bodies and histories. I ask now: what might this film's body tell us about the limits of the Northern imaginary and its history?

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[214] Karl Spracklen, "Theorising Northernness and Northern Culture", *Journal for Cultural Research*, p.11

[215] Of course, even as I attempt to draw attention to bodies which sit less comfortably in relation to the canonical screen history, I am forced to make my selective decisions. Thus, I have still chosen to not consider texts which are produced in more fallow decades, such as the 1970s. This is a concession to word count.

At the same moment in which popular Northern cinema such as *The Full Monty* used narratives of gendered crisis to pose questions of how the male body, and the region, might be recuperated in Blair's neoliberal Britain, newer images of the North were also being negotiated within emerging stories of Britain's multicultural society. Paul Marris completes his survey of Northern screen representation with a hopeful appraisal of the cinematic adaptation of Ayub Khan Din's autobiographical play: *East is East*. The Salford-set comedy-drama revolves around the cultural and generational frictions experienced within a British-Pakistani family in the 1970s. Specifically, the film focuses on the experiences of second-generation immigrants who, in growing up with an acceptance of the secular norms and pleasures of British society, find themselves clashing with the values of their outwardly devout Muslim father George Khan (Om Puri). In its representation of how different cultural values are complexly mixed in 70s Salford, the film is singled out, by Marris, as representing a progressive 'renewal' of the conventions of Northern realism. For Marris, although the film 'draws on the vocabulary of Northern realism' – and visibly references a milieu of working-class cobblestone domesticity conventionalised by *Coronation Street* – its 'retrospective look is not conservative, sentimental, or nostalgic; it introduces a new inflection to the portrait of the North, which acknowledges the social experience of ethnic intermixing.'[216]

However, as Anamik Saha argues, the moment of films like *East is East* in popular British culture was ultimately short-lived.[217] While images of Asian-British life up North held genuine commercial appeal in the 1990s –

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[216] Paul Marris, "Northern Realism: An Exhausted Tradition?", p. 50
[217] Anamik Saha, "Funky Days are (Not) Back Again: Cool Britannia and the Rise and Fall of British South Asian Cultural Production", *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 17:1, (2020)

emblematised by the success of *East is East* and Gurinder Chadha's Blackpool-set *Bhaji on the Beach* (1994) – this wave of popular Asian-authored film had already fizzled out by the beginning of the new millennium.[218] While for Saha, this decline in Asian-British production is interpreted relative to patterns of production and funding, for the purposes of a historical survey of the screen North it raises another question: why is *East is East* canonical when other Northern-set images of Muslim and Pakistani life (such as *My Son the Fanatic*) have had significantly less impact within British culture?

A Comparative Text: *East is East*

There is no simple answer to this question, but we might partly think about it by returning to Marris's account of the film in his history of Northern representation.

While Marris's history of Northern realism promotes the tradition as imaginatively inclusive and capable of accepting difference as *part* of Northernness, he qualifies his inclusion of *East is East* with a reference to its social relevancy. As Marris puts it, the film's 'importance was underscored again as racial violence broke out in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in

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[218] This decline in Northern representation can be seen as part of a broader trend of declining ethnic minority representation in mainstream film and television in Britain. Sarita Malik charts this decline in her book *Representing Black Britain* in relation to television, specifically. In the 1980s, British television had functioned as an important medium for the popularisation of Black representation, and the foregrounding of Black social issues and perspectives. This move was led by Channel 4 - which, from its first transmission in November 1982, had 'Black programming built into the structure of the Channel' – influenced the broadcast schedule. However, by the 1990s, Malik notes how programmes about Black issues, in all modes and genres, were down, even on Channel 4 as it shifted to appeal to a white mainstream. Malik thus charts a parallel decline to Saha; wherein the move away from a politically mandated emphasis on ethnic minority representation, replaced by market forces, leads to fleeting interest in non-white representation in the after the early years of New Labour. See: Sarita Malik, *Representing Black Britain: A History of Black and Asian Images on British Television*, (London: Sage, 2002), p. 60, pp. 56-75

2001.'[219] Interestingly, there is no clarification by Marris of how *East is East* relates to these events. This is an important omission when considering how, as Ben Pitcher argues, the disturbances in Oldham et al. quickly became appropriated by the media to raise questions about the limits of multicultural Britain's acceptance of different cultures.[220] Read in this context, Marris's history seems to suggest that *East is East's* importance is its articulation of progressive forms of ethnic exchange where difference can be positively negotiated. Implied in this reading of *East is East's* canonicity, however, is the notion that Northern place-myth can only allow 'difference' within certain limits.

In her analysis, Loretta Collins Klobah refers to George Khan (Om Puri) as bearing the marks of the *East is East's* ostensibly progressive, but deeply ambivalent relationship to the difference represented by the Pakistani Muslim man. As Klobah argues, although 'George certainly has a distinctive character…he never really transcends this cinematic representation of a subalternity' attributed to Muslim men.[221] While not simply caricaturing George as a racial other, the film's heightened comedic mode nevertheless participates in a 'containment' of certain elements of what Klobah calls 'traditional Pakistani-Muslim culture'[222]. Puri's emphatic performance is one of the ways in which this containment is visually enacted. In the film's representation of the more tense and problematic moments of cultural clash, Puri is often at his most gesturally wild. Scenes of domestic and familial violence are key examples of this emphatic corporeality. In one such scene, George flies into a rage when his white English wife Ella (Linda Bassett),

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[219] Paul Marris, "Northern Realism", p.50
[220] Ben Pitcher, *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Race and Racism in Contemporary Britain*, 2017
[221] Loretta Collins Klobah, "Pakistani Englishness and the Containment of the Muslim Subaltern in Ayub Khan-Din's Tragicomedy Film *East is East"*, *South Asian Popular Culture*, 1:2, (2003), p. 98
[222] Ibid., 96

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questions his authority over the arranged Muslim marriages he is forcing upon his sons. In a confrontation in the chip shop which he owns, George turns to violence, calling Ella a 'bastard bitch' and threatening to kill her as he punches her repeatedly. The camerawork and Puri's performance jointly construct George's out-of-control nature. Capturing his face in close-up, canted angles emphasise a series of disturbing emotional details. With his voice raised, his eyes bulging, his jaw visibly clenched, George's patriarchal violence is rendered an intensively derived temperament, an unreflective expression of assumed masculine superiority that comes from *within* and is conveyed *outwards* in brutal violence (Figs 2.20 – 2.22). After these imposing close-ups, emphasising a wild anger, the scene cuts to a wide shot of the beating - which recontextualises it within the space of the chip shop – intercut with a series of reaction shots of two of the children witnessing in horror. Significantly, by situating this assault within the chip shop, as opposed to a purely domestic space, the scene frames his wild violence as transgressive of an ordinary unassuming Northernness.[223] Surrounded by banal details of working-class consumer culture – notably, a Hollands Pies sign sits directly above George as he punches a downed Ella – the scene constructs an image of extreme violence that disturbs the Northern working-class milieu.

This corporeal performance justifies Klobah's reading of George and the film's liberal take on multicultural community. Although George is an absolute figure of Muslim otherness – his wild nature is complicated by other sequences of marital tenderness – he nevertheless represents the film's 'containment' of a certain kind of masculinity that is naturally excessive and outside the bounds of 'ordinary' Northernness. In this sense at least then, *East as East* might be interpreted acceptable within a Northern canon such as

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[223] Notably,

Marris's because it accepts a history of multicultural settlement in the North, while establishing limits to Northernness. It is worth considering then, whether such boundaries exist in a text like *My Son the Fanatic* and what this tells us about the canon of Northern male representation.
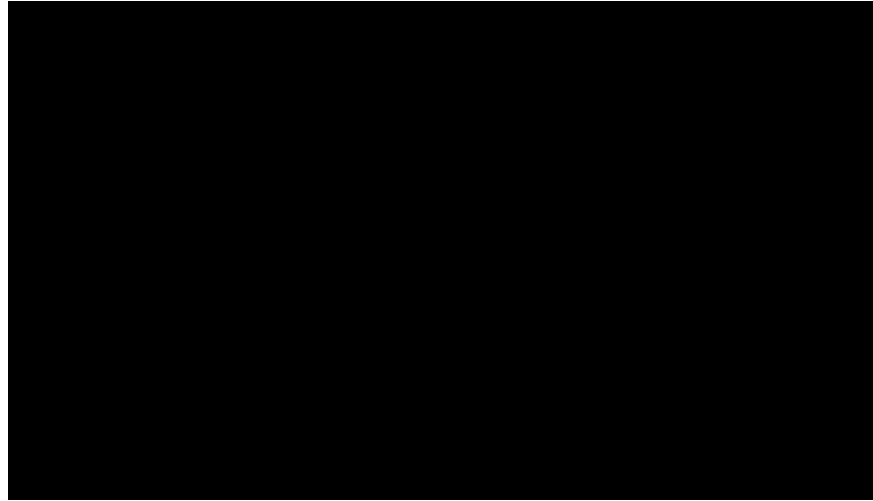
Fig. 2.20
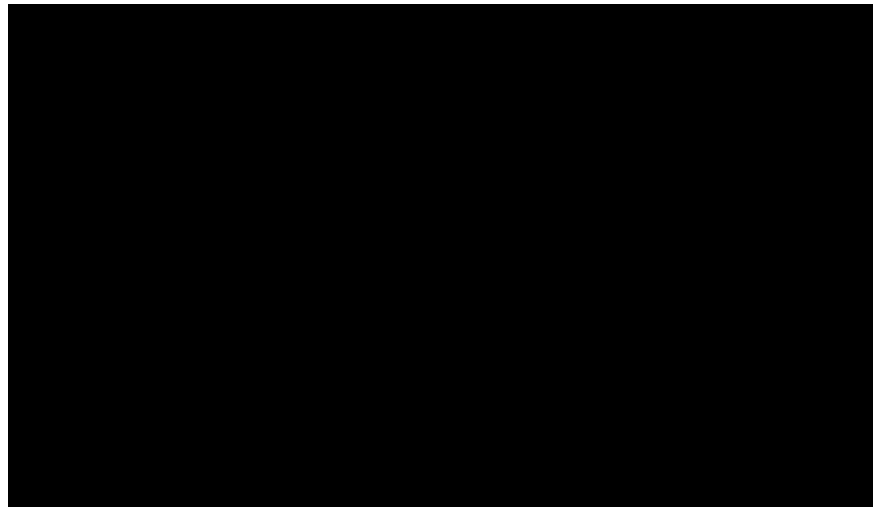
Fig. 2.21
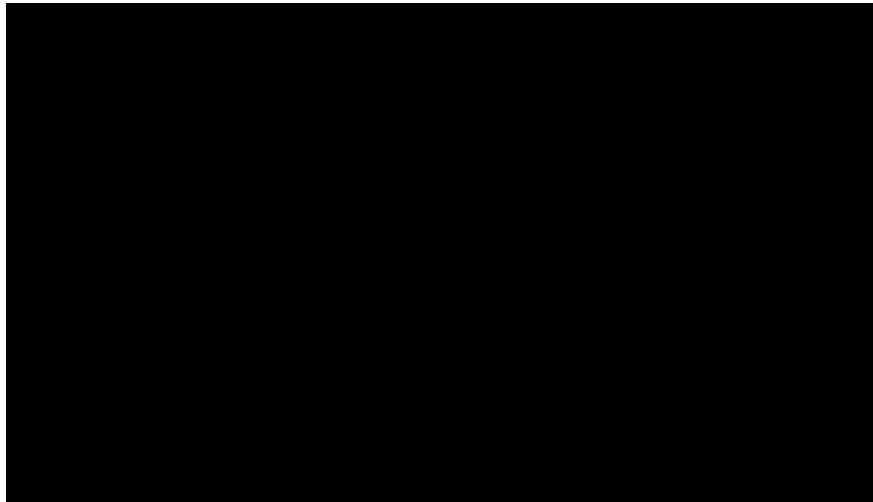
Fig. 2.22

My Son the Fanatic

As in *East is East*, *My Son the Fanatic* involves Puri playing a first generation
Pakistani immigrant who, having lived in Yorkshire for many decades,
begins to find himself and his cultural and ethical values challenged by his
adolescent child.[224] However, where *East is East* stages this as a clash
between the archaic Islamic values of the first generation immigrant and the
liberal Western values of second generation *British*-Asian children, *My Son*
reverses the terms of conflict. Puri's character Parvez is a taxi driver who has
embraced the pleasures of his adopted home – he drinks whisky and listens
to American jazz records – and dreams of assimilating into British society
through his son's impending engagement with a local police constable's
daughter. In contrast, it is his son Farid (Akbar Kurtha) who staunchly
rejects the possibility and the desirability of assimilating into white Britain.
Over the course of the story, Parvez becomes increasingly disturbed at what
he observes as his son's adoption of Islamic fanaticism. He is unable to
understand what motivates Farid's actions, which begin with Farid's
breaking off his engagement and selling all his material possessions, and

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[224] *My Son the Fanatic* will henceforth be referred to as *My Son*.

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culminates in him inviting an Iman from Pakistan into their home. This conflict in values comes to a head around Parvez's romantic affair with a local sex worker Bettina (Rachael Griffiths). Where Farid despises Bettina for the moral degradation that he sees her as representing, for Parvez she offers a vital relation of compassion that he feels bereft of in his life which is otherwise devoted entirely to the alienating labour of driving strangers in his taxi. Thus, in effect, the film poses conventionally Northern realist questions around masculinity, generational divide, and the alienating nature of labour in the post-industrial world, but it narrates these questions within a complex postcolonial context.

The screenplay for the film comes from novelist and playwright Hanif Kureishi, who is most known for writing *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985); a landmark film for mainstream British-Asian representation and a key text in debates around Black British cinema and its relationship to notions of political blackness, diaspora and the expression of new forms of ethnic identity. For instance, Stuart Hall championed the importance of Kureishi's work to Black British cinema because of 'its refusal to represent Black experience in Britain as monolithic, self-contained, sexually stabilized and always "right on" – in a word, always and only "positive"'.[225] Kureishi's work complicates the coherence and discreteness of ethnic identity, and instead emphasises ethnicity's messy intersections with class, gender, and sexuality. And yet, where critics and scholars have figured Kureishi as important to Black British cinema because of this complexity, canons of Northern representation entirely ignore *My Son*.[226]

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[225] Stuart Hall, "The New Ethnicities" in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 450

[226] Similarly, scholarship and criticism of Kureishi has more often ignored the Northern setting of the film when discussing its postcolonial themes. In fact, oddly, there is a tendency by non-British writers to mischaracterise the film's setting when attempting to encapsulate its politics: for instance, Roger Ebert refers to Puri as playing a "taxi driver in a Midlands

Despite its omission from the region's screen history, *My Son* engages with many of the contemporary tropes and narratives of the post-industrial North in the 1990s. The film shares several elements with the story of *The Full Monty*. Both films depict former factory workers and fathers who find themselves becoming increasingly estranged from their sons. In both cases, this strained relationship is characterised by a sense of waning pride that is tied to the son's recognition of their father's inadequacy and lack of social status. The films associate this process of estrangement with a wider sense of post-industrial malaise. Set in the Yorkshire cities of Sheffield and Bradford, *The Full Monty* and *My Son* both depict hollowed out industrial working-class communities. Each film envisions the issue of what follows the collapse of these patterns of sociality by staging important sequences in abandoned factories which become repurposed as spaces which facilitate the night-time economy (in *My Son* a local factory is used for a sex party). However, it is in relation to this question of what comes after, *My Son* diverges sharply from the optimistic images of enterprise found in popular Northern cinema of the 1990s.

In the worlds of both *The Full Monty* and *My Son*, industrial labour is replaced primarily by forms of labour that operate within the night-time economy. However, where *The Full Monty* presents the visual spectacle of stripping as a way of reformulating the value of the iconic labouring body, *My Son* offers no such potential for the visible commodification of labour in relation to the non-white immigrant body. The night-time economy work that replaces factory labour for Parvez is taxi-driving, an occupation which the film characterises in terms of its functional invisibility. Parvez works the night shift, and his jobs most often involve offering the back of his cab as a

town". Roger Ebert, "Indian Actor Straddles East, West", *Chicago Sun Times*, (18th September 1999), https://www.rogerebert.com/festivals/indian-actor-straddles-east-west, accessed 7th November 2020

space for drunk men to pick up and grope local sex workers.[227] As these scenes capture, Parvez's role in these acts is as an absent facilitator. Utilising dark lighting and oblique framing, these scenes communicate the visual obscurity of Parvez as he works (Fig 2.23). His body is both shrouded in shadow and framed as separate from the acts occurring in the backseat, as if he were part of a different space entirely. In these sequences, it is as if Parvez's presence – marked by racial difference – can only be capitalised on in the post-industrial economy if it exists invisibly.

Fig. 2.23

Moreover, where the film characterises Parvez's invisibility as a form of exclusion, it also shows that such a status does not grant protection in the form of anonymity. We are made aware early in the film that the terms of Parvez's visibility are beyond his control. In one scene, we witness Parvez being ridiculed by a comedian while on a night out at a local working-man's club. His pained expression is visible as he is repeatedly insulted with racist Islamophobic jokes for the amusement of an entirely white crowd. Moreover, within the formal logic of the sequence, the comedian's racist abuse is not an

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[227] Parvez is only acknowledged once by one of the male punters. When Parvez questions the man on what he wants, he is yelled at to "go" and mockingly given instructions on where to drive in a crude Pakistani accent.

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individual attack but is shown to function as an inscription of ethnic visibility that performs a wider communal function within this stereotypically Northern working-class space.

The sequence draws attention to the codes and conventions governing visibility within this community. It begins on a tracking shot which sweeps across the length of a smoky function room, packed for the evening's entertainment. Although the low-key lighting makes individual figures and silhouettes difficult to discern, the shot displays a bustling crowd. From off-screen, the comedian's voice is loudly audible, with a thick Yorkshire accent, as he tells a series of 'blue' (offensive) jokes about lesbians and disabled people. These jokes provoke hilarity, registered visibly in the spread of laughing bodies as the camera moves across the tables. Thus, the scene establishes a generically Northern sense of community, with the politically incorrect nature of the comedian's jokes recalling the 'problematic inflections' of 'Northern comedy' as a working-class institution, which, Dave Russell observes, is popular but also potentially 'alienating' to those outside the North.[228]

It is important to note that scene is the only point in the film where we see anything resembling a communal get together. The working-man's club is unique then and feels particularly significant because of how the film has firmly established a bleak post-industrial milieu in its setting of Bradford. Within the club, the performance of the working-class Northern comedian is shown to be one of the few moments in which community is formed. Moreover, this opening tracking shot not only conveys a unique moment of communal gathering, but it also relates this community to a particular form of unremarkable visibility (Fig 2.24). The shot depicts a crowd shrouded in

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[228] Dave Russell, *Looking North*, pp.196-197

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the darkness and collectively turned towards the stage. Yet, in beginning the sequence with a shot of the crowd, as opposed to establishing the situation by first highlighting the comedian's role, the film emphasises the contingency of this unassuming visibility. By centring the crowd in a space that is within the diegetic space itself de-emphasised, the shot conveys the very conventionality by which the crowd is constructed as an unremarkable community. As the tracking shot concludes, it arrives at a table where Parvez, Bettina and Schitz are sat (Fig 2.25). Drawing a continuity between Parvez and the rest of the crowd through its tracking movement, the camera momentarily suggests the potential for assimilation that Parvez strives for throughout the film.

However, Parvez's anonymity is swiftly withdrawn as the comedian calls for a spotlight which lands on him, picking him out from the crowd. The comedian refers to him as "Salman Rushdie" and one particularly cruel but revealing line that the comedian uses to attack Parvez is his statement: "If you bastards all left town on the same day, we'd have two hours extra bleedin' sunlight." Most immediately, this racist attack continues to other Parvez by racialising his body along what Franz Fanon would refer to as a 'racial-epidermal schema'; rendering the surface of Parvez's 'dark' body both visible and immoral because of that very visibility.[229] However, this stigmatising of darkness takes on an additional meaning within the context of the filmic world. Quite literally, *My Son* is a dark film; it conveys Bradford's decline through its envisioning of a shadowy landscape in which the once familiar landmarks of its heyday of textile production recede from view as it is replaced by the night-time economy. In the comedian's cruel

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[229] Franz Fanon, "The Fact of Blackness", *White Skin, Black Masks*, (London: Pluto Press, 1986), p.84

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racism is a rhetorical displacement of the darkness of post-industrial decline with the darkness of the Asian immigrant other. (Figs. 2.26 and 2.27)
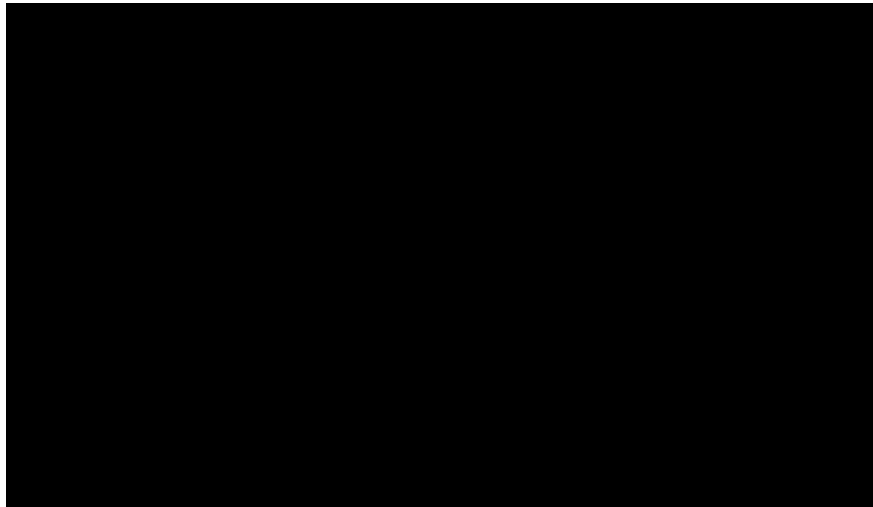
Fig. 2.24
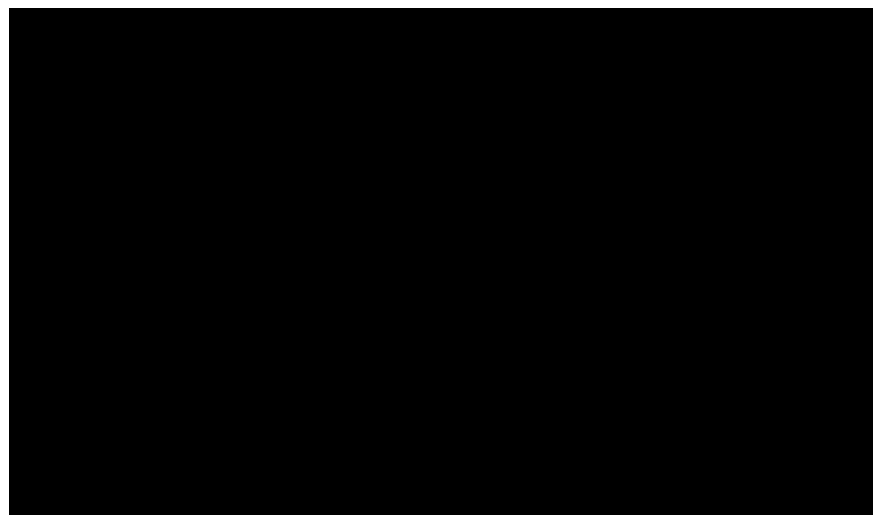
Fig. 2.25
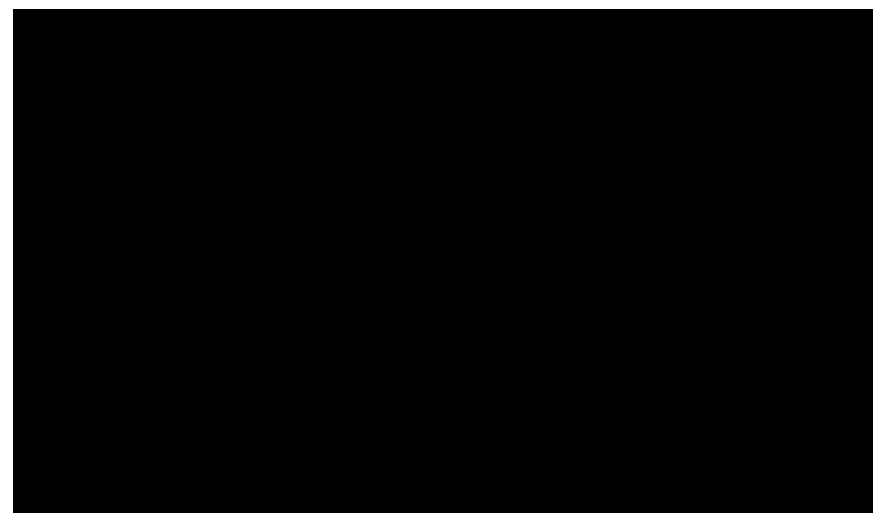
Fig. 2.26

Fig. 2.27

The relations of visibility and invisibility around Parvez's body, which are evoked here echo the discursive functioning of what Paul Gilroy describes as Britain's collective social 'post-imperial melancholia'. For Gilroy, this melancholia describes a paradoxical set of attitudes within British society, which responds to the difficult legacy of Britain's colonial history as something which marks a contemporary guilt while also a repressed desire for a heritage of proud national identity. For Gilroy, this melancholia manifests most strongly in Britain's obsession with constructing race and immigration in terms of absolute difference in a disavowal of the role non-white colonial communities have played in Britain's history. Pertinent, here, is Gilroy's observation that:

> the consolidation of postcolonial melancholia suggests …that
> many people in Britain have come to need "race" and perhaps to

welcome its certainties as one sure way to keep their bearings in a world they experience as increasingly confusing.[230]

In this sequence from *My Son*, the sudden visible racialisation of Parvez's body performs a similar function. Parvez's body here becomes the object of hatred that displaces the more historically ambiguous hatred felt, within this community, towards the forces of de-industrialisation.

This interpretation reproduces Spracklen's notion of the North as an entirely exclusionary imagining of place. Clearly, *My Son* attests to this exclusion, but it does so via a depiction of the *experience* of these exclusionary practices that, I contend, belies the definitive nature of Spracklen's claims that the North is non-white.[231]*My Son* draws attention to the ways in which exclusionary narratives function in everyday social discourse, and, as such, their failure to account for the material histories of people like Parvez. In the case of *My Son*, the film's attention to Parvez's ordinary bodily experiences, and his physical navigation of the difficulties of everyday work and life, recontextualise the wider themes of cultural conflict and racist antagonism within a specifically neoliberal sociality. Rather than merely reproduce the conflict between white racist 'Northern' community and religious fundamentalism, Parvez's body inscribes the ways in which such a conflict is formed and reproduced by the difficult economic conditions of the post-industrial North at the end of the 20th century.

In sum, *My Son's* complex representation of the many levels of Parvez's bodily oppression reckons with the possibilities and problems of the North as a place-myth. In one sense, the film suggests that the North – an

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[230] Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p.116
[231] Karl Spracklen, "Theorising Northernness and Northern Culture", *Journal for Cultural Research*, p.11

imaginary which, as we have seen, foregrounds relations between bodily endurance and labour – offers an appropriate representational tradition within which to understand the complex relations between culture, ethnicity and work in the post-industrial economy. In many ways, Parvez's punishing shifts as a taxi-driver evidence new ways in which men are 'ground down' in the North, and the response of his son Farid, in turning to fundamentalism, is another way in which young men seek to break this cycle of working-class life. However, in showing how Parvez's body is turned into a racialising mark of difference, the film speaks to exclusions within Northern history that cannot be overcome over time precisely because they underpin the way in which British culture narrates its own history of North and nation, one which cannot properly reckon with Empire or even its own history of immigration from the Subcontinent.

Conclusion

The task of this chapter has been to trace the influence of the male body across the post-war history of the North in film and television. One of its instigating propositions has been that the male body has been a contested site of meaning, in which a range of contemporary social anxieties are given form through a repertoire of common images, narratives and affects related to an embodiment that is coded as Northern. The body is a site within British culture where transhistorical myths of Northernness are placed in uneven and ambivalent encounters with historically specific social and ideological discourses in particular moments in time.

This wider task has involved an engagement with the canon of Northern screen representations. All histories of culture have canonical

shapes, but the canon is acutely important to the construction of the North because representations of the region have remained marginal and sporadic within British film and television history. At the beginning of this chapter, I laid out some of the dominant patterns characterising this canonical history; I emphasised the screen North's periodic nature; its recurring emergence at moments of crisis in post-war notions of classed identity and nationhood; and its feeling of being both timely and dated.

While this chapter has traversed markedly different contexts of 'crisis' in the region's post-war and post-industrial history, a key argument throughout has been that the male body inscribes certain dominant structures of knowledge through which crisis is read. The male body, as a key site in the region's representation, contributes to the construction of a rhetorical field of interpretation within which the meaning of historical changes is bound. At the centre of this rhetorical field is the residual form of the labouring body, which exerts a transhistorical influence on how the North, and its meaningfulness within moments of crisis, is conveyed. The chapter has drawn attention to recurring tropes which attest to the structuring force of this form of embodiment. Most notably, we have seen the way in which larger social anxieties – as various as the rising youth culture in *SNASM,* and the total collapse of industry in *Boys from the Blackstuff* – are made *sense of* as problems of labour.

In one sense, the male body has played a role in the process that Paul Marris outlines in his survey of the tradition of Northern realism. Marris's central argument, that the cultural construction of the Northern place-myth is expanded and made more progressive via the influence of texts which work in and against Northern realist tropes,

certainly holds relevance to the ambivalent functions of the male body detailed in this chapter. However, this chapter's survey has also complicated the kind of rhetorical flexibility that is assumed in Marris's 'in and against' model of representational change. Where Marris sees the tension between the old and new – the cultural baggage of the Northern place myth versus the novelty of alternative forms of identity and community – as a progressive force which introduces difference into the region's cultural imaginary, I argue that the body is uncertain in its rhetorical function. For instance, in the case of *The Full Monty*, it is the film's underlying association of Northern working-class identity with patterns of masculinity that rely on industrial labour for their meaning that ultimately renders hollow its attempt to re-imagine a more modern and optimistic image of the region. Rather than allowing and facilitating new myths and image, the male body is often the site of contradictions that derive from the North's inert imaginary; an imaginary that is so crucial to the cultural legibility of the region.

We see evidence of this ambivalence within the canon. *The Full Monty's* ostensibly hopeful future of a life after industry is, in fact, racked by contradictions about this being any real possibility. This is an ambivalence which resides in the continuing cultural capital of traditional images of labouring bodies. However, it is within the margins of the canon where we see the limits of Northern realism as a tradition of representation. *My Son*, the North is shown to be inhospitable to bodies which do not align with Northernness as a historical narrative of working-class identity. Where post-industrial decline foregrounds a history of failure and defeat, *My Son* depicts a form of embodiment which experiences a different failure: that of the non-white immigrant to be an unremarkable and authentic working-

class presence. Finally, it is not just that such bodies are excluded that is important to consider but that their exclusion is necessary for the functioning of melancholic histories of Northern decline, where the North of the past is a stable, ordered and (ethnically) homogenous place.

CHAPTER THREE:

THE DETERIORATED BODY

In the first part of this thesis, I traced the persistence of images of industrial labour and narratives of post-industrial decline across the history of Northern screen representation. I have argued that, during the periods in which the region becomes popular in representation, the Northern male body has functioned as a site in which profound forms of social change emerge but are also ultimately stabilised by the residual meanings and values of industrial labour. Simply put, the Northern male body has most often been a formation which affirms "traditional" notions of white, masculine, working-class identity in Britain. However, as the history of Northern screen fiction has developed, these residual meanings have become further and further removed from the social conditions in which Northern men are shown to exist, and new tensions arise around the male body.

In the introduction I quoted Paul Dave's observation that 'the North re-emerges, post the 2008 financial crisis, as that which marks the hollowness of the neoliberal ideology of contemporary classlessness and the breakdown of the contemporary narratives of capitalism and progress.'[232] I initially drew attention to the deceptive complexity of the verb 'marks' in relation to the object of this statement, in order to elucidate the specific role of the male body as an obvious but overlooked cultural form. Now I want to further query the meaning of 'marks', to consider the specific critical and political stakes of the male body at this moment of re-emergence in British culture. Dave's own use seems to suggest that the North re-emerges as part of a cultural narration of the failures and exclusions of Britain's neoliberal

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[232] Paul Dave, "Knocking-off Time in the North: Images of the Working-Class and History in L.S. Lowry and Mitchell and Kenyon" in Mazierska (ed.), *Heading North: The North of England in Film and Television*, (Cham, Switzerland : Palgrave Macmillan), p. 42

"progress". However, defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as 'a visible trace or impression on a surface', "marks" is a usefully ambiguous term in relation to cultural production, leaving unsaid both the intention and the quality of the marking.[233]

This chapter starts to think about the complex ways in which Northern bodies mark the neoliberal moment by focussing on a particularly visible and significant formation of male embodiment, which I term the deteriorated body. As a preliminary description, this is a body typically constructed through images of visibly ailing men who are restricted in terms of physical capacity, socially excluded, and often worn down by personal struggles with physical and mental health. More than simply a description of images, the deteriorated body names a modality of representing the contemporary North; these bodies can be read as devoid of social agency, as unable to articulate their own projects of forward progress or else consigned to the past entirely. Of course, the Northern place-myth has always carried connotations of pastness, and thus, in developing an answer to how the North marks a post-2008 neoliberal order, much of the work of this chapter will revolve around clarifying what is specifically contemporary about deterioration as a mediation of these issues. Thus, there are two dominant concerns woven throughout this chapter, as it elucidates the meaning of the deteriorated body. The first: what is uniquely contemporary about the deteriorated body? The second: to what extent does deterioration, as a form, produce knowledge about the 'breakdown of contemporary narratives of capitalism and progress'?

Tropes of Political and Social Narratives of the North after Austerity

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[233] "mark, n.1." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/114169. Accessed 22 October 2021.

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As Tom Hazeldine notes, the 'Northern question' has re-emerged over the past decade in both social parlance and in scholarly debate.[234] There has been a flurry of work that has turned to the North as an important place because of its associations with class inequality, and thus because the region offers an imaginary for describing new notions of inequality wrought by the financial crisis and the austerity governance that followed in its wake.[235]

It must be acknowledged that the North's appearances in national debates over this timeframe are not homogenous. Between the period immediately after the financial crash until the re-election of a Conservative majority government in 2019, the North appears at different points carrying different associations. However, as I want to demonstrate, these changes in the meaning are changes of degree and not changes of kind. While the North has been invoked in quite different political and social circumstances, certain dominant tropes of a post-austerity North have been largely resilient and provided a common rhetoric and iconography through which to narrate these changing circumstances. These tropes are not necessarily new or particular to this period – and they often reformulate historical constructions of the North discussed previously – but they have been particularly dominant in how contemporary social inequality has been narrativised since the financial crisis.

Arguably the most recognisable trope of the North in the last decade is its designation as 'the left behind' space of Britain. As Tom Wraight argues, recent years have seen the 'left behind' become embedded within the vocabulary used to discuss social inequality as well as the rise of populist

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[234] Tom Hazeldine, *The Northern Question: A History of a Divided Country*, (London: Verso, 2020)

[235] For example, see the work in the recent edited collection: Craig Berry and Arianna Giovanni (eds.), *Developing England's North: The Political Economy of the Northern Powerhouse* (Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, 2018)

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and nationalist political sentiment.[236] In one sense, the term has gained resonance as a contemporary description of longer running economic forces, based in the historical process of post-industrialisation, and naming the ever widening consequences of social inequality and polarisation. As Gurminder Bhambra notes, the popular account is that 'the left behind' has been produced by the 'processes of automation, the globalization-induced shock to manufacturing sectors…the increasing preponderance of low-wage immigrant labour, and…policies of outsourcing' which have encompassed the shift of Western nations towards post-industrial economies.[237] However, as Wraight notes, the left behind is a particularly 'value-laden' and ill-defined iteration in the narrative of the post-industrial working-class.[238]

An important, if implicit, quality of this 'left behind' narrative, as it pertains to the North, is its essentialist framing. In public evocations, the various economic and political agencies that have contributed to the North's falling behind are often mystified behind broad historical movements (such as post-industrial decline) or else not addressed entirely. An exemplary case of this mystification is the inaugurating speech for the Northern Powerhouse project, delivered by then Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne at a press conference in Manchester in 2014. Setting out a future agenda for connecting the different cities of Northern England into a single and globally influential economic bloc, Osborne's diagnosis of the region's underperforming condition repeatedly turns on a comparison with London (despite his disavowal of the 'myth' of the North-South divide) which,

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[236] Tom Wraight, 'Populism and the Left Behind: Towards a Clearer Conceptualisation', *Aalborg: Danish Political Science Association*, https://dpsa.dk/papers/Populism%20and%20the%20Left%20Behind, accessed 16th February 2020

[237] Gurminder K. Bhambra, 'Brexit, Trump and 'methodological whiteness': on misrecognition of race and class', The British Journal of Sociology, 2017 and Danny Dorling, 'Brexit: The Decision of a Divided Country', *BMJ,* 345, (2016), p. 215

[238] Tom Wraight, 'Populism and the Left Behind: Towards a Clearer Conceptualisation', p. 2

covertly, obfuscates the agencies which have shaped contemporary conditions of inequality. Observations on how 'today, the transport system for the north is simply not fit for purpose' compared to London noticeably avoid any consideration of the causes of poorer infrastructure, and, as they are framed, seem to assume the North's status as 'left behind' by the rest of Britain as self-evident.[239] There is the sense that the North has fallen into decline because it has been left to its own devices.

The second trope of the post-2008 North is the increasingly prevalent notion that Northern communities and people represent a misguided or misplaced agency. We can see this trope as early in the decade as the Northern Powerhouse project,[240] but it is most obvious in the aftermath of the EU referendum. As Craig Berry argues, the result of the referendum fed 'a tendency' in public discourse to 'identify residents of Northern England as the principal 'culprits' of the Brexit vote.'[241] A paternalistic narrative has developed in which it is seen that 'Northerners have acted both selfishly and foolishly'.[242] is imbricated with a history of framing the working-class as prone to bad choices.[243] Shaped by the political conflicts of Brexit, this

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[239] George Osborne, 'We Need a Northern Powerhouse', delivered at The Museum of Science and History, Manchester, June 23rd 2014.

[240] As the previous discussion of Osborne's speech indicates, the creation of a Powerhouse requires proper attention, effort, and support from centralised Government. Implicit in this rhetoric is the assumption the North lacks the required means and decision-making to turn itself around.

[241] Craig Berry, 'Brexit and the North: Not Our Problem', *Future Economies Research and Policies Paper 1*, (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2019), p. 4

[242] Ibid.

[243] In *Revolting Subjects*, Imogen Tyler observes that the political rhetoric of New Labour contributed to a shift in the social and even academic discussion of class away from class itself and towards a language of choice, flexibility, and agency. Tyler locates this shift as allowing a pernicious moral condemnation for those at the bottom of Britain's class ladder. As Tyler argues: 'within the space of a decade the idea that it was a poverty of aspiration, the failure to make the 'right choices' and an unwillingness to grasp the opportunities gifted by the state which were to blame for intergenerational cultures of worklessness was established as a powerful myth.' See: Imogen Tyler, *Revolting Subjects,* (London: Zed Books, 2013)

attribution of misplaced agency also carries another set of meanings. The 'selfishness' that Berry pinpoints refers to a lingering feeling that Northerners had not just made bad decisions for themselves but had acted in a way that had undermined the global status of Britain. Politicians and media pundits alike framed the Leave vote, and continuing support for Brexit, as the actions of an introverted nationalist population.[244]

In these formulations, Northerners are constructed *both* as culpable for their actions and, at the same time, victims. Northerners, still suffering from the decline of industry, were duped by compromised political figures their agency weaponised against them to further an ultra-neoliberalist project of financial de-regulation that would further harm those same Northern communities. Yet, whether culpable or a victim, Northern agency is configured as out-of-touch. Across these popular and scholarly invocations of Northern agency is the lingering notion that the North is comprised of people whose social agency – in their low-skilled, no longer valued labour or in their political – is both out of place and time with modern Britain.

It bears emphasising, however, that while dominant these tropes are not without their opposition. In work ranging from political science to social geography, the notion of a foolish North as 'responsible' for the Leave vote has been repeatedly challenged through studies of voter proportion and density in which Northern regions were found to be no more likely to have voted Leave than anywhere else in the country.[245] Similarly, qualitative sociology has sought a more sympathetic socio-economic explanation for the

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[244] See: Gordon Brown, 'Brexiteers want us to glory in isolation. Their vision is introverted and selfish.', *The Guardian*, 12th May 2019, accessed 10th November 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/may/12/brexiteers-britain-vision-introverted-selfish-brexit-gordon-brown

[245] Gurminder K. Bhambra, 'Brexit, Trump and 'methodological whiteness': on misrecognition of race and class', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 2017 and Danny Dorling, 'Brexit: The Decision of a Divided Country', *BMJ*, 345, (2016)

referendum result.[246] All of these interventions are necessary for the construction of a contemporary idea of the North less authored from dominant ideological perspectives. Nevertheless, the tropes I have outlined are still pervasive despite these intellectual challenges. The imaginative power of these contemporary narratives of the North remains intact, continuing to structure how ongoing social changes are popularly understood. One needs only to consider the centrality of the concept of the Northern Red Wall to current debates around the future of the Labour Party platform to understand how tropes of the North continue to inflect how class and inequality are narrated.[247] The continuing potency of these tropes, despite frequent opposition, indicates the need to consider the North's representation *as representation*. As important as it is to challenge the claims to truth that these ideas assume, I believe it is equally important to focus on how these tropes exist as forms of cultural knowledge.

Case Studies

This chapter is interested in identifying a visual and affective rhetoric in British film and television that accords with this construction of the left behind North as incapable of keeping up with modern Britain. The three films that this chapter looks at are *I, Daniel Blake* (2016), *Tyrannosaur* (2011), and *Sorry We Missed You* (2019), all centre on Northern working-class men who, for a variety of economic, physical, and psychological reasons, find themselves out of time with the demands of contemporary British society. Of these texts, *I, Daniel Blake* has had the most visible cross-over into social discourse surrounding the state of modern Britain. Directed by Ken Loach, in

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[246] Lisa Mckenzie, '"We don't exist to them, do we?": why working-class people voted for Brexit', January 15th 2018, accessed January 10th 2020, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2018/01/15/we-dont-exist-to-them-do-we-why-working-class-people-voted-for-brexit/

[247] The conclusion of thesis considers the concept of the Red Wall, and its significance for a contemporary Northern place-myth, in greater detail.

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collaboration with screenwriter Paul Laverty, the film sparked furious debate about the consequences of ongoing austerity politics, and was described by Loach as a direct attack on the 'conscious cruelty' of the modern welfare state as technocratically designed by successive governments.[248] The story involves Daniel (Dave Johns), a 59-year-old joiner and widower who, after suffering a heart attack, is nevertheless labelled 'fit to work' by the administrative criteria of the Department of Work and Pensions. Denied any disability assistance, he is forced to apply for Jobseeker's Allowance, a form of welfare benefit that requires him to constantly document his search for employment that he is medically unable to accept. The film portrays the myriad of ways in which Daniel is demeaned by the bureaucracy of a contemporary welfare state which operates primarily to sanction claimants.

Tyrannosaur similarly focuses on an aging working-class man who struggles with issues of physical and mental health. However, where *I, Daniel Blake* foregrounds its social commentary, *Tyrannosaur* is intended as a complex character study, by its director Paddy Considine. Adapted from Considine's previous short film *Dog Altogether* (2007), the story focuses on Joseph (Peter Mullan): a widower like Daniel, but a less immediately sympathetic figure. Joseph is a violent alcoholic whose actions are consistently difficult to understand or justify. The film's narrative revolves around the question of whether a man like Joseph can be redeemed. He forms an unlikely bond with a local charity shop worker Hannah (Olivia Coleman), who he provides shelter for from an abusive spouse, but the film resists using this plot as an uncomplicated redemption. Ultimately murdering her husband, neither Joseph nor society can save Hannah. While

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[248] Diane Taylor, '"Conscious Cruelty": Ken Loach's shock at benefit sanctions and food banks', Guardian, 23 November 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/nov/23/ken-loach-benefit-sanctions-jeremy-corbynfood-banks, accessed 8th March 2021

Joseph is changed by this friendship, the jailing of Hannah characterises a social world in which communal bonds are waning and human connection is precarious.

The final case study, *Sorry We Missed You,* returns to Ken Loach's interest in contemporary forms of social and economic exploitation, centring on a working-class man who falls foul of the brutal logic of the gig economy. Ricky (Chris Hitchen) is a husband and father-of-two living in Newcastle who has struggled with debt and precarious employment since losing his job during the 2008 market crash. Ricky becomes sold on the opportunity to run his own franchise as a parcel delivery driver and makes the decision to buy a transit van. However, the cost of the van requires Ricky's wife Abby (Debbie Honeywood) to sell the car which she uses to travel between patients for her job as a home visit nurse. Thus, Ricky's freedom of employment leads to a further burdening of debt, one which falls on the whole family. Where Ricky initially sees such work as a way of obtaining a degree of economic freedom, the oppressive reality of the gig economy soon becomes apparent.

These three films are all characterised by regressive narrative trajectories, characterised by decline and breakdown, which is inscribed primarily through the suffering body of their male protagonists. Either through violence enacted on them, or else an accumulation of exhaustion, these male bodies become privileged sites within each film's diagnoses of an inhospitable and uncaring social world. By identifying this representation of a regressive masculine embodiment as a consistent modality, across these texts, I am starting to set out what I understand the deteriorated body to mean. However, I also want to interrogate whether this focus on male embodiment *determines* a construction of the North that is necessarily fatalistic. Does the deteriorated body produce a contemporary place-image of the North in which "traditional" working-class masculinity is doomed?

And, if so, how does this fatalism allow for new forms of working-class experience and identity to be imagined?

Ken Loach's Northern Realism

Before continuing, it is important to note my decision to use two case studies from Ken Loach. In many ways, Loach constitutes a mode of representation unto himself, in regard to his importance to the cultural-historical image of the North. Paul Dave, for instance, includes Loach among L.S. Lowry and J.B. Priestley in a list of the foremost cultural producers of the ''grim up North' imagery of urban drabness, overcast skies and impoverished lives overshadowed by industry and decline.'[249] Formally, his preference for naturalism, exemplified by his location shooting has contributed to the construction of authenticity associated with Northern working-class subjects. Thematically, Loach's commitment to the depiction of Britain's marginalised working-class populations - as well as his consistent analysis of these issues through concepts of capitalist exploitation and alienated labour – has made his work resonate with Northern narratives of post-industrial decline. However, Loach's realism is not homogenous but is rather comprised of multiple generic registers, often in ways that can be periodised.[250] How might we conceptualise the relationship between the changing generic forms

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[249] Paul Dave, 'Knocking-off Time in the North: Images of the Working-Class and History in L.S. Lowry and Mitchell and Kenyon' in Mazierska (ed.), Heading North, p. 75

[250] If we focus on his Northern-set work, Loach's broad realism has intersected with a variety of aesthetic modes and generic registers; intersections which we can broadly periodise and categorise. Loach's social realism ranges across forms and tendencies such as the documentary style of early television plays like *The Golden Vision* (1968); to the poetic approaches to Yorkshire landscape found in his Barry Hines adaptations such as *Kes* (1969), *The Gamekeeper* (1980) and *Looks and Smiles* (1981); the naturalistic period drama of *Days of Hope* (1975); and the more recent incorporation of comedic strategies in post-Thatcher work like *Raining Stones* (1993) and *The Navigators* (2000). It is not the intention of this section of the thesis to be a section *about* Loach – its focus remains to be tropes of Northern representation – so the moments highlighted here are not exhaustive in their enumeration nor deep in their analysis.

evident in Loach's work, and the changing historical and social conditions of Britain and the Northern working-class?

In terms of the shifts in his work, Wendy Everett argues that '[t]ypically, [Loach's] films are positioned, as it were, along a vertical timeline which posits a direct correlation between historical event (*as cause*) and filmic production (*as effect*).'[251] [author's emphasis] In this position, the emerging presence of melodramatic and comedic tendencies are overlooked or else treated as a natural reflection of emerging social conditions. On the other hand, film studies scholarship on British cinema, seeking to correct this perspective, stresses Loach's status as an artist and an author. This work understands his work more through the lens of art cinema and seeks out his agency throughout different production contexts of British television, independent filmmaking, and internationally co-financed projects.[252] However, there is another way of thinking about Loach's relationship to social reality that does not require constructing a reflectionist continuity or else stressing his individuality. Everett's work on the importance of geography to Loach's work models this way of reading social change. Everett argues for consideration of place and geography as a corrective to the reflectionist understanding of Loach's style. She argues that 'location, far from being merely incidental, is thus precisely targeted in Loach's work…. its simultaneous realist and metaphorical identities [function] as a way of situating the individual experiences of his characters within a wider political, historical, and social context.'[253] This is a method of thinking about the changing generic forms in Loach's work as a mediation of discursive horizons that are particular to prevailing social and cultural ideas and

[251] Wendy Everett, 'Ken Loach and the Geographies of Class' in Cloarec, Haigron, and Letort (eds.) *Social Class on British and American Screens: Essays on Cinema and Television*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers), p.167
[252] See: Jacob Leigh, *Ken Loach: Art in the Service of Politics*, (London: Wallflower, 2002)
[253] Wendy Everett, 'Ken Loach and Geographies of Class', p.178

discourses, and within which certain aesthetic forms become more appropriate. This does not attribute the cause of Loach's changing stylistic tendencies to either the "historical event" nor the filmic "production" but conceptualises both within a shared discursive context and social imaginary.

John Hill argues that Loach's recent work has 'adapt[ed] to this climate of "capitalist realism". There has been a sobering emphasis upon the victims of economic neoliberalism - and the injustices and indignities that they have faced - but relatively little sense of how lives might have been lived differently.'[254] Where Hill attributes this change as reflecting a historical change in the nature of capitalism, I want to argue that the deteriorated Northern male body is part of a wider discursive context that is neither a reflection of reality nor specific to Loach. Rather than attribute the deteriorated body to Loach's work, I want to suggest that it is a modality that exists in a wider cultural context, which Loach's work nevertheless makes symbolic use of for political critique. Specifically, Loach's 'sobering emphasis upon victims' of neoliberalism and his recent return to Northern locales are imbricated elements within a discursive context that is shaped by an emergent imagination of decline. However, as I now turn to *I, Daniel Blake*[255], the question of whether this form allows Loach to imagine different lives is a pertinent issue that we must interrogate.

I, Daniel Blake

Within *IDB's* political critique of the conscious cruelty of the benefits system, the tired and struggling male body becomes a site on which the physical costs of navigating benefits are made evident. An expressive early sequence

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[254] John Hill, *Ken Loach: The Politics of Film and Television,* (*Basingstoke*: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.201

[255] *I, Daniel Blake* will henceforth be referred to as *IDB*

for witnessing the film's use of the body is a sequence in which we see Daniel killing time as he waits for a computer to become available at the central library. A series of shots depict Daniel idly wandering around Newcastle's regenerated shopping district, standing listlessly in the storefronts of designer jewellery shops and loitering amongst the area's boutique tourist attractions.

This is the first of a number of interstitial scenes, which depict uneventful actions – such as walking between places or being made to wait on the phone while on hold – which Daniel is forced to engage in in order to make his case heard. In these scenes, Daniel's agency is obstructed and the relationship between physical action and social purpose is distended. Here, *IDB* spends time dwelling on the minor gestures which mark the time that Daniel is forced to spend, such as; him rubbing his hands together as he stands in a shop doorway (perhaps to stay warm, perhaps simply to be physically busy) or puffing his cheeks out as he checks his watch (Figs. 3.1 and 3.2). In terms of the film's critique of the inhuman bureaucracy of the welfare system, such uneventful gestures recall Elena Gorfinkel's description of the political import of corporeality in contemporary art-cinema. Gorfinkel argues that this cinema is invested in a 'corporeal lexicon of exhaustion', specifically for the purposes of producing an image of 'enduration' - an audio-visual inscription of time passing which is indexed by the belaboured on-screen body – which can be politically mobilised to critique the temporal economies of contemporary neoliberal capitalism.[256] Gorfinkel describes how 'fatigue, weariness, tiredness, and exhaustion emerge from a relation to a sense of time that passes, passes on, and passes through the actor's labouring body, but also never ceases to pass on, to pass through'.[257] Enduration

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[256] Elena Gorfinkel, 'Weariness, Waiting: Enduration and Art Cinema's Tired Bodies', *Discourse*, 34, (2012)

[257] Ibid.

subverts classical cinema's smooth linear delineation of action, instead using the body to affectively convey the unvalued labour of existing. In *IDB*, Daniel's minor gestures emphasise the laborious passing of time, and his physical performance of exhaustion suggests how this time remains unrealised and stuck on the body. This presentation of the exhausted male body exposes the unseen labour of claiming benefits, an image of enduration which runs counter to the official discourses regarding the ease provided by digital streamlining which we hear about from Job Centre workers in the film. Through Daniel, *IDB* emphasises the physical cost which is elided by political and media commentators who wish to cast the benefits claimant as lazy or feckless.

At the same time, the scene situates this more direct political critique within a wider evocation of the changing image of the urban North. Daniel's corporeally marked exhaustion is juxtaposed against the regenerated spaces of Newcastle's city centre. These spaces are presented as inhospitable to Daniel, who moves transiently between shopfronts; spaces of commerce which he is unable to occupy because he lacks the social and economic capital of the intended urban consumer. In his book on the North East on film and television, James Leggott notes a tension in *IDB* and its critical coverage, between the film's use of a specific Newcastle setting and character and its confrontation with 'forces operating at a national, even global, level' that do not solely pertain to the de-industrialised North-East.[258] I would suggest that the film negotiates this tension through a feeling of conflict between Daniel's body and the urban space. Where Daniel's visible weariness contains a belaboured trace of time which has not 'passed through' but rather stays on the body in age and ailing health, the urban

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[258] James Leggott, *The North East of England on Film and Television*, (Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, 2021), pp. 203-204

setting of city centre Newcastle belies a similar image of the residual industrial landscape which is typically part of the realist gesture of the on-screen Northern landscape. Where Daniel's body carries the weight of time, the space around Newcastle's Grainger Market has been neatly repurposed for a modern urban commerce, with its shopfronts housing national and global brands.[259]
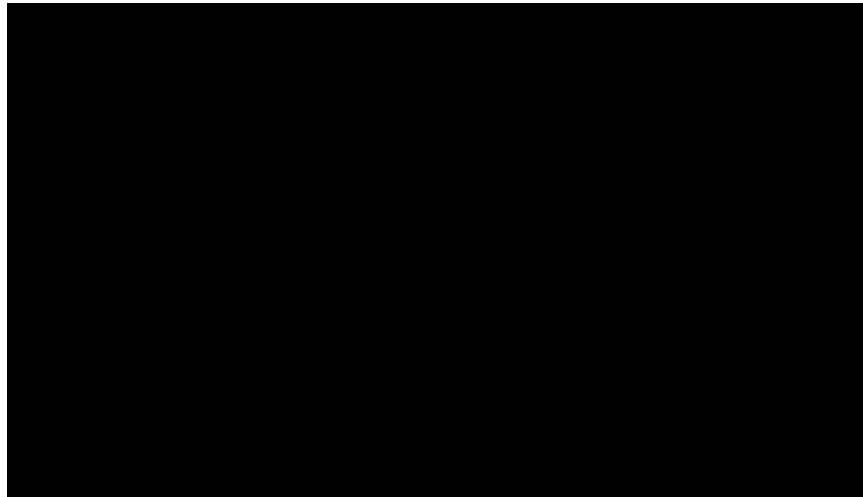
Fig. 3.1

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[259] It is important to note that we see Daniel walking through the Grainger Town section of Newcastle city centre which has always been a district of commerce and consumption, with the heavier sites of industry typically situated outside of the city itself and in the wider conurbation of Tyneside. However, the opening shot of this sequence – Daniel framed outside of an upmarket jeweller – nevertheless gestures to an assumed distinction between aging body and gentrified space.

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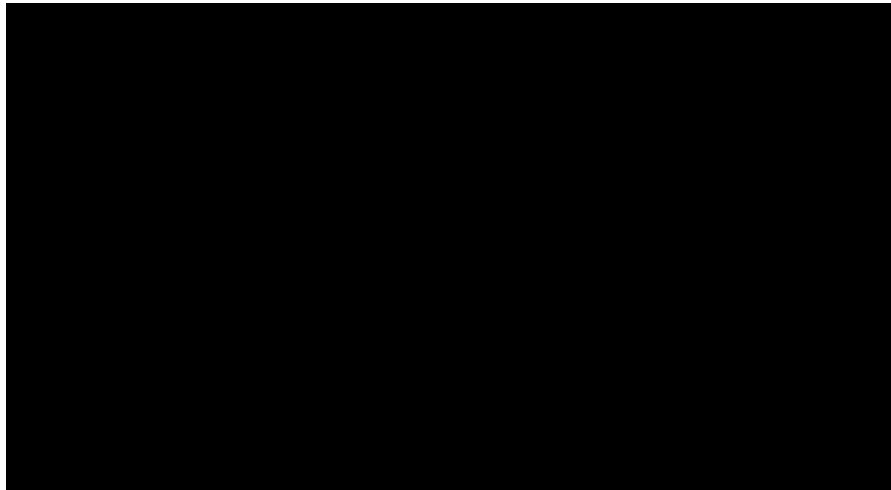
Fig. 3.2

This sequence exemplifies a key aspect of the rhetorical significance of the deteriorated body. Daniel's body itself is treated as an emblem of a still existent working-class struggle – a site for envisioning exploitation and its defiance - that has been evacuated from place itself. As we will also see in the next case study, *Tyrannosaur*, this transfer of the Northern place-myth's political meaning from place to body is a tendency within this modality of deterioration. However, in *IDB*, this movement from place to body also facilitates one of the film's key aesthetic strategies: the construction of Daniel as a melodramatic victim. This use of melodrama, while important to clarifying Daniel's rights as a citizen, also invites a fatalistic structure of feeling that has consequences for the film's construction of a contemporary North.

Austerity, Melodrama and the Temporality of 'Too Late'

In 'Melodrama and Tears', Steve Neale explicates the relationship between the formal and structural organisation of the melodramatic text and its intense arousal of pathos. He argues that the mode typically aims to achieve pathos by communicating a feeling of the characters' powerlessness to act on their personal or social circumstances. This powerless is articulated through melodrama's structural temporality of

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'too late', in which the limits of human agency are narrated through moments in which successful or desired character action is agonisingly delayed. More specifically, Neale argues that pathos is produced 'by a *realisation* that comes too late' [my emphasis].[260] It is not only that melodramatic victims are not able to act on their desires, but that the text emphasises an ongoing misrecognition of their needs by the social world; a misrecognition that is only corrected when it is too late for the victim's desires to be fulfilled. Through this recognition, the melodramatic text uses our emotional alignment, through the viewer's painful awareness of what others do not recognise, to prove the moral virtue of the victim, who suffers because of the flaws of the wider social world.

For Linda Williams, the out-of-time body is the chief object of melodramatic pathos. Williams's work on melodrama is chiefly concerned with gendered ideologies that the mode reveals; specifically, she is interested in how the spectacle of melodramatic suffering invites audience identification with forms of subjectivity that are marginalised within dominant ideology and usually coded as feminine.[261] Of critical importance here is Williams's formulation of the relationship between the suffering body of the victim and the responsive body of the spectator. Across her work Williams constructs a model of fissured sadomasochism in which the spectator identifies affectively with the physical suffering of the body, while also having a privileged position of narrative understanding of knowledge that creates distance and thus the ability to thoughtfully reflect on the social world depicted. The spectator does not merely share the protagonists feeling of

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[260] Steve Neale, 'Melodrama and Tears', *Screen*, 27:6, (1986), p. 10
[261] Linda Williams, 'Body Genres: Gender, Genre and Excess', *Film Quarterly*, 44:4, (1991)

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powerlessness, but rather experiences a 'complex negotiation of emotions and between emotion and thought', which allows for a critical understanding of social circumstances.[262]

Taken together, Neale's and William's explications of the melodramatic mode provide a means of understanding *IDB* articulation of Daniel as a paradigmatic victim through a formal emphasis on his as being a suffering body. The melodramatic temporality of 'too late' is inscribed on Daniel's body throughout. 'Too late' is a key material element of the film's narrative and formal style, and is central to how the film conveys Daniel's experience of the maddening bureaucratic system of procuring disability benefits. An emblematic instance of 'too late' can be found in a brief but significant sequence in which we see Daniel walking the streets of Newcastle city centre on the way to a scheduled appointment at the Job Centre. The images we see of Daniel are spatially and temporally out-of-sync with the soundtrack, as the voice-over captures a phone call between Daniel and a Job Centre adviser. As we see him walking the streets, without ever seeing him reach a destination, we simultaneously hear a frustrated Daniel being told that he cannot speak to anyone about his benefits claims. Loach uses the voice-over conversation to confuse the temporality of the sequence; the temporal *tense* in which Daniel is shown walking to an appointment is conflicted by a discontinuous call centre conversation which cannot be securely placed as either before or after the images we are seeing (Fig 3.3). This temporal confusion affectively undermines the purposefulness of Daniel's movements. Even as his walking demonstrates a desire to play by the rules in order to be eligible for his

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[262] Linda Williams, 'Melodrama Revised', in Nick Browne (ed.), *Refiguring American Film Genres*, (University of California Press, 1998), p. 49

benefits, the soundtrack reinforces the sense that Daniel is going nowhere. Never able to make progress with his case, it is as if Daniel is always "too late". The visual image of Daniel's agency is undermined, framed as insufficient to tackle the obfuscation built into the welfare system, which the character comes to describe as a "time-warp".
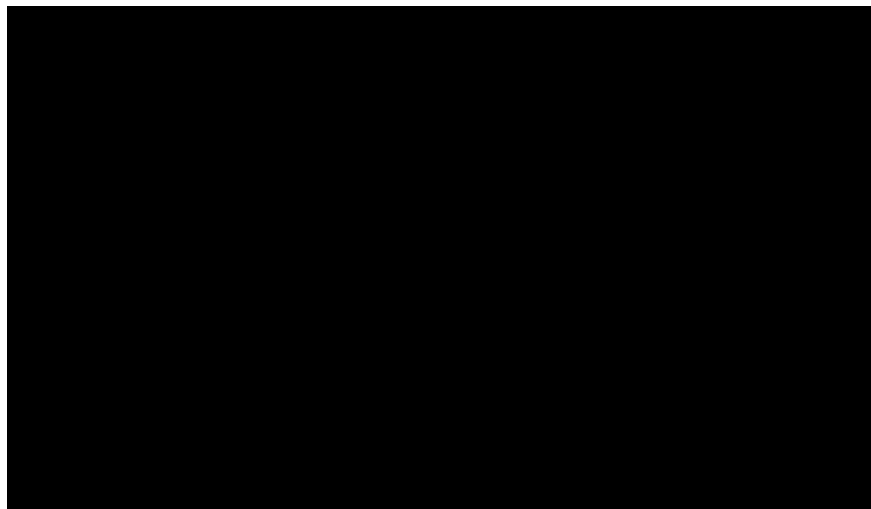
Fig. 3.3

However, if *IDB's* application of melodramatic forms allows for the articulation of moral failings in contemporary austerity policies, the film's inscription of moral and social injustice onto the suffering body has its own ideological issues. Namely, by making Daniel's body the site onto which suffering is evoked, the film also invites readings that would make Daniel's victimhood ontological. This notion of victimhood corresponds with Thomas Elsaesser's argument that melodrama has become a popular mode of cultural discourse because it offers victimhood as a stable subject position. He argues that, within melodrama:

> the victim is assigned not only a certain circumscribed role (for instance, to produce affect and emotion, and to refrain from having an opinion or promote an argument), but also a certain power, namely that of filling the slot of "authenticity,"

righteousness and subjective truth – but only on condition of

consenting to being a victim.[263]

Elsaesser here highlights the symbolic capital associated with the

melodramatic victim, but also an ideological trap of this victimhood, in

which identifying as a victim risks making the subject under

construction appear as an *essential* victim.

In the context of *IDB*, the construction of Daniel as a victim of

the erosion of social security is complicated by its investment in the

body as expressive of this erosion. While the film's melodramatic plot

follows Daniel's deterioration and highlights the ways in which the

punitive nature of contemporary British social security exacerbates his

physical suffering and distress, its foregrounding of the body

introduces imaginative tensions where political commentary is

undermined by images of bodily failure that are pre-determined and

destined by the forms and conventions of the melodramatic mode.

It is significant in the construction of Daniel's specific

victimhood that his initial state of precarity is *caused* by a heart-attack

that occurs before the plot of the film has begun. Before Daniel has

come to experience the punishing reality of benefits, his declining

health establishes the narrative trajectory of 'loss' which conventionally

structures the melodramatic plot.[264] It is Daniel's incapacitating heart-

attack that causes the initial impediment to his ability to work and act,

an event that instigates all the later delays that Daniel experiences. The

film begins with an interview in which symptoms of Daniel's physical

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[263] Thomas Elsaesser, 'Melodrama and Victimhood: Modern, Political and Militant', in Loren and Metelmann (eds.), *Melodrama after Tears*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), p.36

[264] Loren and Metelmann, 'Introduction', *Melodrama after Tears*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), p.11

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condition are conveyed, via a state medical examination, over a black screen. This initial absence of image in favour of just Daniel's voice is admittedly a trademark of Loach's style elsewhere, but the black screen takes on other connotations when allied with the male voice on the soundtrack which describe the severity of his recent 'massive heart-attack'. The darkness of the screen here can also be interpreted as announcing the very absence of the strong self-sufficient body that Daniel once had. Moreover, by not showing this moment of ailing health, by associating the heart-attack with an absent image, the opening implicitly (perhaps even unconsciously) constructs this deterioration as *without cause*. The formal elements here imply that Daniel's body begins with an essential (even conventionally pre-determined) failure that is root of all other losses that accumulate throughout the film.

<u>Male Melodrama</u>

The limits of the film's melodramatic imagining of Northern male embodiment become clear if we compare Daniel's depiction to that of Katie (Haley Squires), the film's other primary character who also struggles to survive the welfare system. Through Katie, the film articulates another set of discourses around the transformation of the relationship between state and individual, from citizen to the perceived consumer of resources. Ostensibly, the inclusion of Katie broadens the film's representation of contemporary experiences of precarity both in terms of region and gender. Katie is a single mother who has been forced to relocate from London to an unfamiliar Newcastle to find a habitable council home for her and her two young children. Her move from South to North reverses the mythic journey of Northern realism, conveying a new organisation of economic inequality in Britain,

represented less by an essential geographical divide than by a more uneven yet broadly national experience of inner city gentrification forcing working-class families outwards. Katie's struggles to survive on benefits also differ from Daniel's in terms of the gendered labour invoked. Her precarity involves a struggle for recognition over the care-work involved in motherhood, specifically in terms of balancing the ongoing daily maintenance of her children's wellbeing with a desire to return to education and more permanently improve her family's economic standing. Thus, via Katie the film seemingly develops a different iteration of melodramatic misrecognition. It is worth noting that while Daniel's body is the most emblematically melodramatic, another key moment of pathos in the film centres on Katie's humiliation at a food bank, when she desperately and instinctively eats a tin of cold beans with her bare hands, with her children just out of sight, before breaking down in tears when consoled by one of the bank's volunteers.

However, even as *IDB* appears to acknowledge a differently gendered set of experiences related to precarity, the melodramatic loss which coheres the film's moral critique remains attached to the loss of physical agency associated with Northern working-class masculinity. Katie's suffering is not only because of the cruel and unfair nature of state provision but also, within the film's narrative and visual logic, because Daniel no longer has the physical capability to provide for her.[265] The film reveals this attachment to a masculinist model of

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[265] Early in the film, it is Daniel's craftmanship and DIY – a set of residual skills still, at this point, unhindered by the heart attack – which takes some of the financial burden from Katie when she struggles to pay the electric bill. However, Katie increasingly must take charge. Although they are not signalled as causally related, there is nevertheless a parallel structuring, in terms of narration, of Daniel's physical decline with Katie's increasingly desperate financial position.

working-class agency in how it represents Katie's eventual turn to sex-work as a last resort. Katie is coerced into working at a brothel by a security guard who catches her stealing sanitary products from a local shop. Daniel's eventual discovery of Katie, in the brothel, is a moment of heightened emotion. A distraught Daniel follows Katie onto the street, in tears, as he pleads "you don't need to do this". This depiction of sex work has been criticised as paternalistic. Francesco Sticchi, citing Miguel Mellino, surmises this moment as revealing of an attitude in which:

> Daniel's ethical ground is highly defined by his 'enclosed' white/male working-class status, associated with a nostalgic celebration for past political organisations and by a consequent inability to recognise in Katie an equally struggling worker or to empathise with her decision.[266]

Qualifications could be made here – that Katie seems to voice her own self-disgust - but the paternalism is clear in the presentation of Daniel's body during the moment of emotional confrontation. Towards the end of the scene, specifically, Daniel's gestures of weariness are reappropriated as signifiers of emotional and moral inaction (Figs. 3.4 and 3.5). Captured in a series of shot-reverse-shots, we see Daniel attempt to embrace Katie, to offer her comfort, before he is pushed away. As she justifies her decision by saying she has the money to buy her children fruit, reverse angles keep returning to Daniel, whose stillness and visibly heavy breathing suggest a physical inability to intervene anymore. By making Daniel's deteriorated body the key site

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[266] Francesco Sticchi, *Mapping Precarity in Contemporary Cinema and Television* (Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, 2021), p. 58

of melodramatic pathos, *IDB* betrays an attachment to strong virile masculinity as the privileged sign of working-class political agency.
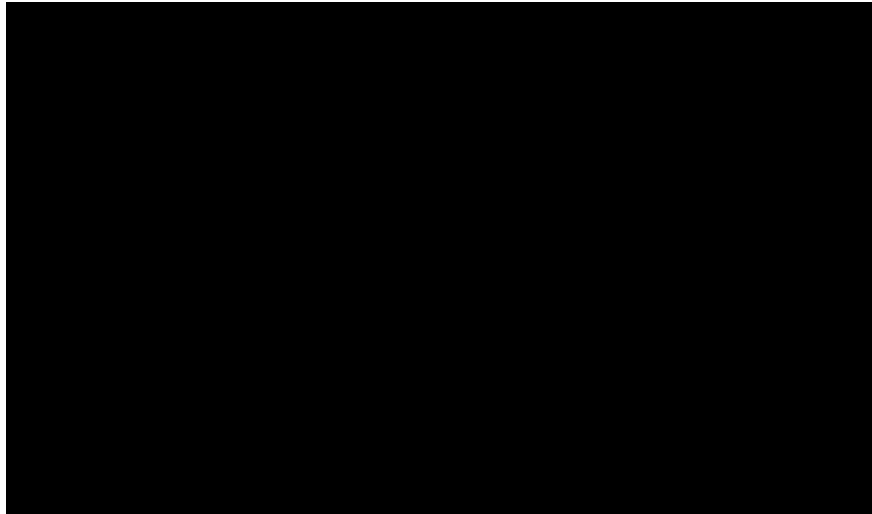
Fig. 3.4
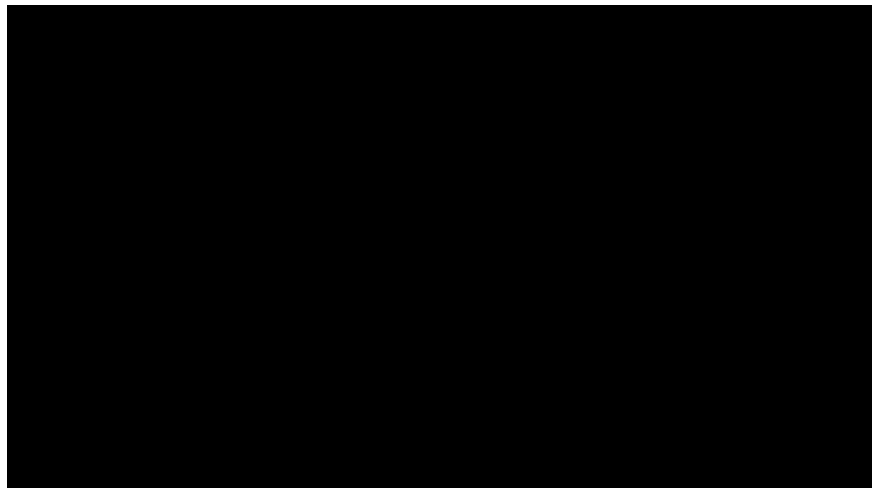
Fig. 3.5

<u>Tyrannosaur</u>

The deteriorating body appears in a different guise in *Tyrannosaur* but with similar affects. At first glance, Paddy Considine's directorial debut is much less politicised than Loach's work. As opposed to the moral clarity of melodrama, *Tyrannosaur* is a character study which foregrounds

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psychological complexity in its depiction of a severely troubled and angry male protagonist. As previously stated, it might be tempting to thus read the film as partaking in a "new realist" aesthetic, in its favouring of the more subjective and personal dimensions of reality, as opposed to an emphasis on social and structural forces. An interest in the performance of masculinity, and its potential harmfulness within intimate relationships, is a prominent theme in Considine's small body of work. His subsequent film *Journeymen* (2017) is also set in the North – shot primarily in Sheffield – but treats toxic masculinity as a problem which must be battled in terms of psychological and personal improvement. *Journeyman* de-emphasises the wider social context both through its close engagement with the generic conventions of the boxing film (and the narrative trajectory of the underdog who ultimately succeeds) and by its almost entirely home-set depiction of domestic abuse.[267] Considine's close adherence to a personal realm might thus be interpreted as leading to a less impactful evocation of the North within the narrative world. However, in the case of *Tyrannosaur* specifically, the ambiguous relation between personal and social can be seen as invoking notions of essentialised social space that we can read as grounded in the myths of the North. Furthermore, we can identify a common set of rhetorical strategies shared by this film and *IDB*; strategies which, as we will see, rely in some sense on a conventional construction of Northern masculinity. Thus, by comparing *Tyrannosaur* and *IDB* we can further define the boundaries of the deteriorated body and its cultural and political significance to contemporary Northern representation.

In a broader discussion of European 'post-crisis' cinema, György Kalmar has noted the thematic resemblance between *IDB* and *Tyrannosaur* by

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[267] For a more detailed discussion of the film's use of the narrative conventions of the boxing film, see: Stephen Glynn, *The British Boxing Film*, (Palgrave Macmillan: Cham; Switzerland, 2021), pp. 221-227

characterising both films as representations of 'Angry Old Men'. Like the protagonist of the British New Wave films, Kalmar's Angry Old Men are treated by their films as 'allegorical figures' who emblematise a profound feeling of change in the status of the British working-class.[268] Specifically, Kalmar relates this figure to the articulation of a left behind structure of feeling. Describing the situations encountered by their protagonists, Kalmar argue that the films 'express the idea that the world…is no longer accommodating [to such men] … They feel dispossessed, neglected and disregarded, they do not understand the new "digital by default" world of globalized capitalism'.[269] Moreover, Kalmar describes how these broader political issues are focussed through 'regressive' and 'moribund' narrative trajectories, 'which are not driven by forward-looking desire, but by pain, mourning, melancholia [and] nostalgia.'[270] What Kalmar describes as narratives of crisis focussed on 'Angry Old Men' is what I am describing as narratives of Northern male deterioration. However, although we are naming similar structures of feeling, Kalmar's broader focus on European 'post-crisis' cinema results in a lack of attention to both diachronic and synchronic relations between British culture and history. The essay only briefly references the angry young men as antecedent representations of working-class masculinity.[271] This lack of concern for culturally specific histories results in Kalmar's reflectionist understanding of the 'allegorical' status of Angry Old Men. These figures are always read as clarifying the ongoing transformations in late-capitalist society. However, rather than treat them as transparent in this allegorical role, we need to ask what it means that images of prematurely aged men have become allegorical of the present

[268] György Kalmár, 'Angry Old Men in Post-Crisis European Cinema', *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies*, 18, (2020), p. 51
[269] Ibid., pp. 51-52
[270] Ibid., p. 52
[271] Ibid., p. 32

moment in British society? What does the allegorical nature of these figures say about the kinds of social relations which can be represented in British film? By now looking at *Tyrannosaur*, I want to sharpen our sense of the rhetorical contours of the deteriorated male body and develop a sense of what it is that is particularly *present* about this modality. This is a task which requires, first, to interrogate the film's presentation of the male body with reference to the aesthetic paradigm of new realism. Specifically, how does the film's resemblance to new realism impact the way in which the film comments on masculinity and understands the social world in which such masculinity is formed?

Outmoded and Allegorical Masculinity

In its very first sequence, *Tyrannosaur* suggests both the allegorical status of its central male character, Joseph (Peter Mullan), and the complexity of what it is, exactly, that he is meant to allegorise. The film opens in a backstreet as Joseph is kicked out of a bookie for refusing to part with a can of lager. Drunk and incoherent, he starts to make his way home by collecting his dog Bluey from a nearby lamppost but suddenly snaps in a moment of misdirected rage and lashes out at the innocent pet, fatally kicking it in the ribs. The scene turns on this disturbing act of violence; filled with sudden remorse, Joseph picks up Bluey, and carries the injured dog miles back to his house where he tends to it in the garden shed as it dies overnight. The sequence thus characterises Joseph as representing an outmoded masculinity. He is a drunk bully who takes out his perceived injuries on a defenceless victim. Acting almost as a prologue to the film's story, Kalmar describes how this introductory sequence makes Joseph representative of 'everything that can go wrong or become toxic' about this kind of working-

class masculinity.[272] However, although something is clearly 'wrong' with Joseph, the scene creates a distance, both in terms of narrative point-of-view and moral alignment, that renders the viewer unable to understand what exactly is wrong.

This is a distance which is constructed through the film's 'new realist' approach to the representation of character. Forrest himself includes *Tyrannosaur* within his category of new realism. This opening does much to justify his argument that, in contrast to the clear didactic approach of Loach's films, which approach character in terms of the construction of 'representative' types, new realism's 'focus on sensory and physical experience' invokes a 'wilful plurality of realist accents' that emphasises the essential ambiguity of reality even as it appeals to a familiar and concrete sense of the social. The emphasis on Joseph's indeterminate sensory experience immediately sets him apart from the social and psychological legibility of the Loach protagonist Daniel. Unlike Daniel, Joseph's physical and mental ailments are not immediately apparent in terms of their cause, nor are they represented as coherent qualities. In this opening scene, Joseph's psychological ambiguity is conveyed through a sudden change in physical demeanour. Although the scene opens with this attack on Bluey, Joseph's remorse is reflected in his sudden changing comportment, kneeling to gently carry the dog back home. There is a shift in the shot scale, too. Where the attack of Bluey is filmed in long shot, with the impact of the kick withheld as the camera focuses solely on Joseph and the force and violence of the motion of his upper-body, the scene later introduces multiple extreme close-ups which Joseph tenderly strokes Bluey's paw and pats its head. These different moments of physical engagement with Bluey – a vacillation between a striking outwards and more intensive feeling of touch – are stark in their

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[272] Ibid.

contradiction. Both styles of shooting feeling spatially incomplete; we only see Joseph's upper-body in the moment he kicks Bluey and then only the edges of his hand as he later strokes her fur (Figs. 3.6, 3.7, and 3.8). Intensifying these contradictory feelings of bodily engagement, the opening scene presents Joseph has as two distinct and irreconciled personalities and bodies.

Tyrannosaur invokes a male body that is visibly and intuitively troubling partly because it is so ambiguous. The very same physical actions which attest to Joseph's inscrutability as a 'social' realist figure also construct our feeling that he represents a deteriorated masculinity. It is not that Joseph's violent nature is inherently objectionable; as made evident by the earlier chapter, History of the Screen North, the image of the violent working-class man has often been framed as either restorative or else a cathartic reaction to a widespread social wrongdoing. An obvious comparison is Yosser Hughes, who, like Joseph is introduced as an unstable character capable of momentary acts of violence. This is a comparison which Considine implicitly invites, with the director describing Joseph as influenced by the focussed character studies of *Boys from the Blackstuff*.[273] However, Yosser's violence can be understood as inscribing through the male body a residual and dislocated Northern "hardness" which the wider text relates to the loss of stable industrial work. Yosser's wild gestures attest to a body which can no longer find purpose or stability in labour. Joseph's violent acts lacks this wider social justification, and thus lack the attentive feeling of catharsis associated with lashing out at a wider social ill.

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[273] Paddy Considine, 'Paddy Considine introduces his short film Dog Altogether | Film4 Interview', *YouTube*, uploaded by Film4, (22nd March 2018). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zR2UGFnlV5s&ab_channel=Film4. Accessed 10th June 2021.

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Fig. 3.6
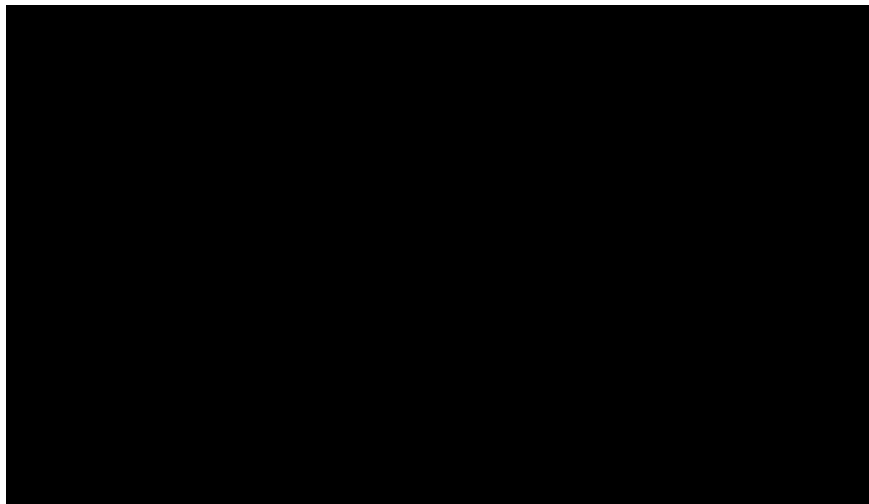
Fig 3.7
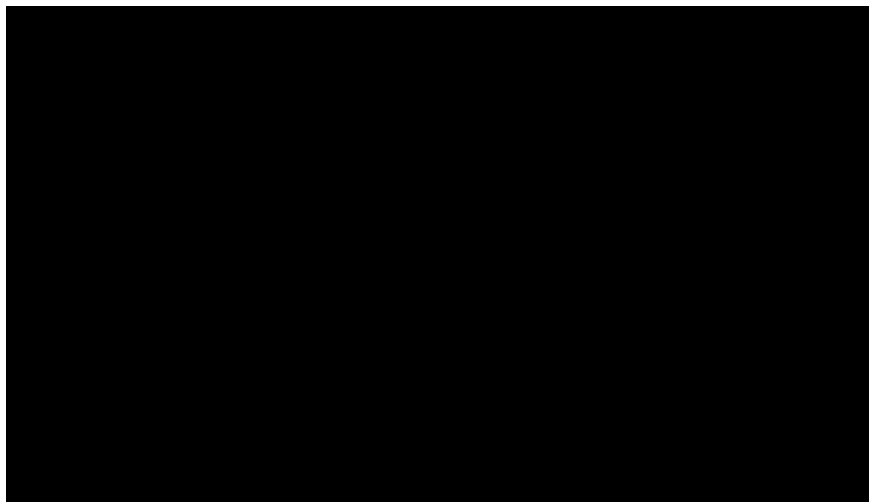
Fig. 3.8

Tyrannosaur's characterisation of Joseph as a psychologically opaque character raises questions about how much the film's representation of such masculinity is socially inflected. This is not just a rehashing of questions about the social-ness of contemporary "new" realism, but also regarding the importance of a sense of regional specificity to contemporary portraits of the working-class. Leggott's suspicion that social realism, in this period of neoliberalism, is faced by the flattening of local difference by more globally organised economic systems is even more pertinent to *Tyrannosaur* than to *IDB*.[274] Although *Tyrannosaur* is filmed in Leeds, this setting is less expressively signalled by the film world and more implied by incidental details such as the preponderance of Yorkshire accents within the diegesis. The temptation to read the setting as an unimportant backdrop for a psychologically driven narrative is also provoked by the context of the film's production. Not only is the main character, Joseph, Scottish, but the film itself is an adaptation of Considine's previous short film *Dog Altogether*, which was set in Glasgow and shot on location in the city. With Peter Mullan and Olivia Coleman playing the same roles in both films, *Tyrannosaur* recreates the plot of *Dog Altogether* in its first twenty minutes before expanding on the short and developing into a story which is more concerned with the relationship between Joseph and Hannah (Olivia Coleman). In keeping the story the same across both texts, the relocation from Scotland to Northern England might seem like an incidental detail in a realist text primarily intended by Considine as a character study. However, as suggested earlier, the re-emergence of the North in the last decade can also be approached through its role as a place-myth which condenses broader discourses related to histories of class and gendered identity. Specifically, the

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[274] James Leggott, *The North East of England on Film and Television*, pp. 205-206

'left behind' North is relevant here to understanding for understanding how and why *Tyrannosaur* treats Joseph as an allegorical figure.

While the events of *Tyrannosaur's* first twenty minutes are identical to those of *Dog Altogether,* its construction of a social world surrounding Joseph is notably different. Primarily, *Dog Altogether* creates the feel of a coherent working-class community, even if such a community feels remote. Joseph interacts with people within a recognisable working-class milieu; he playfully banters with local children who he passes on the street and speaks to the barmaid in the pub while ordering a drink. These passing interactions, even if minor, are a world away from the desolate social environments of *Tyrannosaur* where Joseph's only forms of social connection revolve around shared experiences of trauma and pain.[275] Although the character of Joseph remains psychologically troubled across both films, *Dog Altogether* presents this deteriorating mental state as contained within his character with little influence on the wider depiction of community. In *Tyrannosaur* this mental and physically marked deterioration is felt as emblematic of a wider feeling of an evacuated social world, where all that is left is the ruins of a community. That we cannot obviously understand Joseph in relation to a wider social context is used by *Tyrannosaur* to comment on the condition of that social world. It is this presentation of Joseph's body which accords with a recognisably Northern imaginary. Even if Joseph is not characterised as Northern in terms of geographical identity, his representation nevertheless

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[275] The only scene in *Tyrannosaur* in which Joseph is depicted as part of a group or community is during the funeral reception of his recently deceased friend. With Hannah temporarily living with Joseph as a refuge from her abusive husband, the pair attend the funeral together. Although this provides a moment in which a community is represented – one of the more hopeful images of the film involves Joseph and Hannah merrily dancing in the pub during the reception – it is notably brief and elegiac in its presentation, with this being a collective group who we only see in the context of another man's death.

relates to discourses of decline and the loss that contribute to a feeling of deterioration.

Enigmatic Bodies and Essentialised Deterioration

In terms of *Tyrannosaur's* imagining of the North, this evacuation of industrialism – and its residual images of heroic masculinity – raises both potentials and problems for representing the region in terms that avoid the fatalistic historical discourses of post-industrial decline. In one sense, the film's tendency to narratively and visually disturb the viewer's identification with Joseph provokes questions about how we value the working-class male body outside of the context of industrial labour. This is a provocation which the fIlm emphasises through moments of visual intimacy with Joseph's body. On the face of it, the moral ambiguity written through Joseph's body is opposite to the melodramatic victimhood inscribed on Daniel's suffering body in *IDB*. This opposition seemingly mirrors the distinction between didactic social realism and more 'poetic' realism, where Forrest associates the latter with a potential to better convey 'more complex and nuanced accounts of reality in its multiple articulations'.[276] In turn, these complex constructions of reality are read by Forrest as promoting an active engagement from the viewer in the social worlds represented. New realist films 'actively work against a sense of the viewer's passivity' by resisting more obvious Marxist-inflected models for describing social relations and historical change.[277] However, as suggested in the Literature Review, the relationship between realism's aesthetics and its social import cannot be simply assumed. Specifically, in the context of Northern and working-class representation, a visually and narratively complex aesthetic is not, on its

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[276] David Forrest, *New Realism: Contemporary British Cinema,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), p. 18
[277] Ibid., p. 16

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own, enough to determine a complex working through of the changing meanings of classed life.

Forrest's assumption that ambiguity leads to an apprehension of social complexity is difficult to justify in the context of contemporary working-class representation. Paul Dave's work on the morally and aesthetically complex underclass films of the 1990s attests to how British culture is adept at presenting emerging changes in class relations through reified frames of reference.[278] Despite the sudden popularity of subversive characters, such as Renton in *Trainspotting* (1996), Dave argues that the underclass films were essentially a release of class-based tensions which re-worked the tradition of the national pastoral, with its objectives of performing a 'simplification and harmonising of class and social relations'.[279] What was unique about this version of the pastoral was that it performed this simplification with an emphasis on the ambiguity of its classed characters, as opposed to their knowability. As he characterises it:

> Avoiding the respectful sentimentalism for a national pastoral
> grounded in an industrial working-class of the past – the elegiacs
> of *Brassed Off* and *The Full Monty* for instance… Pastoral
> humanism…is replaced by a voyeuristic feeling for the distance
> between the middle-class connoisseurs of popular, demotic
> cultural forms and the *underclass naturals* that embody them.
> Another way of putting this would be to say that the ruins of the
> post-war "new Jerusalem" …are no longer recognised as the
> disappointed dreams supposedly once common to the middle
> class and the working class. To an extent these ruins become an

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[278] Paul Dave, *Visions of England: Class and Culture in Contemporary Cinema*, (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2006)
[279] Ibid., p. 6

enigma for the middle class and they are viewed "from a distance".[280]

The notion of 'enigma' is important in this passage. Dave understands the construction of enigmatic characters as disturbing old frames of class reference but in a manner which repels the viewer's active and empathetic engagement. In effect, in rendering these characters as enigmatic, such texts merely confirm a middle-class notion that working-class characters are beyond understanding, that they are culturally alien. Dave suggests that it is the underclass' unknowability that reinscribes a reassuring sense of distance.

In situating the contemporary iteration of the pastoral tradition within the historical context of the 'ruins' of the post-war society, Dave's arguments usefully relate to the structures of feeling under discussion in this chapter. The left behind, as a category which names both the economically excluded and the culturally pathologised, is a contemporary iteration of this pastoral tendency. The left behind renders complex social shifts comprehensible via narratives of redundant populations, which cast large parts of Britain as 'failed spaces' both economically and morally.[281] Thus, Forrest's conflation of ambiguity with an active engagement with reality needs reconsidering in terms of these enigmatic social discourses. In the case of *Tyrannosaur*, its representation of Joseph's issues as 'enigmatic' illustrates how formations of Northern masculine deterioration tend towards fatalism and closure even in this ostensibly more complex mode of realism.

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[280] Ibid., p. 12

[281] For example, see: Shamin Miah, Pete Sanderson, and Paul Thomas, *"Race", Space and Multiculturalism in Northern England*: *The (M62) Corridor of Uncertainty*, (Cham; Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020)

The narrative patterning of Joseph most obviously renders this enigmatic quality in terms of deterioration's fatalism and essentialism. These qualities are evident in the parallels which the film constructs between Joseph and Hannah (Olivia Coleman). The narrative of the pair's growing friendship is evidently intended as a broadly humanist representation of two characters from different class backgrounds who find temporary companionship in the shared recognition of other's loneliness. In the pair's first encounter in Hannah's charity shop, after Joseph's attack on the teenagers in the pub, he ignores her when she offers to pray for him to calm him down. The next day, he returns and mocks what he perceives to be her condescending and middle-class Christian moralism. He tells her: "I met people like you in all my fucking life…You've never eaten shit. You don't know what it's like out there. You haven't a fucking clue!". However, for both characters, these initial judgements are overcome as the pair begin to recognise a shared hardship. Through Joseph and Hannah's unlikely friendship, and against the backdrop of its eroded social world, the film ostensibly develops the thematic claim that individual acts of empathy can bridge the social divides which have become more keenly felt in the period of neoliberalism.

However, although the film portrays Hannah as sharing Joseph's hardships, it provides her character a degree of narrative explanation which is withheld from Joseph. The film depicts Hannah as a victim of domestic violence. In a number of scenes, we see the physical and verbal abuse which she is put through by her husband James (Eddie Marsan). While initially attempting to keep the façade of a respectable middle-class marriage, the emotional toll of this abuse leads to Hannah breaking down. These moments of breakdown resemble the difficulties which have characterised Joseph throughout the story. Hannah starts drinking excessively as a coping

mechanism, and like Joseph, becomes aggressive and defiant towards James when she is drunk. Eventually, Hannah turns violent, and even stabs James to death after he rapes her. One might interpret these resemblances in behaviour as constructing both characters as similar in their emotional torment, and yet the film narrates Hannah's actions as justified and surprising acts of desperation, whereas Joseph remains enigmatic and beyond clarification.

For instance, where Hannah starts drinking alone, it is an action which is motivated by multiple preceding sequences of abuse and emotional anguish; the film shows this as a gradually developing problem, beginning with a glass of wine at home in anxiety at James's return, progressing to a few desperate swigs of a bottle of vodka hidden in the backroom of the charity shop, and culminating in her drinking to the point of collapse when she heads to the town centre and physically berating James when she returns home. This sequence of events happens in a short space of time, within the plot, emphasising a clear psychological cause-and-effect. Thus, even though *Tyrannosaur* seeks to represent a common feeling of deterioration, it formally and narratively reaffirms Dave's notion that the working-class 'naturals' are represented as embodying the social ills which the middle-class might fall foul of. In this sense, the deteriorated male body is treated as rhetorical proof of a wider moral decline.

Having explored two different realist texts, with two very different male characters, we can see the development of a common representational issue of the deteriorated body. This is the question of whether deterioration clarifies or confounds our understanding of the contemporary social moment. If deteriorated bodies inscribe a structure of feeling that is associated with the erasure of industrialisation from a Northern imaginary, do they also allow us to understand the social and political structures which

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have emerged in the wake of this erasure? In the case of *IDB* and *Tyrannosaur*, although deteriorated bodies focalise an emergent feeling of social dislocation and dissolution, they also seemingly pre-determine how we interpret this new social. For all their political differences, both bodies reify Northern masculine working-class identity, either through structures of melancholia or else via the enigmatic qualities of the urban pastoral which pathologise contemporary working-class subjectivities. For all the apparent aesthetic differences between *IDB* and *Tyrannosaur*, they reproduce a similar rhetorical effect, where deterioration stabilises a complex and contradictory set of social forces and effects.

However, this is not to argue that deteriorated bodies are politically compromised from the outset. Another core argument of the chapter, thus far, is that the meaning of bodily representation is not determined by broader assumptions of aesthetic strategies, but rather must be read according to their specific textual construction. As Raymond Williams argues of realist representation, there is a subtle distinction between the aesthetic processes of 'releas[ing]' and 'working-out' social contradictions.[282] In the spirit of not treating deteriorated bodies as determined by their mode of representation, my final case study returns to an approach which has already been discussed: the Loach realist-melodrama.

Sorry We Missed You

Formally and thematically, Loach's 2019 film *Sorry We Missed You* is a companion work to *IDB*, continuing the filmmaker's interest in the everyday realities faced by the British precariat.[283] The film shifts its concern from the

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[282] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin in association with Chatto & Windus, 1965), p. 62
[283] *Sorry We Missed You* will henceforth be abbreviated as *SWMY*

welfare state to the gig economy; a system of commerce which is structured around short-term and flexible forms of labour enabling the immediate delivery of good and services. As this economy has grown in recent years, its precarious working practices have become more visible, with numerous high-profile strike actions drawing public attention to conditions in which workers operate as self-employed contractors, with few rights and protections, and only guaranteed employment one gig at a time.[284] Following *IDB's* condemnation of the abstract cruelty of the benefits system, *SWMY* is another attack on the dehumanisation of British civic society in the period of neoliberalism. However, by turning attention to the labour process, this later film shows how initially economic logics – privatisation, informationalisation, and algorithmic governance – have come to extend beyond the context of labour. Just as *IDB* depicts how Daniel becomes trapped by bureaucracy of the welfare state, *SWMY* captures Ricky's slow unravelling because of the punishing effects of gig economy work, which comes to take an increasingly visible toll on his well-being.

Ricky's Exhaustion

In *SWMY*, physical deterioration is represented as an accumulating process tied to the bodily experiences of gig economy labour. The representation of Ricky's stressful work schedule centres on how his body registers and reproduces the illogical imperatives of algorithmically governed labour. The film makes these stresses evident in the many sequences we see of Ricky making his deliveries in his van. All of Ricky's deliveries are scheduled by the palm device that plans his routes and sets his 'precises' (strict timeslots for all drop offs). Yet the apparent ease of this informationalised work quickly becomes a source of frustration. In particular, the film communicates

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[284] The release of *Sorry We Missed You* in UK cinemas, in November 2019, arrived two months after the highly publicised strike action taken by Deliveroo drivers in London.

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the irrational expectations of this form of labour through a consistent formal emphasis on the temporal lags and gaps that Ricky experiences.

In the first such delivery sequence, we see Ricky's delivery route through a montage of fragmented scenes: a delivery of medication to the door of a man suffering from cancer for whom Ricky offers to unload a heavy package; Ricky driving the van to a deserted industrial estate where he stands perplexed at the location he is meant to deliver the parcel; Ricky angrily yelling at other drivers from the driver's seat as he is stuck in rush hour traffic; finally, Ricky delivering a parcel to the flat of a man, resulting in an argument about football (Figs. 3.9 – 3.16). The editing of these fragments is palpably contradictory. As my brief synopsis indicates, these moments are connected elliptically, reflecting a sudden passage of time. Moreover, the quality of the ellipsis is truncated and awkward. Although we can infer that the order we see these scenes in are in fact sequential, none of the deliveries are completed except for the final one, and the cutting frequently situates Ricky mid-delivery. The different sequences do not fit together in any contiguous way. Instead, we feel the gaps in time.
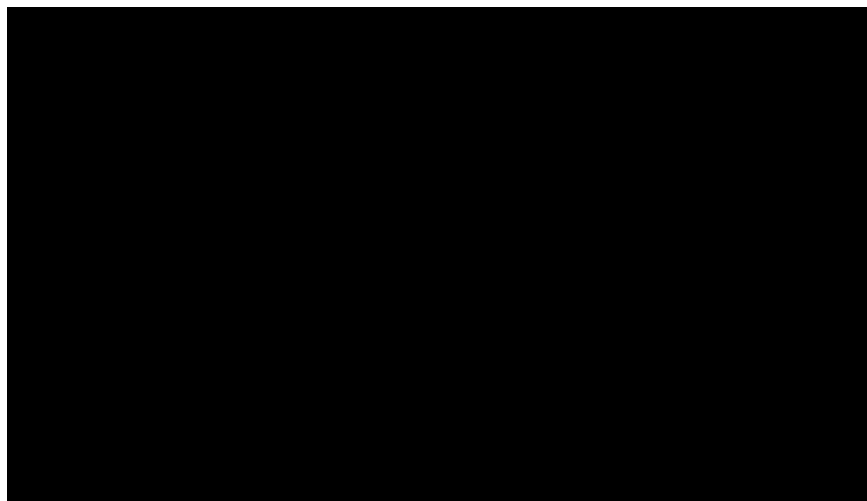
Fig. 3.9
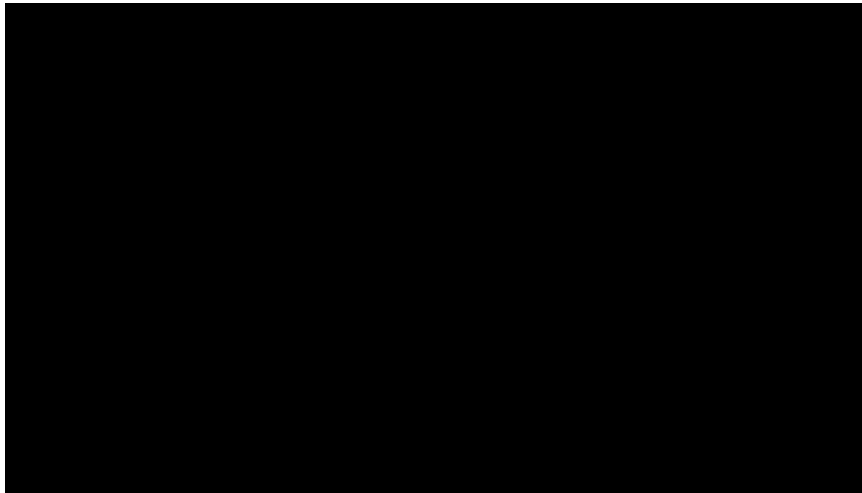
Fig. 3.10

Fig. 3.11

Fig 3.12

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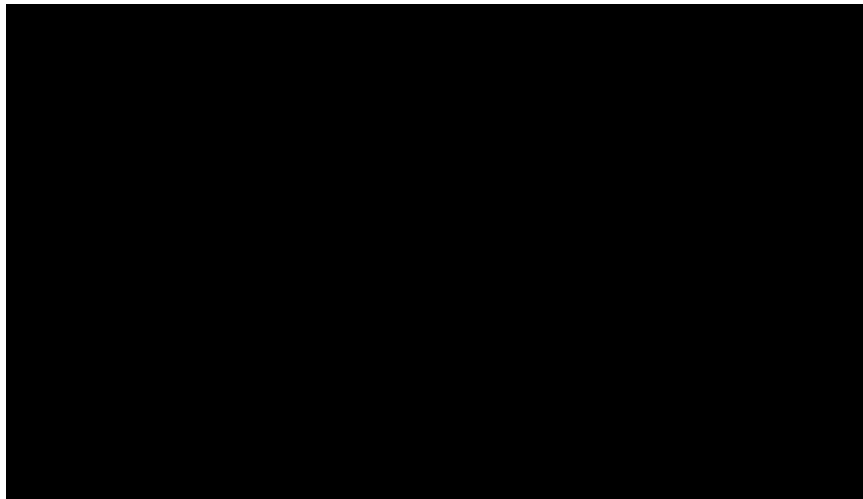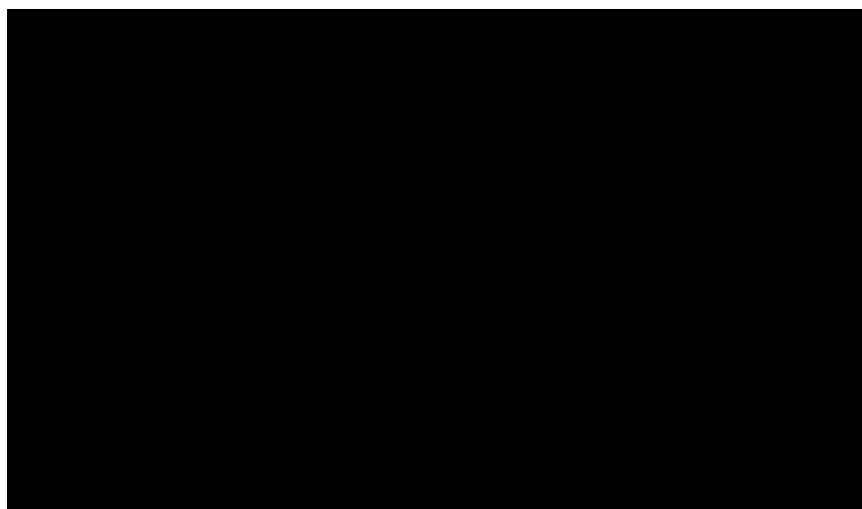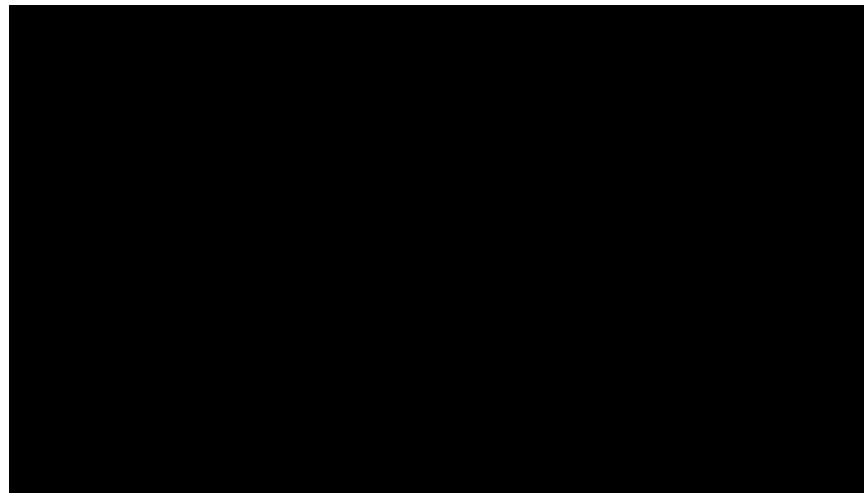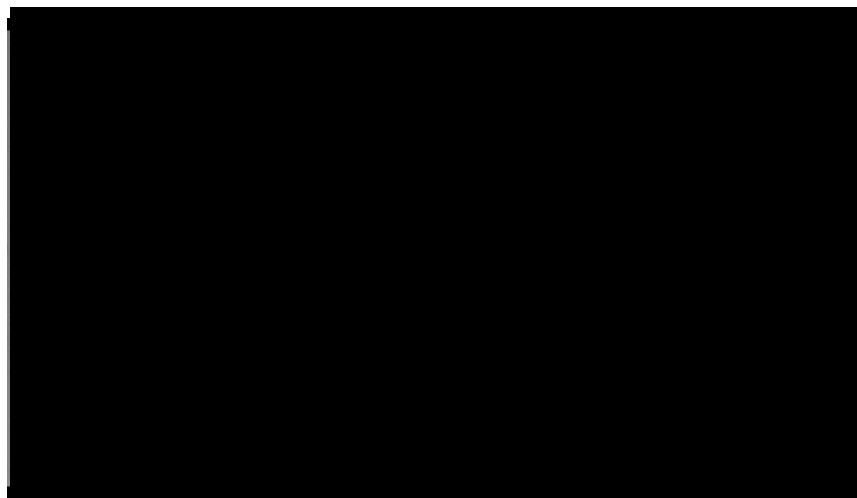
Fig 3.13

Fig 3.14

Fig 3.15

One way of interpreting the quality and purpose of the editing of these sequences is to read it as resembling a late-capitalist structure of experience. Although there have been a number of different nuanced conceptualisations of how late-capitalist society engenders new forms of spatio-temporal experience – from Frederic Jameson's formulation of late-capitalism as the end of temporality[285] to Bauman's theorisation of a contemporary 'liquid modernity'[286] – there is a broad consensus that the modern global informationalised economy relies on immaterial flows of data and capital and thus produces an ideal social logic in which distances between time and space are condensed, almost to the point of total elision.

These driving sequences reproduce this spatio-temporal organisation; Ricky's labour does not so much follow him as it does the algorithmic logic of the software that precisely determines the schedule of his labour. Edits across time and space, as if in sync with the palm device, abstract Ricky's work into predetermined times and locations. The scene thus formally contains a feeling of intense temporal compression. However, in contradiction with this construction of an immaterial structure of experience, these sequences also foreground the physically laborious nature of Ricky's work. Although the elliptical editing seemingly carries Ricky instantaneously through time and space, his facial expressions and gait betray an accumulating exhaustion. These signs of fatigue are most evident in the moments when the delivery process break down, such as when he is directed to the wrong address in the deserted industrial estate. In a long shot, framing the van against an abandoned warehouse, the camera briefly lingers on Ricky as he wanders around, looking for some sign of his destination, while visibly exhaling either from exasperation or tiredness.

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[285] Frederic Jameson, 'The End of Temporality', *Critical Inquiry*, 29:4, (2003)
[286] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press; Malden, MA : Blackwell, 2000)

Such gestures contribute to the awkward nature of these sequences in their expression of time and order. Ricky's body inscribes, in the text, a socially and economically overlooked weariness; 'a sense of time…that never ceases to pass on, pass through' the labouring body but rather lingers in exhaustion.[287] The camera observes these tired gestures in the liminal moments of Ricky's work-day as material evidence of the fact that late-capitalist labour does not elide time and space but merely burdens it onto the worker.

Within such sequences, we can begin to see the political utility of *SWMY's* construction of Ricky as a deteriorated body. In previous periods of Northern representation, referenced in the History of the Screen North, the exhausted body is dominantly visualised as the consequence of industrial labour: a life of hard work "naturally" wears out the body. In Huw Beynon's essay on 'Images of Labour', this relation has been variously framed as 'romantic' and/or 'alienated' – either ennobled by the physical effects of hard work or else regulated by repetitive acts in physical docility–- but the contiguousness of body and labour is securely assumed.[288] Loach's work has often been critical of this conflation of working-class identity with industrial labour; rather his television (*The Big Flame*, 1969*)* and film *(Riff-Raff*, 1990) work more often depicts union action as the ideal sphere of working-class political power. However, as this chapter has argued, the deteriorated Northern male body is a form which appears at a moment in which industrialisation has been evacuated as a frame of reference in working-class representation. In the context of late-capitalist labour, and in which

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[287] Elena Gorfinkel, 'Weariness, Waiting: Endurance and Art Cinema's Tired Bodies', *Discourse*, 34, (2012), p. 312

[288] Huw Beynon, 'Images of Labour/Images of Class' in Rowbotham and Beynon (eds.), *Looking at Class: Film, Television and the Working Class in Britain*, (London: Rivers Oram Press, 2001)

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discourses of responsibilisation make the individual solely responsible, the individuated body becomes the primary site in which social and economic agency is worked out. Here, deterioration, as the inscription of declining physical capacity, offers a material contradiction to the immaterial logic of late capitalism. This is a contradiction which makes visible a labour that contemporary neoliberal economies wish to render abstract and invisible. In this contemporary context, the natural link between labour and physical wear is severed, and the representation of Ricky's physical deterioration becomes a site in which the realist text can ask: what is the use of this weariness?

It is not only the emphasis on bodily experience that allows these sequences to speak to the changing conditions of post-industrial labour, but also how they reconfigure a recognisably Northern iconography. One moment stands out in its reference to a history of Northern representation. In a later driving sequence, Ricky is accompanied by his daughter Liza Jane, who helps enliven his delivery duties. At the scene's culmination, the pair have lunch together in the back of the van; an interaction between father and daughter that seems to offer a moment of relief for Ricky from his relentless schedule (Fig 3.17). Significantly, the scene is staged overlooking a spectacular view of the Tees Valley; the camera frames from behind the pair, guiding the viewer's gaze beyond their silhouettes and out of the van's doors at the unfolding rural landscape. This choice of framing overtly references the iconic 'long shot of our town from that hill' and invokes its history of association with narratives of working-class escape, to convey Ricky's sense of respite in being able to steal a small portion of time out of his work day. However, these resonances of escape are evoked with distinct irony. As discussed in previous analysis of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, the 'long shot[s]' of the British New Wave agitate with a repressed individualist

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energy, in which escape is defined against 'the mass, the class, and class consciousness'.[289] In contrast, *SWMY's* long-shot does not frame Ricky standing alone, nor defiantly counterposed to an urban landscape associated with conformity and domesticity. Instead, Ricky's escape is rest, one which he finds in a moment of domestic responsibility.

Here, the conIitions of gig economy work, which wears down Ricky while also eroding the spatial and temporal distinctions between work-life and domestic life, is referenced in such a way that the masculinist notions of agency associated with the Northern male body are profoundly inappropriate. This critique of masculinist ideology is crucial to how *SWMY* introduces deterioration as a way of examining the hollowness of contemporary notions of labour and agency. To understand this, we must return to the issue of Loach's use of melodrama.
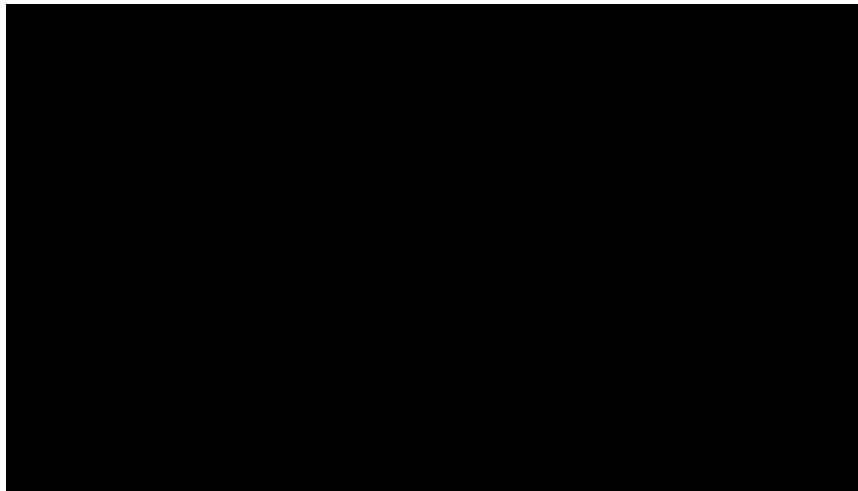
Fig 3.16

Dislodging Masculinity and Melodrama

[289] Andrew Higson, 'Space, Place, Spectacle: Landscape and Townscape in the "Kitchen Sink" Film', *Screen*, 4:5, 1984, p. 14

From the opening shot, *SWMY* establishes a melodramatic mode by signalling its comparative relationship with *IDB*. Like its predecessor, *SWMY* opens with main character Ricky being introduced initially as an unidentified and unseen voice, speaking over a black screen while minimal title credits appear. The scene shares the conceit of introducing the character through a formal interview; where Daniel was questioned on his medical history, here Ricky is being interviewed about his recent employment history. He provides a potted account of the numerous manual labour jobs he has worked over the previous decade, suggesting his difficulties in finding work that is either reliable or fulfilling. Immediately, then, the film situates itself as another Loach portrait of the experience of precarity in austerity Britain.

At the same time, by repeating the motif of the disembodied voice against a minimal title credit, the opening also focalises the importance of Northernness to our apprehension of its bleak melodramatic world. In her work on the relationship between comedic and melodramatic modes within cinematic address, Deborah Thomas emphasises the importance of a film's opening in orientating the viewer's expectations towards the film world.[290] She highlights how non-diegetic elements, such as soundtrack and title credits, create an expectation about the kind of social world being established, particularly in relation to the possibilities of agency and fulfilment it will offer for its characters. In the melodramatic mode, the opening often signals a 'repressive, hierarchical world' even before the

[290] Thomas's narratological reading introduces another variation of 'melodrama' into the terminology which has been engaged with throughout this chapter. Moreover, her focus is entirely on Hollywood cinema. However, her treatment of melodrama as a mode intersects usefully with this chapter's discussion of melodramatic versions of realism. Moreover, there is a useful correspondence between her argument that narrative conventions can pre-determine our reading of certain diegetic worlds as 'melodramatic', and the questions which this chapter has wrestled with in regard to deterioration.

introduction of narrative circumstances.[291] In these opening credits, Ricky's accent plays a similar role to such non-diegetic elements. The male Northern voice – importantly broadened beyond the North-East setting through actor Hitchen's Mancunian accent - confirms that the non-diegetic resemblances between these credits and *IDB's* credits characterise the social world itself. As soon as he speaks, this will be another grim portrait of economic precarity in the North and that Ricky himself will suffer. The male voice and the Northern accent become material signifiers of a social world which we expect to offer little hope or opportunity.

In the two films discussed so far, we have seen how deteriorated bodies have constructed Northern working-class masculinity as comprising an exhausted set of values. At the same time, I have suggested that this construction of deterioration works to implicitly reify masculinity as the ideal category of Northern and working-class identity. In these elegiac narratives of decline and loss, it is taken for granted that the deterioration of the body signifies the deterioration of traditional masculine identifications and values; male embodiment and masculinity are treated as conceptually contiguous. One consequence of this treatment of masculinity is a difficulty to account for the ways in which masculinity is discursively and materially imbricated in present forms of sociality and power. Through the reified deteriorated body, working-class masculinity risks being framed as an archaic identity, one which is fundamentally unable to find a place in contemporary Britain. In *SWMY*, the trajectory of deterioration is set into motion by this opening scene, but, while the narration invites a comparison to *IDB's* melodramatic fatalism, a significant point of departure is created through the way in which Ricky actively presents himself as a working-class

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[291] Deborah Thomas, *Beyond Genre: Melodrama, Comedy and Romance in Hollywood Films*, (Dumfriesshire: Cameron and Hollis, 2000), p.14

man. Here, masculinity is essential to Ricky's notion of decline, but it is presented as being imbricated in the very forms of social power which cause this decline.

Ricky's words repudiate the political sentiments assumed in *IDB*. Asked if he's "ever been on the dole", he declares that "he'd rather starve" as he's "got his pride". Immediately, Ricky is identified as a character whom we imagine rejecting the sympathies that *IDB* lent to figures like Daniel and Katie. Where that film saw a certain nobility in its characters' suffering and their attempts to gain social recognition, Ricky sees no pride in the struggles of navigating benefits. Having already established the looming expectation of Ricky's suffering, these words demonstrate what Neale identifies as a key trope in construction of melodramatic irony: a 'mistaken perception'.[292] Here, though, this is a mistake of self-recognition. Ricky describes himself as a "grafter" and believes that the values of hard work and self-sufficiency will allow him to get ahead. Thus, unlike *IDB*, this interview is not about trying to make himself recognisable as a victim – in need of social and state aid – but as a strong and capable agent, with the term "grafter" framing this in terms of traditionally Northern working-class agency

The film also explores these intersections further through the figure of Maloney (Ross Brewster), the overseer of the delivery depot who interviews Ricky in this opening scene. Part boss and part salesman, Maloney represents a new kind of manager produced by the demands of the gig economy. He is every bit the tyrant as the factory foremen and middle-managers which the British New Wave protagonists frequently rail against, but he facilitates the extraction of labour from Ricky and his fellow drivers through the language of responsibilisation. Maloney's role within this new

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[292] Steve Neale, 'Melodrama and Tears', p. 13

labour process is to convince the workers that they, as individual agents, have sole responsibility for their work, even as the depot sets increasing demands and burdens on them all. In this shift away from collective duty to individual responsibility, residual notions of masculine agency provide a visual and symbolic set of references which legitimate this exploitative system.

It is significant that Maloney is both the first male character we see in the film and that his body is visibly different to the deteriorated body. Where *IDB* opens with a close-up of a tired-looking Daniel, *SWMY* reverses things by beginning on a medium shot of Maloney at his office desk, as he surveys the CV of a nervously hunched Ricky sat opposite. Even as he is seen sat behind a desk, Maloney makes a strong physical impression. Although he is clothed in the company uniform, his broad physique – characterised by a wide chest and visibly large biceps - is obvious. Maloney seemingly uses his imposing posture strategically, here. As he moves through a clearly rehearsed series of corporate slogans – "let's just get a few things straight at the start here: you don't get hired, you come onboard" – he leans forward over the desk and hulks over Ricky, as if to disregard the formality of an interview and instead communicate man-to-man. Momentarily, the professional office space is overwhelmed by Maloney's physical presence (Fig. 3.18). Here, Maloney seems to embody the values which Ricky believes in, giving the distinct impression that the formal and rational spaces of the gig economy can be dominated by a strong masculine agency.

Fig 3.17

The opening scene thus introduces a productive contradiction between a melodramatically structured apprehension of the oppressiveness of this social-economic context, and a language and performativity of hard Northern masculinity that is seen to uphold it. This is a different mobilisation of masculinity from both *IDB* and *Tyrannosaur*. Here, it is not a reified masculine body which emblematises a declining state of working-class agency and worth; rather, in a more critical fashion, *SWMY* suggests that it is precisely these residual myths of Northern male embodiment as social and political strength that has been co-opted to serve the ideological work of neoliberalism. *SWMY* uses our immediate understanding of Ricky as melodramatically fated for deterioration to suggest that it is masculinist notions of working-class 'graft' which are compromised and seemingly bankrupt, providing the language which justifies an increasingly pernicious environment of exploitation. This is a rhetorical distinction which demonstrates an underlying political potential for the deteriorated body, not as a formation which signals the decline of a real masculine agency, but as a site where the material inadequacy of masculinist constructions of class and agency, to describe contemporary exploitation, might be revealed.

Conclusion

In this chapter's introduction, I raised the question of what it means to say that the North 'marks' the hollowness of Britain's neoliberal progress. In terms of film and television, I have forwarded the deteriorated body as a site of meaning which demonstrates both the obviousness of this process of marking, and the complexity of its ideological functions.

Much like the broader social discourses which frame the North as Britain's 'left behind' place, the deteriorated body offers an emotionally resonant form for a post-austerity structure of feeling, related to a pervasive sense of terminal social decline. In all three texts covered, the characterisation of this body as deteriorated is immediate and seemingly intuitive. In fact, each film instrumentalises this association of Northern masculinity with physical decline, using it to characterise the social world as defined by breakdown, hopelessness and cruelty. In performing this role, the deteriorated male body is constructed, by popular British culture, as rhetorically obvious. This is a quality which cuts across realist representations of the region. Even as *Tyrannosaur* presents a level of psychological complexity which is missing from the representative types of Loach's cinema, the male body still performs a similar rhetorical function, inscribing a fatalistic loss of working-class social agency and community.

This iconic relationship between physical decline and social decline resonates with a tradition of Northern realism, in which the male body is a site on which realist texts work through contemporary anxieties around the changing structures of working-class life, and its traditional gender roles. However, what distinguishes the deteriorated body as a contemporary formation is that its inscription of loss and decline is no longer clearly contextualised by the residual images and narratives of post-industrial decline. The deteriorated bodies of contemporary British cinema

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communicate a structure of feeling of loss which cannot be attributed to the loss of industrial labour. This evacuation of industrialisation from the meaning of deterioration influences the fatalism of contemporary Northern representation. Without industrial labour as even a residual frame of reference, decline becomes terminal and inevitable. As I have argued, while the deteriorated body thus appears obvious, its construction demonstrates a difficulty in contemporary social realism with imagining the present. Where stable structures of representation do appear, they are often essentialising, using the North as a place where people are ontologically left behind, essentially adrift from any notion of progress.

However, as my final case study, *SWMY*, demonstrates, the deteriorated body is not an ideologically bankrupt form. In fact, its inscription of the breakdown of residual forms of social reference, in relation to Northern working-class identity, offers an opportunity to critique the masculinist myths which underpin the meaning of social agency. Faced with contemporary forms of informationalised labour in which traditional notions of agency are not only inadequate but, also, compromised by larger systems of power, representations of bodily deterioration can draw our attention to the forms of exploitation which had been masked by romanticised myths of Northern masculinity. However, as we see by the film's end, Loach's desire to make these problems politically legible ultimately results in a return to the pathos of the deteriorated body.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE YOUNG NORTHERN MALE BODY

The previous chapter proposed that through the deteriorated body we can recognise the waning residue of post-industrialisation in the representation of the North and social breakdown. The chapter located a political tension within this body, with deterioration conceptualised, in part, as a de-linking of the operations of capital and labour from the appearance of working-class male embodiment. This chapter continues to explore these tensions within the cultural production of the contemporary North, by considering a different modality of Northern masculine representation: the young adult body.

The distinction between deteriorated bodies and the bodies of young men is more than just a difference of category. Shifting attention towards the contemporary representation of youthful bodies reveals a different set of attitudes around the relationship between decline and working-class men. Where the deteriorated body is associated with more elegiac narratives, and is sensually expressive of feelings of pathos, younger male bodies introduce different questions of moral value and worth. As Stephanie Lawler argues, the moral responsibility for decline has become an implicit feature of how the contemporary working-class is represented. Lawler asserts that narratives of decline are imbricated with narratives of *lack*, 'in which the story goes, there was *once* a respectable working-class which held progressive principles and knew its assigned role…that class has now disappeared.'[293] The loss of a material world associated with industry is a powerful component of these discourses, as it furnishes an imaginary in which decline is not so much essential but instead linked to a class failure: 'in

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[293] Stephanie Lawler, 'Disgusted Subjects: The Making of Middle-Class Identities', *The Sociological Review*, 2005, pp. 434-435

such narratives, the decline of heavy industry – often seen as emblematic of working-class existence – is linked with a decline in the *worth* of the working-class.'[294] Lawler's analysis raises questions of value and worth which represent another facet of Northern decline, but it also points to a different structure for how that decline might be narrativised. Whereas deterioration is associated with a 'making worse', a process of degrading which is pre-determined, narratives of lack connect the past and the present in less straightforward ways.[295] Similarly, I want to suggest that younger bodies, by the nature of their not being in the same state of physical decline, embody a more uncertain site of representation. Intuitively, there seems to be a contradiction here between physical appearance and capacity, and the ontological quality of *lack* which Lawler recognises in wider social discourse. The contemporary younger male body therefore presents problems to the common understanding of film and television as representing a reified construction of the North and its social decline.

Exemplified by the Angry Young Man, the young man is a figure which has been crucial, within Northern fiction, for conveying social change. However, Linda McDowell notes that, while the image of the young man as a 'bad boy', in the vein of Arthur Seaton, remains part of the popular media construction of the working-class, it has increasingly attracted a different set of attitudes since the recession.[296] She argues that, in 'post-crisis media coverage':

> The tone…had changed from a reluctant admiration to a more
> pernicious rhetoric about 'feral' uncivilised youth: young men

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[294] Ibid.

[295] "Deterioration, n." OED Online. Oxford University Press, December 2019. Web. 10 February 2020.

[296] Linda McDowell, 'The Sexual Contract, Youth, Masculinity and the Uncertain Promise of Waged Work in Austerity Britain', *Journal Australian Feminist Studies*, 29: 78, (2014), p. 40

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without ambition and morals, almost untameable and so to be
controlled and even imprisoned rather than assisted into
employment.[297]

As this chapter will subsequently explore, this change in tone is a
cultural phenomenon that is partly fed by a dominant neoliberal logic
of personal responsibility and individuality, but, for now, I want to
highlight the way in which these changing structures of feeling suggest
an increasingly contradictory position that is occupied by the image of
young Northern men. As McDowell's observation suggests, the
working-class young man is a figure that has a recognisable lineage of
masculine imagery – the bad boy that while embodying counter-
cultural attitudes, was nevertheless seen as a part of the national and
part of the classed social structure - and is yet constructed as having
little social value and as being morally deficient by nature. In this
construction, the young working-class man of the post-economic crisis
is constructed in the media as a paradoxical figure. These tensions of
symbolic value and history, as they are inscribed through the
representation of the young male body, are the focus of this chapter.

Young Working-Class Men: Representing an Ontological Problem

One of the dominant ongoing concerns of both popular political
discourse and sociological analysis is the 'ontological challenge'
(Mahoney and Kearon) facing young working-class men after the
collapse of Britain's industries.[298] This 'challenge' names an area of
concern which goes beyond describing the material and structural

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[297] Ibid.

[298] Ian Mahoney and Tony Kearon, 'Formulating the Postindustrial Self: The Role of Petty
Crime Among Unemployed, Working-Class Men in Stoke-on-Trent' in Walker and Roberts
(eds.), *Masculinity, Labour and Neoliberalism*, (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018)

changes in employment. What is deemed critical by these discourses is the construction of identity, the maintenance of cultural practices, and the general structure of feeling associated with working-class masculinity.[299] As Phil Cohen argues, the loss of industrial labour is not only about economic security, but also the loss of a coherent cultural language, grounded in the stable structures and pathways of working-class life. Cohen describes the problem as the:

> [D]eregulation not only of the market and civic economies (the neoliberal agenda) but of *the moral economy of labourhood…* The traumatic impact of de-industrialisation on working-class communities is not just about the loss of jobs, but of a whole way of life, a mode of social being - and becoming - in the world, based on a sexual and generational division of labour which has been rendered obsolete.[300]

The most profound loss here is not the work itself but the sense of social and symbolic capital attached to this work. It is important to note that the elegiac connotations of this loss, and how it is described within sociology particularly, is often mitigated by an understanding that this loss also brings to light how social and symbolic capital has often constituted a 'patriarchal dividend'.[301]

However, although these feelings of post-industrial obsolescence are not an exclusively contemporary phenomenon – as covered in the Literature Review, film and television studies itself is attuned to the cyclical nature of the crisis of masculinity as a narrative within British

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[299] Ibid.

[300] Phil Cohen, 'Finding Uncommon Ground: Working-Class Labour Politics after Labourism', *Soundings: A Journal of Politics and Culture*. 66, (2017) p. 124

[301] Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1995)

social realism – the extent to which the language of class and class value has been eroded is what makes it notable for contemporary sociologists. In Simon Charlesworth's bleak phenomenology of the blight faced in the Yorkshire town of Rotherham, the struggle for representation is the acute problem of the post-industrial experience. Charlesworth description of the feelings and physical experiences of social exclusion portrays a social world in which the loss of a coherent language of classed value is accompanied by a sense of men's dispossession from their bodies.[302]

In this context, cultural representation, as a mechanism of making sense of masculine identities which have been unmoored from the stable frameworks of labour, performs a potentially crucial role in working out the meanings of working-class identity. However, although cultural representation – from print media to film and television – has received interest within the context of sociology, scholarship usually emphasises the abjectifying and pathologising stereotypes which characterise such representation. McDowell's observation of an increasingly visible imagery of 'feral' masculinity suggests the overlap between how working-class men are represented in popular culture, and the broader discourses of 'the underclass' that have grown increasingly prominent in the media over the recent decades.

The Underclass

Writing in the 1980s, John Macnicol provides an early definition of 'underclass' as a classification which is 'distinct from the working-class – in effect, a rootless mass divorced from the means of production – definable

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[302] Simon Charlesworth, *A Phenomenology of Working-Class Experience*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

only in terms of social inefficiency, and hence not strictly a class in the neo-Marxist sense.'[303] As sociological literature has highlighted, this state of 'social inefficiency' is rhetorically expressed in print media and news coverage through a variety of bodily stereotypes: from 'feckless' to 'idle' (Owen Jones)[304], to 'feral' (Sara De Benedictus)[305], to 'destructive…redundant, violent and dangerous' (Chris Haylett)[306]. Overlapping with narratives of post-industrial decline, contemporary underclass discourses commonly emphasise a nostalgic relation to an older working-class that knew its place in relation to a wider coherent sense of nation. However, as John Welshman elucidates, the concept of the underclass has, in actual fact, been a recurring image within British social representation since at least the beginning of the twentieth century, existing in various guises that often arise in moments of change in social and economic life, particularly at moments of apparent crisis.[307] Much like narratives of Northern decline, underclass discourses describe a timely sense of crisis while repurposing a residual trope of working-class disorder.

In the post-recession context, underclass discourses are understood as representing an ideological response to deepening inequality. As Imogen Tyler argues, underclass labels construct 'abject figures' who are 'symbolic and material scapegoats, the mediating agencies through which the social decomposition effected by market deregulation and welfare re-entrenchment

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[303] John Macnicol, 'In Pursuit of the Underclass', *Journal of Social Policy*, 16(3), (1987), p. 299.
[304] Owen Jones, *Chavs: The Demonisation of the Working Class*, (London; New York: Verso, 2012), pp. 119-121
[305] Sara De Benedictus, 'Feral Parents: Austerity Parenting Under Neoliberalism', *Studies in the Maternal*, 4:2, (2012)
[306] Chris Haylett, 'Illegitimate Subjects? Abject Whites, Neoliberal Modernisation and Middle-Class Multiculturalism', *Environment and Planning*, (2001), 359
[307] Welshman highlights, for instance, the discourses of the "unemployable" in the 1930s, and the "problem family" of the 1950s. See: John Welshman, *Underclass: A History of the Excluded Since 1880,* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 9

are legitimised.**'[308]** In Tyler's analysis, the characterisation of certain people and places as underclass is a discursive mechanism against which media and government agents define the proper nation and the proper national subject. In sum, the categorisation of a contemporary underclass represents one of the ways in which the transition of Britain from industrial to post-industrial has been conceptualised in culture. Haylett, for instance, describes a spatialising element in how the poorest working-class communities were represented in governmental address under New Labour. He notes how New Labour rhetoric, in its labelling of problematic areas of social life from 'broken homes' to 'sink estates', gestured towards a decline of working-class life in Britain which evoked 'the degraded state of families, communities…[and] people and places left behind by modernity's forward march.'[309]

As a field of intellectual resistance to the discourses of the coalition and Conservative governments and the mainstream media, sociological scholarship conceives of the underclass as a terrain of visibility in which the mass culture is positioned on one side, as the site of abjectifying representation, and scholarship itself is positioned at the other, as the medium in which oppositional meanings become realised. Imogen Tyler's work on the construction of 'revolting subjects' is emblematic. For Tyler, 'revolting' forms a key theoretical dialectic for how the underclass exist and understand themselves. Tyler seizes upon the two meanings of 'revolting': as an adjective, utilised by the media, denoting an abject and passive objecthood, and:

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[308] Imogen Tyler, *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*, (London: Zed Books Limited, 2013), p. 9

[309] Chris Haylett, "Illegitimate Subjects…", p.355

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revolting as a verb, suggesting a more active self-determination, and referencing seemingly illegitimate practices but, nevertheless, practices through which individuals and groups resist, reconfigure and revolt against their abject subjectification.[310]

Tyler is interested in the ways in which those events that seem to confirm these groups' existence as revolting objects, are evidence of active forms of opposition to the social structures that circumscribe their lives as illegitimate.

Thus, Tyler sets out an ideologically complex relation between stigmatising representation and the active construction of alternative forms of symbolic value. However, inevitably this is a relationship that seems to occur between popular culture and the sociological work of *Revolting Subjects* itself. Throughout the book, popular media representations are challenged for the ways in which they strip symbolic value and dignity from certain groups, and Tyler repeatedly tackles the underlying logic behind the myths and stereotypes. Popular culture is the representational space where the passive 'revolting' is imposed via mediation, while the sociological work is the space where the active 'revolting' is read via re-mediation. Tyler's work stands for a trend throughout this field of literature in which the exclusion of the underclass category is definitive, and the media's role in this hegemonic structure is clear-cut.

However, whereas Imogen Tyler asserts that underclass discourses use abject subjects as scapegoats because they provide a material image which legitimates the inequality of hegemonic neoliberal forms of society, I want to consider the Northern male body as representing an altogether more troubling image. Where Tyler's subjects can be defined as illegitimate - and can thus be expelled from notions of the state and national imaginaries -

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[310] Imogen Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, p. 13

because of racial or gendered categorisation, the Northern male body is less easily disassociated from dominant structures of class, gender, and national identity.

Case Studies

The remainder of this chapter covers four case studies which are each approached as expressive of the ontologically troubling nature of the young male body, as it relates to working-class identity. Although the issues of ontology and pathology, which characterise the wider social discourses so far covered, are treated as necessarily imbricated, the rest of the chapter is organised in two parts. The first half concerns the issue of the textual marginality of young men by considering two texts – the crime serial *Happy Valley* (2014 -), and Clio Barnard's social realist film *The Selfish Giant* (2014) - which represent a contemporary North in which previously dominant constructions of a masculine public realm are no longer viable. Both texts depict troubled social worlds marked by poverty, drug abuse and crime, while focusing on strong female characters and vulnerable children, respectively, to interrogate the need for different forms of Northern sociality in the absence of industrialism's supposedly stable bonds. The later half of the chapter involves Northern-set programmes which more clearly centre the young male body and interrogate its significance to understanding the state of the contemporary underclass. This section covers two television dramas – *Little Boy Blue* (2017) and *Brassic* (2019 -) – which both foreground men within their crime narratives, in order to pose important questions regarding the relationship between social exclusion and moral worth.

The texts covered here, both across the chapter and within these pairings, vary significantly in terms of mode and tone. *Happy Valley* uses the serial narrative structures afforded by broadcast television to re-imagine a feminist North, *The Selfish Giant* emphasises the complex and opaque

representational tropes of New Realist cinema to represent a world in which previous social bonds and continuities are entirely illegible. Equally, *Little Boy Blue's* appeal to real-life personal and national traumas to interrogate contemporary youth culture differs dramatically from *Brassic's* comedic and hyperbolic representation of underclass delinquency. These differences in mode, genre, and tone will be considered as informing each text's approach to the problem of imagining the contemporary young body. These differences highlight the problem of this body as cultural tendency specific to this moment in time, and across modes of representation. It is notable, however, that not only are all of these texts legible within the Northern realist tradition, but they also all deal primarily with narratives of crime and male criminality.

Happy Valley

The work of Yorkshire-born Sally Wainwright is a touchstone for recent scholarship regarding the changing roles of women within screen representations of the North.[311] Series like *Unforgiven* (2009), *Scott and Bailey* (2011-2016), *Last Tango in Halifax* (2012-), and *Happy Valley* are marked not only by their engagement with women's everyday lives, but also in their evocation of the nuances of contemporary female identities that are inflected by class and region. Specifically, *Happy Valley* has been framed as an important feminist text in its foregrounding of Northern women. Set in the

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[311] Describing this phenomenon in terms of content, Ruth McElory asserts that "women's intimate lives have become a preoccupation of popular culture in ways that reflect not only…women's increasingly central place in the workforce but also the new forms of emotional management that have accompanied these fundamental changes in post-industrial societies' labour markets." See Ruth McElroy, 'The Feminisation of Contemporary British Drama: Sally Wainwright and RED Production', Rachael Moseley, Helen Wheatley & Helen Wood (eds.), *Television for Women: New Directions*, (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 45-46

working-class town of Sowerby Bridge within the Yorkshire locale of the Calder Valley, *Happy Valley* is centred on the tough yet compassionate figure of police sergeant Catherine Cawood (Sarah Lancashire). In the tradition of the television police drama *Prime Suspect (*ITV, 1991 – 2006), the programme explores both the feminist concern of the ideological tensions between the female officer and the hegemonically masculine social power of policing, as well as the postfeminist concern of the successful female sergeant navigating the personal costs of the increasing professional duties placed on successful women in this working context.[312] Yet, uniquely, the drama uses the framework of the crime series to sympathetically explore contemporary issues of Northern working-class representation. Catherine is a maternal figure who recognises that her personal hardships are imbricated with the wider social ills of the blighted working-class community of Sowerby Bridge. Motivating much of the drama is Catherine's personal anger at the recent loss of her daughter as the result of suicide after rape, a trauma that both she and the series' narrative frequently connects to larger societal issues such as the drug gangs, broken homes, and sex trafficking. As Helen Piper argues, the programme's narrative structure – moving between professional and personal conflicts - suggests the inextricability of Catherine's role in processes of criminal detection and investigation, and her 'emotional journey'[313] in coming to terms with her anger and grief.[314] With this thematic

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[312] For a discussion of the broad and complex ideological baggage of the postfeminist label in television, and how *Prime Suspect's* negotiation of postfeminist issues asks more intersectional questions around class, age, and race in the representation of female police officers, see: Charlotte Brunsdon, 'Television Crime Series, Women Police, and Fuddy-Duddy Feminism', *Feminist Media Studies*, 13:3, (2013)

[313] Helen Piper, *Happy Valley*: Compassion, Evil and Exploitation in an Ordinary 'Trouble Town' in Forrest and Johnson (eds.), *Social Class and Television Drama in Contemporary Britain*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 191

[314] A key subplot of the first season of the programme involves Catherine dealing with the trauma she still carries because of her daughter's rape and suicide. These past events continue to haunt Catherine within her professional life, and she intermittently sees visions

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and narrative patterning which constantly emphasises the imbrication of the personal and the public, the emotional and the moral, the role of the detective with the maternal identity, *Happy Valley* has been positioned as an exemplary work in the ongoing 'feminisation' of British televisual drama.[315]

Furthermore, the emerging body of scholarship on *Happy Valley* reads Catherine as a dynamic feminist construction of working-class identity, whose complexity challenges the often objectified character of women within the Northern place-myth. Scholarship on *Happy Valley* is attentive to how the programme subverts the narrative and formal circumscriptions that inhere in the dominant tropes of Northern representation and its hegemonically masculine construction in British culture. For the purposes of my own discussion of the male body, I want to highlight one tendency within the scholarship to suggest the programme's feminist politics as being implicated in a re-appropriation of the visual, affective, and ultimately ideological relationship between active bodies and spaces within social realist representation.

As Kristyn Gorton surmises, 'one of the characteristics of Wainwright's work is that she puts women centre stage as opposed to the periphery or as part of the reason for men wanting escape.'[316] Yet, this movement from periphery to centre is not a neutral replacing of the

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of her daughter's corpse as she becomes increasingly embroiled in the investigation of a kidnapping and suspected sexual assault of a young woman.

[315] Describing this phenomenon in terms of content, Ruth McElory asserts that "women's intimate lives have become a preoccupation of popular culture in ways that reflect not only…women's increasingly central place in the workforce but also the new forms of emotional management that have accompanied these fundamental changes in post-industrial societies' labour markets." See Ruth McElroy, 'The Feminisation of Contemporary British Drama: Sally Wainwright and RED Production', Rachael Moseley, Helen Wheatley & Helen Wood (eds.), *Television for Women: New Directions*, (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 45-46

[316] Kristyn Gorton, "Feeling Northern: 'Heroic Women' in Sally Wainwright's Happy Valley (BBC One, 2014 -), *Journal for Cultural Research*, 2016, p. 73

traditional male hero of Northern realism with a meaningfully contiguous female protagonist. Rather, as Gorton argues, the foregrounding of the Northern female figure is used to re-articulate the meanings and attitudes the region evokes. Specifically, Gorton's analysis of *Happy Valley* highlights its sensitivity to evoking the experience of 'feeling Northern', a structure of feeling communicated by an emphasis on Catherine's emotional performance and embodiment as bridge between personal relationships and a wider sense of duty to her community. As opposed to the often distant and othering perspective of social realism in the period of the New Wave, *Happy Valley*'s aesthetics demonstrate an investment in Catherine's emotional connection to place as a positive force. [317] This concept of feeling Northern is achieved partly through the programme's reworking of the masculinist logic of social realism, specifically the division between emotion and physical action as types of social agency. Whereas New Wave films such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* narratively and visually associate emotion as being opposed to action, a negative response (often of anger and frustration) at being unable to *act* and escape a stifling working-class world, Gorton suggests that *Happy Valley:*

> uses emotion as both a way to engage her audience and as a
>
> means to demonstrate the way women, in particular, work
>
> through the anger resonant with the male protagonists of social

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[317] Faye Woods's discussion of the affective nature of the programme's use of its Yorkshire landscapes similarly implies a visual re-appropriation of the imagery of the Northern social realist tradition and the working-class townscape shot. Woods argues that whereas Higson reads the "that long shot" as 'seeking to separate and signify the aspirational male working-class protagonists' desire to escape [the Northern community], *Happy Valley's* framing embeds Catherine…within the valley.' For Woods, the programme marks the Northern townscape not as an othered space outside of the individualistic construction of the protagonist, but rather a space that Catherine is engaged with emotionally. Across the series, space comes to symbolise a dynamic range of emotions that suggests a close affective relationship between body and space. See: Faye Woods, 'Wainwright's West Yorkshire: Affect and Landscape in the Television Drama of Sally Wainwright', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 16:3, (2019), p. 359

realism. Their emotional labour, the affective working through of their feelings, leads them to find a sense of harmony with their lives, the land they come from and live in.[318]

By suggesting that Catherine's feelings form a kind of emotional labour, a catalyst for social action and the intervening in her community, Gorton frames the programme as challenging the North's image as dominated by what Phillip Dodd encapsulates as "the masculine, the working-class, and *the physical*" [my emphasis]; the gendered cultural logic of the Northern body as a male body of outward exteriorising action.[319] Catherine's emotional agency disturbs the trope of Northern agency as a form of flight, and, in doing so, imagines the Northern working-class place as offering positive change and in which a future might be possible.

Sue Thornham similarly relates the drama's feminist politics to the affective complexity with which Catherine is represented for the viewer. For Thornham, the programme intervenes in a tradition of Northern representation which symbolically associates the Northern woman with the passive place which masculine agency is grounded upon and moves through; a tradition which she links to the construction of woman as the eternal 'home' in Hoggart's simple (and ideally disembodied) figure of 'our mam'.[320] Thornham argues that Catherine is a crucial feminist figure because she is a 'maternal subject' who is emotionally complicated and is affectively complex in her

[318] Kristyn Gorton, 'Feeling Northern: 'Heroic Women' in Sally Wainwright's Happy Valley (BBC One, 2014 -)', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 2016, p. 76
[319] Phillip Dodd, 'Lowryscapes: Recent Writings about the North', *Critical Inquiry*, 32:20, (1990) as cited in Kristyn Gorton, 'Feeling Northern: 'Heroic Women' in Sally Wainwright's Happy Valley (BBC One, 2014 -), *Journal for Cultural Research*, 2016, p. 75
[320] Sue Thornham, ''I'm Not Your Mother': British Social Realism, Neoliberalism and the Maternal Subject in Sally Wainwright's Happy Valley (BBC1, 2014–2016)', *Feminist Theory*, 20:3, (2019), pp. 6-7

presentation.[321] Thornham's work details the richness of the drama's strategies for visualising Catherine's complex embodiment of emotional states, and her kinaesthetic disruption of the masculinist logic of fluid space and time associated with both the police procedural drama and the nostalgic constructions of masculinity found in British social realism.[322]

A Failing Masculine World

Against this scholarly explication of how *Happy Valley* succeeds in communicating a particularly feminist and Northern place-myth, why use the programme as a case study for the representation of young male bodies? My intention is not to re-centre the male body as the object of study – and argue that the boys haven't been given enough attention – but rather to consider the aesthetic and ideological context within which a feminist North appears as an emergent set of narratives and place-images. If we appreciate *Happy Valley* as a text which imagines a new kind of North, I pose that we need to consider: how the series displace older images of the region; what is its structural relationship to residual and dominant images; what stereotypes does this displacement subvert? These are questions which do not seek to undermine *Happy Valley's* feminised representation, but rather they ask us to pay attention to the tricky intersectional hierarchies attached to Northernness.

In the case of *Happy Valley*, the question of where this emergent Northern female representation appears from has been answered, in terms of industrial context, with reference to the growth of independent production

[321] Ibid., p.7

[322] Sue Thornham, 'Breathing Spaces? the Politics of Embodiment, Affect, and Genre in Mare of Easttown and Happy Valley', *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. ahead-of-print, no. ahead-of-print, (2022)

companies under the auspices of BBC and ITV. There have been several investigations of the industrial and organisational agencies involved in this recent flourishing of Northern female representation. Andrew Spicer and Beth Johnson have each highlighted the significance of the Manchester-based RED Production Company. By marrying a high level of influence within mainstream broadcast television to a commitment to supporting female talent behind the camera, as well as working with regionally-based dramatists, RED is understood as uniquely capable of foregrounding Northern and female voices in its output of quality television.[323] While these analyses provide one reason for the emerging mainstream interest in Northern women, I do not believe this industrial context, alone, captures the aesthetic differences of *Happy Valley's* North. The presence of women as key creative figures in Northern realism is not a solely recent phenomenon. Women writers have produced major texts across the history of the screen North. From Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* (1961) to the adaption of Andrea Dunbar's *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1987), women have been successful if too frequently minority figures within Northern screen fiction. While those texts reckon with female experience within the typical themes of Northern realism, the sense of a progressive and forward-looking North is not the same as it is with the *Happy Valley*.

So how might the show's own aesthetics reveal this structure of feeling's ideological context? Looking at the programme's formal, narrative, and thematic content suggests that the emergence of a feminist North is

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[323] Both Spicer and Johnson emphasise the importance of Red Production Company founder Nicola Schindler. Johnson, for instance, positions Schindler as a collaborator with Wainwright, and argues that she might be considered an author in work such as *Happy Valley*. See: Andrew Spicer, "A Regional Company? RED Production and the Cultural Politics of Place", *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 16:3, (2019). Beth Johnson, "Leading, Collaborating, Championing: RED's Arresting Women", *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 16:3, (2019).

structurally related to the morally precarious status of the dominant image of a masculine post-industrial decline. Significantly, the programme constructs what Helen Piper terms a 'moral opposition' between Catherine and the murderous rapist character of Tommy Lee Royce (James Norton). In the first season, he is a figure who is morally responsible for both the events of the criminal detection narrative – the kidnapping that sets events into motion – and the initially unclear personal trauma in Catherine's past (we learn that he raped Catherine's daughter). Thus, Royce reflects a dual structure of immorality: both related to the personal and the wider context of the social. This characterises Royce as something of a typical underclass figure, who represents that societal ills are consequences of personal failings. This dynamic relation of personal and social is also crucial to how *Happy Valley* constructs its feminist image of the North. Royce provides an opposition that allows for the programme to depict Catherine as a woman for whom the professional and social is always personal and emotional.

Royce is also key to understanding how *Happy Valley* imagines the current state of Northern masculinity. Helen Piper emphasises Royce's exceptionalism as a figure within the social world depicted by the programme, describing him as a 'murderous abject figure of evil', who is 'not constructed as "typical" of his class'. [324] Certainly, Royce is morally exceptional, and the programme narratively distinguishes his crimes of evil from other male antagonists in the programme, such as his younger criminal accomplice Lewis Whippey (Adam Long) who is performed as wracked by guilt for aiding Royce and frequently offers a visual contrast in the scenes that Royce commits his worst acts. However, although exceptional among the drama's men, I would still suggest that *Happy Valley* does construct Royce as representative of the state of a traditional labouring working-class

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[324] Helen Piper, "Happy Valley: Compassion, Evil…", p. 195

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masculinity which has, in its abstract values and meanings, become bankrupt. This representative quality is evident both narratively and visually. Narratively, Royce is continually embedded within a working-class masculine milieu; visually, his body is often captured in ways that suggest him to be emblematic of a residual masculine agency which is bereft of moral and social value.

Consider how Royce is first narratively introduced ('Episode 1.1') and how he is established within the social world of Sowerby Bridge. As indicated by Piper's reading, there is an initial discrepancy between Royce's role as a figure who personally haunts Catherine, and his wider involvement in the Season One's main criminal plot, in which a local criminal gang kidnap Ann Gallagher (Charlie Murphy) who is the daughter of a wealthy local business owner.[325] Unaware of this kidnapping, Catherine's search for Royce is motivated by painful past emotions and has unclear goals (possibly for retribution, possibly for closure), and is thus given a moral legitimation by the viewer's later knowledge that he has committed the same crime of sexual assault on Ann. For Piper, this discrepancy achieves a greater sense of moral alignment between the viewer and Catherine.[326] However, this discrepancy also says something about the society that is being depicted. By the time Catherine reveals the past trauma wrought by Royce's actions, the viewer has already seen him as seemingly an ordinary member of the gang as it becomes embroiled in the kidnapping scheme. Before Royce takes on a clear personal significance for Catherine, he is just one of a number of men involved in crime. Royce is firmly embedded within a milieu of social decline and breakdown.

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[325] Ibid.

[326] Ibid.

Moreover, the depiction of the gang also gestures towards this sense of a wider malaise of the community of working-class Northern men. It is not an unimportant detail that the viewer's discovery of Royce amongst this group of men is mirrored by a diegetic discovery of a criminal gang disguised behind the appearance of ordinary legitimate work. Led by the apparent entrepreneur Ashley Cowgill, it is discovered early in the first episode that a local construction and holiday-making business is a front for a drug trafficking operation that is supplying the Calder Valley. The man who instigated the initial plot to kidnap Ann Gallagher, a disgruntled employee of her father desperate for money to pay his child's private school tuition, does so upon the sudden discovery that Ashley's caravan site is the base of this criminal activity. This discovery comes about when Royce, who appears at this moment merely to be an ordinary labourer, accidentally drops a bag of cement that spills and exposes a large amount of heroin (Figs. 4.1 and 4.2). The revelation of drug crime hidden within the fabric of an ordinary local business is indicative of a theme of *Happy Valley*, that of drugs threatening structures of work and community that once cohered small working-class towns in the rural North. It is important to note that as Piper argues, this moment also points to unseen networks of crime that are imported into the Northern community, suggesting not so much innate decline as exploitation.[327] This is a reading which Thornham builds upon, arguing that the programme is clear to contextualise the 'wasted lives' of Sowerby Bridge, and its population of young criminal men, within the 'structures of global capitalism'.[328]

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[327] Ibid.

[328] Sue Thornham, 'Breathing Spaces? the Politics of Embodiment, Affect, and Genre in *Mare of Easttown* and *Happy Valley'*, *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. ahead-of-print, no. ahead-of-print, (2022), p. 5

At the same time, it is symbolically significant that this illicit criminal economy exists within the simulacrum of the kind of ordinary labour that would have once helped sustain a working-class Yorkshire town. This representation of archetypal regional labour existing as a husk for criminal activity is a trend that is evident in other Northern crime dramas in which female protagonists displace the male Northerner. ITV's *The Bay* (2018) similarly depicts a key Northern industry – this time the fishing industry in Morecambe bay – as a front for drug trafficking in and out of the town. A persistent trope, this revelation is not only dramatic, but also works thematically, suggestive of a bankruptcy of masculinist paradigms of Northern work and community. The forms of sociality and class identity these kinds of labour historically symbolise are represented as hollow in a fluid late capitalist order of global exchange. In this context, the imagery of regional labour – traditional men's work – is shown as empty in its meaning. The significance of both this imagery and Royce's embeddedness within it relates to *Happy Valley's* feminist project, and its subversion of the nostalgic and masculinist rhetoric which has determined cultural representations of the North and its post-industrial decline. By showing the hollowness of the town's working-class labour, *Happy Valley* questions not the men themselves, or their failure to perform masculinity, but the very values which sustain these myths of masculinity in the first place. It is in staging this feminist critique, that Royce's body becomes emblematic of a labouring masculinity whose values feel compromised.
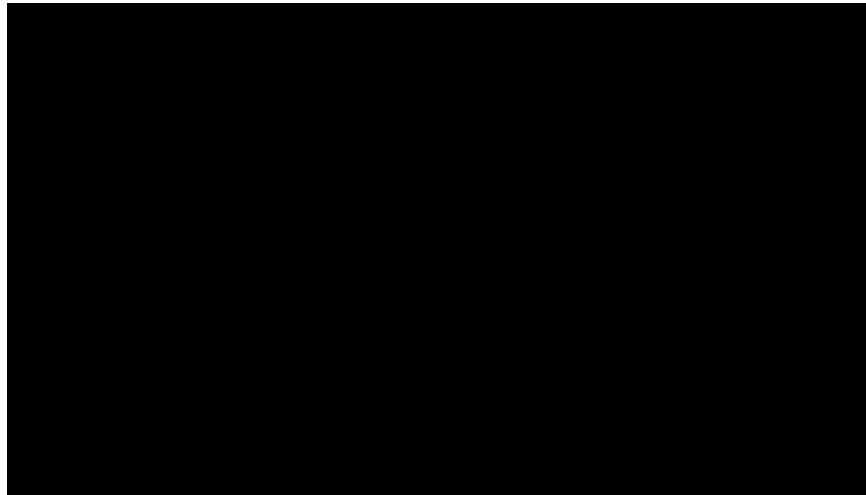
Fig 4.1
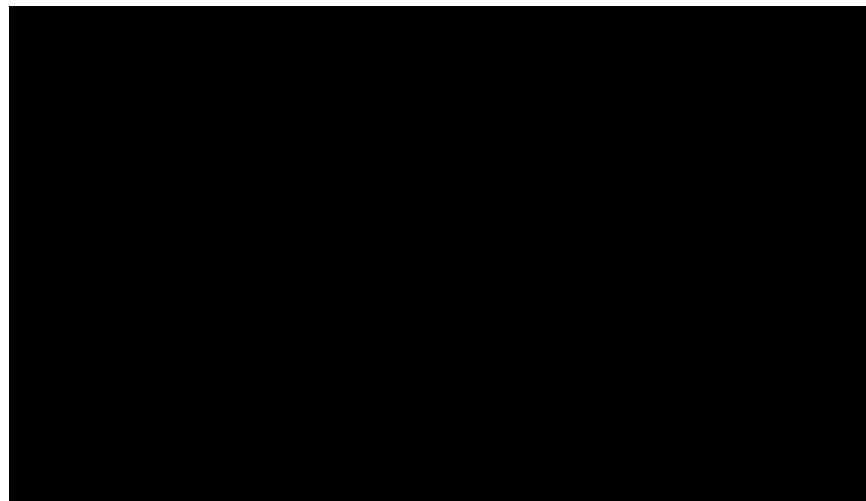
Fig 4.2

The Labouring Body Gone Wrong

On one hand, Royce's body exemplifies the continuation of valued Northern signifiers of 'hardness'[329], as well as an endurance and physical capacity associated with the 'daily 'graft' of working-class labour.[330] He is frequently involved in confrontations in which his physical dominance, and the threat or demonstration of violence allows him to get what he wants. But these

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[329] Dave Russell and Stephen Wagg, *Sporting Heroes of the North*: *Sport, Region and Culture*, (Newcastle: Northumbria UP, 2010), p. xiii

[330] Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 39

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traits, once expressive of Northern place-myth dominated by a working-class masculine iconography, contribute to *Happy Valley's* characterisation of Royce as an alienating and deviant figure. Through this physical alienation, *Happy Valley* questions the very values which once sustained the labouring Northern masculine body as a key part of the imagined structure of working-class sociality.

To see how these characteristics become coded as 'bad' traits, I want to focus on aspects of two scenes in the first episode which contribute to the initial construction of Royce's character. The first scene I want to highlight is the kidnapping of Ann Gallagher, and the way in which Royce is represented during the distressing moment of Ann being physically abducted. With the accomplice Lewis operating as a distraction, the scene shows Royce, his face hidden beneath a balaclava, attacking Ann to stun her and then force her into the back of a van before binding her hands and feet with tape. Although the kidnapping plan has been repeatedly established and prepared for by this scene, the act of abduction is disturbing in its sudden and messy violence. The brutality with which Royce treats a frightened Ann is difficult to watch, not least because of the naturalistic performances and shooting style in which the haptic and visceral experience of violence is amplified through sounds of striking blows, panicked breathing, and cries. While we empathise affectively with Ann, Royce's body is entirely othered in this sequence. The mise-en-scene suggests a moral detachment from his actions through the disjunction of bodily cause and effect; as Royce punches a screaming Ann to silence her, the action of punching is separated by a cut from the result of being hit, with Royce's body being absent from the reaction shot. This spatial separation of bodies is not only telling of the clear moral alignment in this moment but suggests something wider about the construction of Royce in his relation to physical

action. Visually, Royce is presented here less as a psychologised character than as a physical force. The framing repeatedly keeps most of his body on the far left side of frame as he forcefully restrains and binds Ann (Figs. 4.3 and 4.4). When Ann is made more prominent in reaction shots, often it is only Royce arms that are visible, protruding into frame to control a resistant Ann. Royce is totally committed to this criminal act as a physical exertion of will, the mise-en-scene denies psychology and makes him an entirely disturbing and alienating figure.
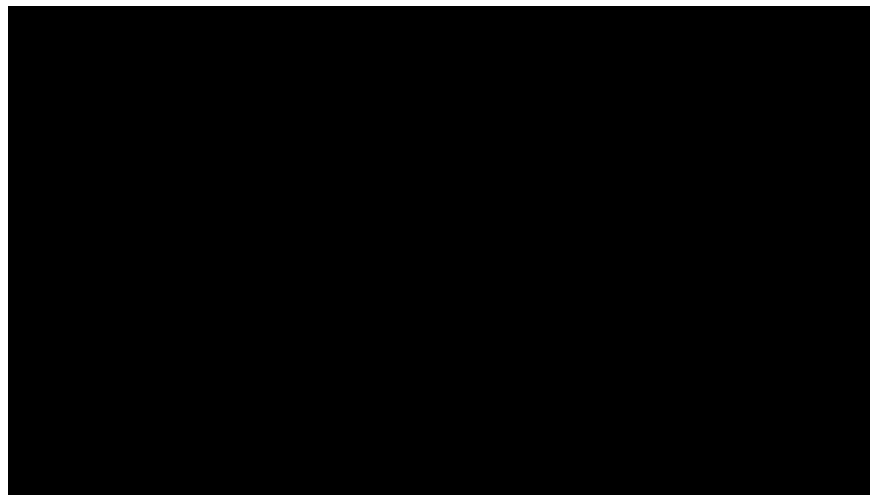
Fig 4.3
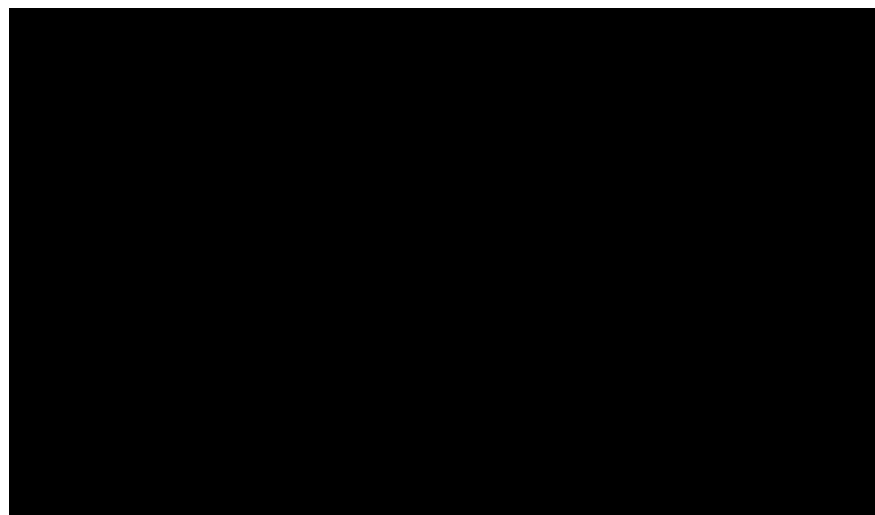
Fig 4.4

The second moment of importance is a brief scene in which Royce's body becomes the focus of a scrutinising gaze. Occurring just after the abduction, it comprises a sequence of shots showing Royce as he quietly smokes a fag on the path outside the house in which Ann is imprisoned. The sequence is unusual both in its apparent banality, it being an ostensibly uninteresting and undramatic moment that halts the rising tension of the unfolding criminal plot, and in its intensity in terms of the visual display it provides of Royce. The moment is built around extreme close-ups that linger at an intimate proximity to Royce's fingers and lips as he performs the actions of lighting a cigarette, taking a drag, and then exhaling. This being the first moment in episode in which he is seen alone, and away from the events of the kidnapping, the camera's close interest in the minor details of Royce's body is ostensibly part of a revelation to the viewer, a brief pause of narrative momentum in which we are invited to discover something of his interiority and psychology. However, in its realisation, the visual intimacy the between body and camera only emphasises an alienating exterior, with the use of close-ups highlighting a purely physical presence (Figs. 4.5 – 4.7).

Despite the attention close-ups pay to Royce's face, no meaningful emotion is legible. He appears to be smiling faintly, but there is no narrative context or element of performance to provide a reason for this smile. Similarly, although his eyes move around in a seemingly purposeful and thoughtful act of taking in his environment, no reverse-angles indicate what he is looking at or thinking. This disjunction of corporeal presence and psychological absence lends Royce an othering quality. This is also expressed in the sound design, which amplifies the closeness of Royce's body, turning up the slight noises of each small aspect of him smoking, and yet reveals nothing beyond the surface of his exterior. All the discernible sounds we hear are external and non-human in nature; there is the sharp metallic

flicking of the lighter; the rough friction of the cigarette end burning; and the soft release of smoke escaping from Royce's lips. These sounds further emphasise Royce as a force of exterior action, an assemblage of mechanical physical processes.
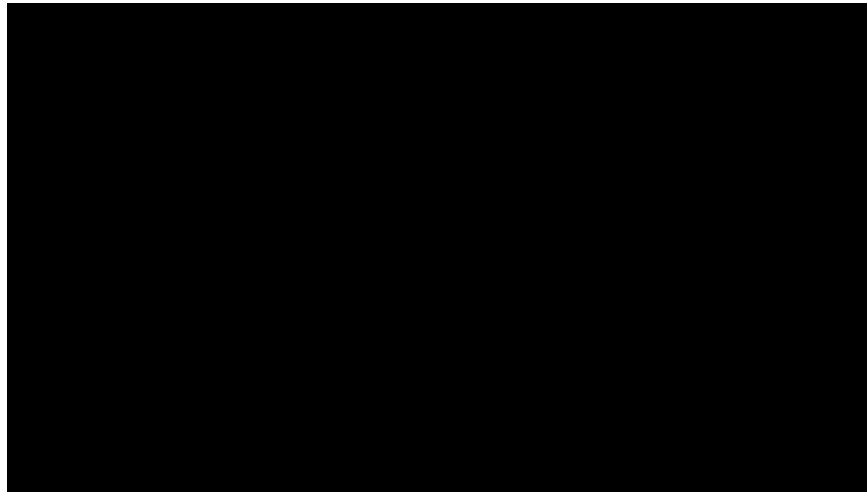
Fig. 4.5
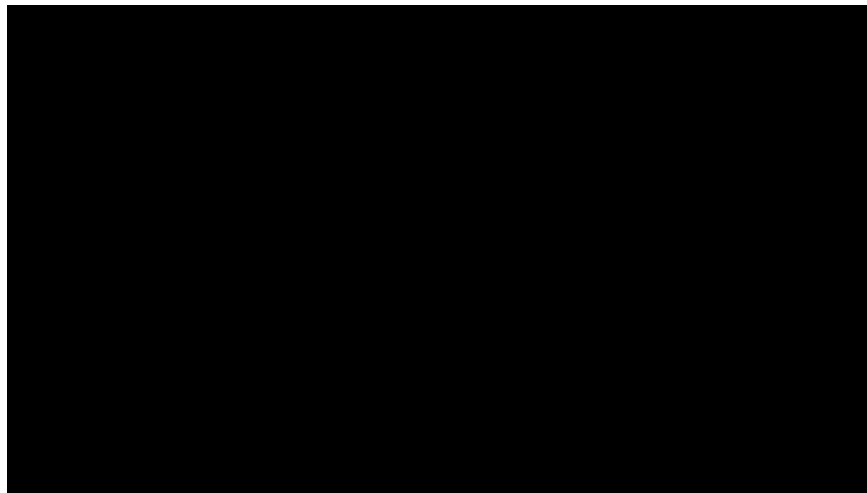
Fig. 4.6
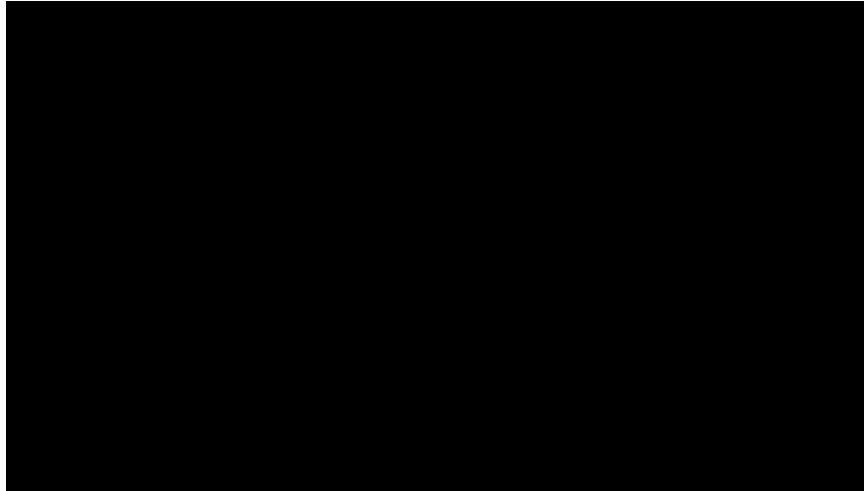
Fig. 4.7

In both sequences, the affective presentation of Royce confuses the traditional methods by which British social realism inscribes value onto the Northern male body. In stark contrast to the deteriorated body of the previous chapter, Royce acts with clear efficiency and physical capacity. There is no analogue between social malaise and physical decline. Royce is not trying and failing to embody a previously ideal masculinity. A closer figure for comparison from earlier in the tradition of Northern realist drama might be Yosser Hughes, who, as discussed in the History of the Screen North, visualises a similar set of valued masculine traits in his hardness and his drive towards physically extensive action. However, *Boys From The Blackstuff* supplies a clear narrative and visual context for Yosser's breakdown, showing his violence to be lashing out at the absence of employment and a sense of social purpose. In doing so, *Boys* partly reaffirms and the value of Yosser's traditional form of hard masculinity as it mourns its social redundancy. As these aforementioned sequences indicate, not only does *Happy Valley* avoid supplying any similar narrative motive for Royce's immoral behaviour, but the drama also visualises his body in a way which intensifies this absence of social cause or motivation. In introducing Royce in such a way, we can see the role that the marginal male body plays in *Happy*

Valley's subversion of the values of Northern representation. As Gorton and Thornham both argue, *Happy Valley's* centring of Catherine's maternal subjectivity is key to how the series reimagines the representation of Northern community and working-class futurity in the neoliberal moment. Through Royce, the programme recontextualises an ideal physical expression of masculinity in order to question the notion that such a masculinity has ever been anything other than ideologically compromised. Has the body of external action, of physical hardness, and escape ever been as politically productive as British social realism tries to imagine? In this sense, if *Happy Valley* is trying to represent a more hopeful and complex imagining of Northern working-class identity, community and future, the programme seems to suggest that the marginalisation of the labouring body is a necessary step.

The Selfish Giant

Where *Happy Valley* portrays a social world in which the marginality of the male body frames the emergence of a feminine Northern subjectivity, *The Selfish Giant* moves away from young adult men to capture the oppressive structures of precarity and poverty through the experiences of children. *The Selfish Giant* follows Arbor (Conner Chapman) and Swifty (Shaun Thomas) who turn to stealing cable for copper and scrapping for metal around Bradford after they have been excluded from school. Swifty's family are in desperate poverty while Arbor's single mother struggles to financially support Arbor's truancy and ADHD and his brother's drug addiction and debts.[331] The little opportunity scrapping metal offers the boys becomes, for them, the only option to economically relieve the conditions of their families.

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[331] An early scene shows Arbor's parents selling a settee they don't own to pay the electric bill.

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Moreover, for Arbor in particular, the 'graft' of being a scrap-man and securing some sort of capital provides a kind of social agency.

The Selfish Giant is another film grouped in the category of new realism, but its emphasis on stylistic and psychological opacity has drawn ire within debates around the political efficacy of these aesthetics. Clive Nwonka characterises *The Selfish* as an example of the naturalistic and de-politicised tendencies of this realism.[332] However, disregarding the primacy of realism in this debate, what is more useful here is the kind of social that Nwonka reads as being produced. The naturalistic approach of Barnard is understood by Nwonka to lead to an 'implicitly fatalistic and uncritical' and even essentialising representation of Bradford and its working-class characters.[333] Nwonka quotes a statement made by Barnard in *The Guardian* around the time of *The Selfish Giant's* release which gestures towards the film's implicit sense of the political. While Barnard's description is taken by Nwonka as pointing towards a promotion of social-realist cinema that is discursively familiar and reassuringly conventional in how it is materialised, the filmmaker's reading of her own work is also telling for what it cannot say clearly, for the absences suggested in its approach to depicting the social world of contemporary Bradford. As Barnard describes her intention:

> I don't want the film to have explicit political content, but it is
> there. It's essentially a film about love, deep friendship and
> loyalty between the two boys, but it is played out in an adult
> world where something has gone fundamentally wrong; and
> children are often at the cutting edge of that. When I was making
> *The Arbor*, what I saw was excluded children whom we

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[332] Clive James Nwonka, '"You're What's Wrong with Me": *Fish Tank, The Selfish Giant* and the Language of Contemporary British Social Realism', *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, 12:3, (2014)
[333] Ibid., p. 216

criminalise and demonise and who I think are victims of the widening gap of inequality…With *The Selfish Giant*, hopefully you see what gets lost when that ideology of greed is adopted wholesale.[334]

As Nwonka notes, Barnard here situates her work within familiar contemporary socio-political discourses of austerity, late-capitalism, and the demonisation of the working-class. This is a promotional move that not only signposts the film's commitment to a politically conscious brand of social realism, but also signals a quite conventional mobilisation of the North as a fictional space where this political consciousness can be visualised. Yet, for Nwonka, the apparent political timeliness of Barnard's aspirations is hampered by an inertness and predictability. Nwonka sees the familiarity of the film's relationship to 'discourses of social and generic verisimilitude' as constructing a knowledge of social-realist representation that cues a 'voyeuristic anticipation'.[335] The viewer is not challenged to think of a different state of affairs, a different future for this class of people; rather, the audience receives the representation of social problems not as a call to action but as a 'pleasure' (or at least an affective product) of the genre.

However, where Nwonka describes a fatalism that he attributes to an absence of political drive within the realist aesthetic itself, we might equally consider this fatalism as relating to the film's struggles to visualise a complex social present, one in which the continuities between people and social structures are unclear. This is suggested in

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[334] O'Hagan, S. (2013) 'Clio Barnard: Why I'm drawn to outsiders – Interview', *The Observer*, 12 October 2013, as cited in Nwonka, "You're What's Wrong with Me", p. 212
[335] Nwonka, "You're What's Wrong with Me", p. 213

Barnard's interview with *The Guardian*. The reference to "something" having "gone fundamentally wrong" in the adult world of the film is telling. In one sense, this can be interpreted as a reference to the contemporary austerity context that the film is located within. The film's depiction of poverty and its effect on children certainly suggests an economic catastrophe as a lingering cause for the characters' struggles. However, the vagueness of this "something" which has gone wrong shouldn't be overlooked. I want to read this "something" as meaningfully vague. Barnard's sense that the social is no longer what it was, implies a past that still weighs in the present, a past that has been deviated from or whose promise has been failed. But Barnard cannot exactly name what the present is, nor what it is that is wrong about it. In suggesting it is a failure of the adult world of which children bear the consequences, Barnard attributes an adult working-class world which is lacking, a world emptied out by the ideology of greed. When one turns to the film itself, this absentness is not neutral, but I want to argue, an absence of the kinds of working-class adults that would shield children from the effects of austerity and hardship. When Barnard's politics are visualised, the absence of her political diagnosis finds its material correlative in the body of the working-class man.

Marginal and Absent Young Men

The sense that the absence that permeates *The Selfish Giant* is an absence of a type of working-class man is further apparent by observing how young men appear in the film. In the depiction of a post-industrial world in Bradford, men are either literally missing, pushed to the margins of a narrative based around poverty and waste, or visually constructed as missing bodies. Both narratively and formally, the presence of these men is configured as a social and political void.

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Even as the film's narrative seems to frame Arbor's and Swifty's thieving and scrapping as a "rite of passage" into a world of illicit and criminal male labour, there is no sense of a solid male community existing for the boys to enter. An illegal horse-and-cart race that is organised and supervised by a gang of gamblers is the only gathering that occurs within this culture of scrap-men. Moreover, Barnard clearly establishes the clandestine nature of this event. Filmed in natural low-light conditions indicating the early morning setting and staging the race itself via rapid cuts and with a chaotic sound design of shouts, blaring car horns, and galloping hoofs, this event is clearly presented as a transitory and transgressive male gathering. The race's setting of a deserted dual carriageway, under the cover of darkness, is expressive of the marginality of this working-class masculine community, appearing fleetingly on the edges of public space.

However, this marginality is not simply characteristic of a social content that is being documented by the film – it is not simply a *reflection* of a contemporary reality in which the decline of industry marginalises these men – but rather is actively constitutive of how the film formally imagines the contemporary North as a problematic space. The fatalism which Nwonka asserts as characteristic of the film's approach to social realism is, in a large way, materialised through the marginal figure of the young man, a body which frames the film's allegorical representation of children being brutalised by a malevolent world. The extent to which these bodies are constitutive of the film's fatalism is evident in the visual logic of how the film frames the boys' pursuit of capital. For instance, these bodies linger in the frame when Arbor and Swifty first turn to scrapping as a means of procuring the money that their struggling mothers need. After being excluded from

school for fighting, the boys happen upon a disused pram outside a local shops and Arbor is inspired to repurpose it as an object for transporting the scrap they find. The act of re-using the shabby pram is emblematic of the film's depiction how austerity and late capitalist greed has left little for working-class children: the entrepreneurial spirit is ironised in this choice of object. Yet, at the same time, Barnard's social realist documentary impulses also implicates the absence of men in this message. Although focussed on Arbor and Swifty, this short scene implies a wider social world through the brief presence of two men who pass through the space around the boys. Barnard's camera clearly asks us to notice these presences. The camera lingers on the second figure for a few moments after Arbor and Swifty leave the frame, even as their physical appearances, clothed in tracksuits that hide much of their bodies, are entirely unremarkable (Figs. 4.8 and 4.9).
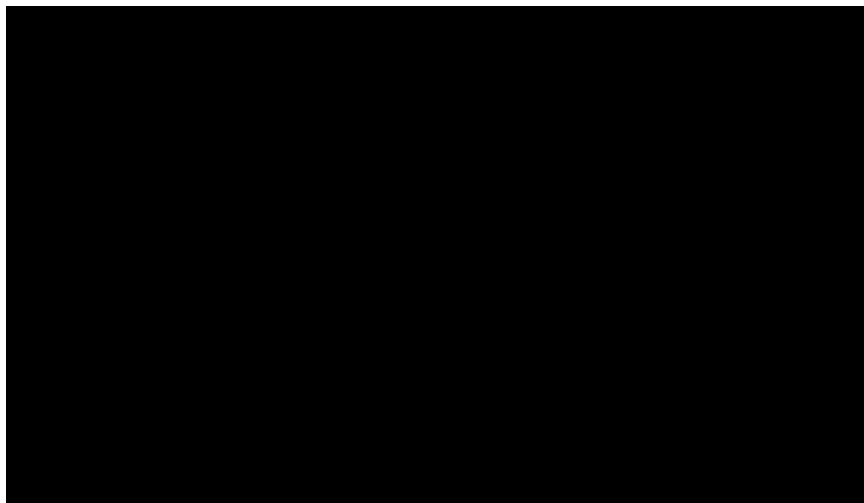
Fig 4.8
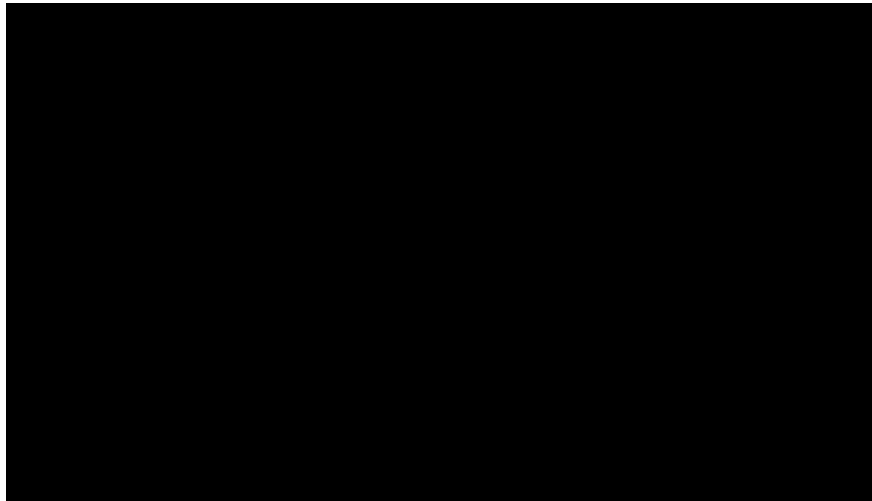
Fig 4.9

These bodies are ostensibly superfluous figures, changing nothing about the narrative act being depicted, and yet, in their very material presence and their stubborn visibility, this figures clearly affect our feeling around the boys shouldering the work of scrap-men. Visually bracketing Arbor and Swifty, they seem to physically evoke their own social absence. As we focus on Arbor and Swifty beginning to take on this responsibility, and their act of taking the pram as an event which exemplifies their own narrow future, these bodies around them seem to stand for their own inability to intervene in these children's lives. In effect, these young men embody a missing class of men, the kinds of labouring bodies that could provide a model of social continuity from childhood to adulthood. If not a strategy as such, these marginal bodies nevertheless characterise the material fabric of *The Selfish Giant*, constituting a means by which the film is able to construct a *thick* visual world appropriate to social realism that paradoxically signifies a barren masculine community around Arbor and Swifty.

The Selfish Giant's palpable absences are not unintentional aspects of the film's attempt to represent a Northern landscape and community. Rather, as Barnard's observation of 'something having

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gone wrong' suggests, the film is engaged in a conscious product of subverting the agency of its working-class child protagonists to capture a world has declined in ways they cannot understand or control. Consider how brief interstitial sequences punctuate the narrative to provide still landscape shots of the Yorkshire hills surrounding Bradford. Opening the film with a wide specular shot of a hilltop at night grazed by horses, the filmmaker consistently interrupts the drama of the lives Arbor and Swifty with these tableau images of a natural Northern landscape uninhabited by human figures. There is a distinct looseness of focus in these moments, aided by the lack of character to guide visual interest or direction: within these still frames sometimes roaming sheep catch the eye, other times the backdrop of cooling towers might provoke temporary contemplation.

On a structural level, these sequences exemplify the more poetic and figurative approach to rendering landscape that characterises new realism. One might possibly view these interstitial moments through Forrest's positive reappraisal of the poetic potentials of the landscape shot, with what he sees as a tendency towards evoking multiple open symbolic meanings that resists both the linearity of narrative character action and the deterministic social commentary often demanded of the representations of the industrial North.[336] This pausing of Arbor and Swifty's story can be seen as a momentary interruption of the aesthetic logic of the grim and troubling Northern working-class world, what Jay Kuehner reads as Barnard 'finding dissonance in the gaps that open when genres and forms coincide.'[337] These gaps open up different ways

[336] David Forrest, *New Realism: Contemporary British Cinema, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020)*

[337] Jay Kuehner, "TIFF 2013: The Selfish Giant (Clio Barnard, UK.)", *Cinema Scope Online*, (2013), <cinema-scope.com/cinema-scope-online/the-selfish-giant-clio-barnard-uk/> accessed 13 May 2019

of thinking the relationship between the Northern space and the working-class protagonists who usually structure the limits of our engagement with the world. Shots like these influence Kyo Maclear's post-human reading of *The Selfish Giant*, in which the writer sees such moments as denaturalising the documentary aesthetic attached to Arbor and Swifty to highlight the limits of their agency within their world. By orientating us towards a sense of the autonomy of forces in the natural and post-industrial landscape, via the wild nature of the hills and the monumentality of cooling towers, Maclear sees these moments as dissonant elements within social realist text that 'avoids the simplistic conclusion that the voids left by industrial, economic, and ecological trauma can be refilled' by the innocent child figure.[338]. By pausing the narrative to linger on natural landscapes, the film suggests that something is going on in this world in ways that the boys have no influence over (Figs 4.10 – 4.12). While these sequences would not seem to immediately point to the significance of the young male body, their feeling of absence and their subversion of narrative agency seem, to me, to allegorically question the idealisation of the male body as a virile emblem for Northern working-class agency.

[338] Kyo Maclear, "Selfish Giants and Child Redeemers: Refiguring Environmental Hope in Oscar Wilde's and Clio Barnard's The Selfish Giant", *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures*, 10:1, (2018), p. 52

Fig. 4.10
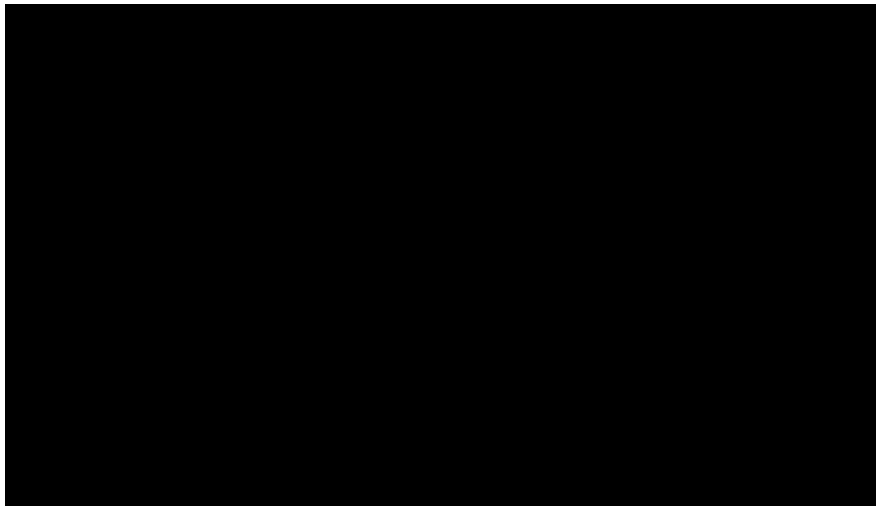
Fig. 4.11
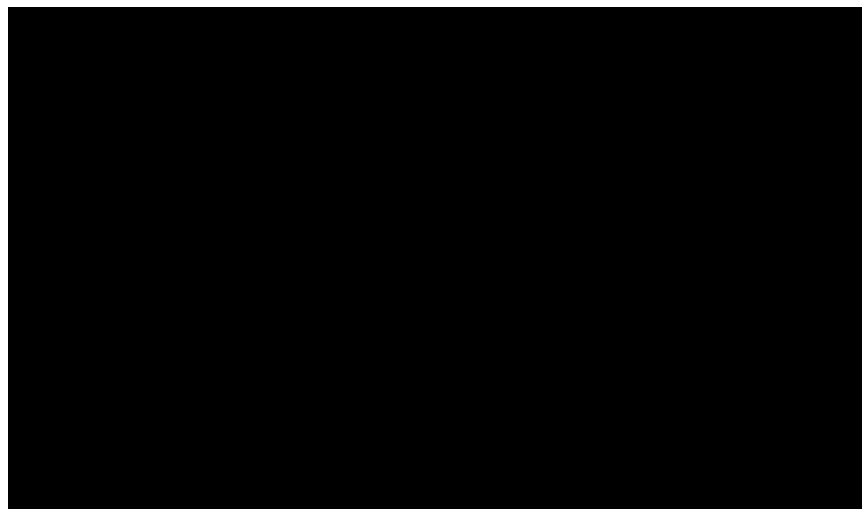
Fig. 4.12

The Visibility of the Underclass Body

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In *Happy Valley* and *The Selfish Giant*, the marginality of young men structures a realist imagining of both the Northern working-class community and the region's sense of future, outside of the dominant narratives of declining male agency. In both texts, the sense that something has fundamentally 'gone wrong' in the present provokes a critical examination of whether things were ever actually right, whether previously romanticised figures such as the labouring body, or the noble industrial worker, were ever valuable models for a progressive North. However, for these texts to offer progressive reappropriations of the visual, narrative and temporal structures of Northern realism, a contemporary working-class masculinity must be contained and repressed. The potential for contemporary identifications with working-class masculinity are elided, and a question which both texts leave open and uncertain is how to visualise a positive Northern masculinity after the collapse of industry. The importance of such an embodiment is not just to reassert masculinity as a dominant and valued form, or as an end. Rather, this is a question which we must now consider because, as Stephanie Lawler's work demonstrates, processes of containment and repression are often complemented by the opposite representational tendency: an emphatic presentation of bodies which evoke abjection and provoke disgust.[339]

The remainder of this chapter, then, is concerned with texts which foreground the male body within a narrativisation of underclass existence. Although *Little Boy Blue* and *Brassic* are drastically different in tone, both programmes utilise crime narratives in which young men are represented at the centre of the Northern working-class social world. However, in both texts, this foregrounding of young men is signalled as being part of the construction of what Stanley Cohen terms 'folk devils', culturally reproduced figures who condense (and are often portrayed as causing) a set

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[339] See: Lawler, 'Disgusted Subjects', and Lawler, 'Angry Young Men'

of social ills and elements of crisis within the national community.[340] Importantly, as Cohen's formative work argues, folk devils constitute not only a 'new' threat to the social, but are also symptomatic of more deep-seated and long-running anxieties which are less immediately apparent in their representation.[341] While the bodies depicted in these final two texts are made visually apparent as representing a contemporary underclass, engaged in transgressive acts of criminality, they are also sites on which the contemporary symbolic value of working-class masculinity is negotiated in relation to deeper historical logics of Northern embodiment.

Little Boy Blue

When explaining his decision to create the factual drama *Little Boy Blue* nearly a decade on from the killing of schoolboy Rhys Jones in Liverpool in 2007, writer Jeff Pope described how the crime represented a 'watershed moment' in British national identity.[342] Speaking on *This Morning,* on the day that the series' first episode aired on ITV1, Pope explained: 'I liken it to the murder of Stephen Lawrence. It was a moment when collectively as a nation we thought how? How does he go off to football training and then not come home? I still can't make sense of it.'[343] Pope's labelling of the killing as a 'watershed moment' is consonant with the significance of how the event was presented at the time as a national tragedy but his acknowledgment that he cannot make sense of the killing is interesting. If Pope sees his work as returning to an event which was totemic of a change in British social

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[340] Stan Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and the Rockers*, (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1972)

[341] Ibid., p. xvii

[342] Jeff Pope, 'Jeff Pope Shares Why He Wrote Little Boy Blue', Interviewed by Philip Schofield and Holly Willoughby, *This Morning*, (ITV1), 24th April 2017

[343] Ibid.

relations, he also admits not understanding what this event reveals. The comparison with Stephen Lawrence is telling because the two events are not totally analogous. While Lawrence's murder was the subject of another project helmed by Pope – *The Murder of Stephen Lawrence* (1999) - the actual tragedy resulted in a public inquiry into a deeply-rooted culture of racism within the police and wider national institutions.[344] In this sense, Lawrence's death marked a watershed moment because it caused a new recognition of how Britain's social relations are shaped by racist ideologies. By contrast, the articulation of embedded social ills is elusive in the case of Rhys's killing. Seemingly, for Pope, the tragedy of the event is that it feels palpably like a sign that something has "gone wrong", and yet what has gone wrong cannot be made clear.

Like *The Selfish Giant*, *Little Boy Blue* is framed as responding to a social breakdown that eludes easy analysis. However, where *The Selfish Giant* emphasises absences within the social world, *Little Boy Blue's* narrative turns to the personal lives of those involved in the investigation of Rhys's murder, to understand the wider significance of the event. Told across four episodes, the drama begins with the tragedy of Rhys's death – captured from the perspective of his parents Melanie (Sinead Keenan) and Steve (Brian O'Byrne) – and then follows the process involved in the investigation, trial, and sentencing of those involved in his killing. Although the drama moves between various people involved in the investigation – both those involved in the crime and those who are victims of it – a significant character is

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[344] As Stuart Hall explains, the publication of the Macpherson Report in 1997 was a moment in which the concept of "institutional racism" within the police and wider British society was explicitly articulated. The report marked a moment in which racism was institutionally recognised as a problem that was socially iterated and culturally regulated. This is, of course, not to say that Lawrence's death marked a fundamental material change in how racism was tackled in British institutions. Hall's examination of the report details the many ways in which the report's social and historical analysis is flawed. Stuart Hall, "From Scarman to Stephen Lawrence", *History Workshop Journal*, 48, (1999), pp. 194-195

Detective Superintendent Dave Kelly (Stephen Graham). Kelly's importance is narrative and generic – the plot often follows him to provide an order familiar from the television crime drama, in which processes of detection are used to make sense of the seemingly random killing – but also thematic. The attention to Kelly personalises and humanises the events, by showing his increasing emotional investment in a crime that he sees as a stain on his home city of Liverpool.

This humanising re-telling of real crime is a familiar strategy for Pope. The three-part drama *The Moorside* (2017), which depicts the events surrounding the hoaxed abduction of Yorkshire schoolgirl Shannon Matthews, similarly shifts attention to peripheral figures, specifically on the community work of neighbour Julie Bushby (Sheridan Smith), to eschew previous sensationalism. However, in a perceptive analysis of *The Moorside*, David Forrest and Beth Johnson note a troubling resemblance between the programme's representational logic and a wider political narrative of 'broken Britain'.[345] The pair argue that, in stripping back the event to a story of different personal values and agencies, *The Moorside* implicitly establishes a 'simplistic dichotomy between "good" and "bad" citizens' that undermines its supposedly empathetic depiction of a Northern working-class community by ignoring wider social forces.[346] My subsequent reading of *Little Boy Blue* builds upon Forrest and Johnson's critique of Pope, and his representation of the Northern working-class which locates decline in the field of individualist morals and agencies. However, where Forrest and Johnson judge *The Moorside* relative to the actual events and community depicted, I am interested in showing how this discourse of broken Britain offers *Little Boy*

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[345] Beth Johnson and David Forrest, "Erasing Diversity: Mediating Class, Gender, and Race in *The Moorside*", *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 17:1, (2020)
[346] Ibid., p.92

Blue a representational rhetoric through which to make sense of the figure of the young underclass male.

<u>Broken Britain: Moral Frameworks and Jeff Pope's Aesthetics</u>

Broken Britain was a specific mobilisation of the negative tropes of underclass representation that were wedded to issues related to ongoing recession and economic downturn. At the centre of the popularisation of this narrative were leading politicians in the Conservative party (then the opposition party) who used the concept of broken to shift public discussion of economic inequality onto issues of moral and individual failing. As Lisa McKenzie argues, the Tories used 'the successful concept of "the broken" to explain inequality as a product of family breakdown.'[347]

The circumstances surrounding the murder of Rhys Jones, as well as the hoaxed kidnapping of Shannon Matthews, were treated as the worst manifestations of this broken society. In 2008, then opposition leader David Cameron grouped Rhys, alongside the Matthews case, as one of many tragic stories indicative of ongoing social breakdown. Writing in the *Daily Mail*, Cameron described them exemplifying those 'children [who have] suffered at the very sharpest end of our broken society.'[348] Cameron framed these events as representative of an underclass characterised by waning morals and a lack of parental responsibility. As he put it, 'raised without manners, morals, or a decent education, they're caught up in the same destructive chain as their parents. It's a chain that links unemployment, family breakdown, debt, drugs and crime.'[349] Conflating wider issues of 'education'

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[347] Lisa McKenzie, *Getting by: Estates, Class and Culture in Austerity Britain,* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2015), p. 11

[348] David Cameron, "There are five million people on benefits in Britain. How do we stop them from turning into Karen Matthews?", *Daily Mail*, 8th December 2008, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1092588/DAVID-CAMERON-There-5-million-people-benefits-Britain-How-stop-turning-this.html>, accessed 4th May 2019

[349] Ibid.

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and 'unemployment' with traits of morality and manners, Cameron's broken society essentially diagnosed structural problems as matters of personal responsibility. Cameron's rhetoric is exemplary of the slippage between individual moral responsibility, personal failure, and wider social deprivation that characterised the neoliberal consensus in the media and politics of the decade.[350]

Broken Britain's moral framework for understanding inequality can been read as an exemplary discourse for Tyler's argument that the governmental discourses rely on the creation of 'abject subjects'. The social and economic polarisations, that Tyler argues has deepened in the past three decades, are reformulated in the national imagination through the regulation of what she terms a 'disgust consensus'.[351] Certain people and groups are stigmatised so that their social exclusion may be represented as essential to them. 'National abjects' such as 'the welfare scrounger' are monumentalised in media and political discourse as part of 'processes of othering, distinction-making, distancing and boundary formation.'[352]

According to Johnson and Forrest, it is this oppositional structure that implicitly orders *The Moorside's* representation of class and place. By narratively centring Julie Bushby, the text does not interrogate the socio-historical causes of the of the Matthews event but implicitly repeats its initially sensational presentation. This structure of moral opposition between the good working-class citizen and the bad underclass subject will become influential in my own reading of the aesthetics of the subsequent *Little Boy*

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[350] As Val Giddens argues, from New Labour through to Conservative governments, problems of inequality were hegemonically framed as problems of self-management: according to the political consensus 'prosperity derives from being the right kind of self, while poverty and disadvantages [are] associated with poor self-management.' See: Val Giddens, "'Raising the Meritocracy': Parenting and Individualisation of Social Class", *Sociology*, 39:5, 2005, p.837
[351] Imogen Tyler, "Revolting Subjects", p.23
[352] Ibid., p. 26

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Blue. However, I first want to draw attention to the different complexities that arise in the representation of younger men within this context of broken Britain; complexities that are less apparent in *The Moorside* but at the foreground of *Little Boy Blue* with its focus on the youths responsible for the heinous murder. These complexities are related to my wider argument that young male bodies are sites of discursive tensions when it comes to narrating decline. In the case of broken Britain discourses, I believe that the framework of moral polarisation is still evident, but that, when dealing with Northern men, the bodily capacity is a primary means by which this polarisation is comprehended.

We can begin to see this element of the broken Britain discourse by returning to the words of Cameron in his *Daily Mail* article in 2008. What is also revealing about Cameron's diagnosis of these cases of broken Britain is the rhetorical slippage between issues of moral value and economic utility. This is most evident in his summation that a 'broken economy and broken society go hand in hand', but Cameron also makes statements such as 'work gives life shape. It gives people esteem and responsibility. It powers our economy.'[353] It is one's ability to work, to contribute economically, that is positioned as foundational to moral responsibility and thus to social order. One's value as a moral subject and as an economic agent are conflated. The breakdown of moral order represented by cases such as Rhys Jones is thus related not only to the failure of parents to instil proper moral values and manners, but also to individuals failing to make proper use of themselves as economic agents.

Rather than reading abjectification as simply a process of exclusion, or a representation of certain figures as essentially 'wrong' citizens, it is the

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[353] Ibid.

implicit supposition of Cameron's words here – of wasted economic utility – that I want to seize upon. As far as the young Northern man is concerned, the notion of bodily potential underwrites the assessment of moral value by which contemporary decline and economic inequality is comprehended by British social and cultural discourses. How, then, are these discourses manifested in *Little Boy Blue*? A useful theoretical touchstone here, is Beth Johnson's discussion of television's presentation of moving bodies, and their capacity to shape emotional alignments and social identification.

The Moral Coding of Physical Movement in *Little Boy Blue*

In an explication of television's capacity to provoke physically felt empathy, Beth Johnson unpacks a conceptualisation of 'movement' as a form which affectively conveys classed and gendered experience. Her attention is on the figure of Lol (Vicky McClure) as she appears across the *This is England* mini-series.[354] Johnson notes a feeling of empathy that is not about totally understanding or having experienced what Lol goes through, asserting that her 'emotional response was not one of identification with Lol in terms of what had happened to her, but rather one in which I seemed to feel her pain.'[355] What Johnson suggests instead is that her engagement with Lol is based on a *form* of empathy. This is an emotional identification that arises more from television's aesthetics than it does from any personal correspondence between narrative content and viewers' real experiences. Johnson reads her response as indicative of a potential for broadcast television to foster intimacy between viewer and text, facilitated by long-form narrative seriality and the centrality of close-ups to the medium's address. But she also gestures towards a transference between intimacy and

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[354] Johnson's discussion focusses primarily on *This is England '88* (2011), but considers the durational effect of following the multiple mini-series.

[355] Beth Johnson, "This is England: Authorship, Emotion and Class Telly", *Social Class and Television Drama in Contemporary Britain*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 20

emotional empathy, that she characterises as 'being moved', and a shared affective feeling (or 'reversibility' as Jennifer Barker would term it) of physical movement between herself and the character.[356] For instance she recognizes how the 'emotional movement on my part contrasts with (and was enhanced by) McClure's markedly tired and at times still physical performance.'[357] For Johnson, the televisual body's movement, or lack thereof, is capable of conveying the weight of a person enduring a wider social world on an emotional level. This represents a different kind of social realism, in which the intersection of social forces, economic and gendered oppression, and emotional and embodied experience is made affectively sensible to a viewer.

This theorisation of the reversibility of movement as a potential reading strategy for television's social realism elucidates the ideological stakes of one of the dominant stylistic tactics of *Little Boy Blue.* This tactic is the use of the handheld long-take, with the camera following behind characters for prolonged periods as they personally engage with upsetting circumstances which they have been thrown into. In one sense, this technique aims at a sensory realism, attaching the camera to the rhythms of

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[356] Barker describes cinematic affect, specifically, as a process of dynamic sensory 'reversibility' between spectator and image. She asserts that meaning is created mutually "in an intimate tactile encounter" between film and viewer, in which content of the image is fleshed out by our bodies, and our physical sensorial experienced is deepened by what we see on screen. While a sense of ontological distinction is still maintained between the actual body and the virtual filmic body, there is nevertheless a feeling of mimetic empathy between spectator and image that allows one to understand the text itself as expressing embodiment in a manner which can be read through textual analysis. That is, stylistic techniques themselves can be read as expressing a mimetic form of embodiment; for instance, we can read shallow focus as a means of expressing hapticity or camera movement as a mimetic conveyance of a body turning in space. Although Barker is discussing cinema, Johnson seems to be reading a similar process in medium specific qualities of television. See: Jennifer Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009),p. 15

[357] Beth Johnson, "This is England: Authorship, Emotion and Class Telly", *Social Class and Television Drama in Contemporary Britain*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p.22

the moving body to present an intimate depiction of these events as they were lived. One might interpret a potential, in this visual engagement with moving bodies, to avoid the sensationalism of how the killing was initially narrated and overcome what Tyler sees as the boundary-forming discourses of underclass representation. However, while Johnson's theorization of 'being moved' suggests televisual realism's potential for providing new forms of identification and understanding, it also, implicitly, opens the question: *are all bodies represented as capable of this movement, and thus what kinds of bodies move and move us*?

The scene which most exemplifies *Little Boy Blue's* investment in an emotive representation of movement is the scene which opens the first episode of the series: in which we see the events of Rhys's death, as tragically presented through the perspective of his mother Melanie. In line with Pope's philosophy of avoiding lurid depictions of events, *Little Boy Blue* does not show the killing itself, but rather uses the mother's perspective to frame the event for the viewer. Occurring five minutes into the first episode, the scene follows Melanie from the kitchen of the Jones household to the site of Rhys's death in a Croxteth pub car park. It is structured via two plan-sequence long-take shots that unfold either side of a conversation, between Melanie and Rhys's football coach which occurs on the doorstep of her home, where Melanie first hears of Rhys's shooting. Captured as if in real-time, the sequence dramatises Melanie's agony during the minutes that separate her ordinary day from the senseless tragedy of the event itself. By staying entirely with Melanie's perspective, the sequence shuns the lurid spectacle of death for an empathetic focus on the personal consequences of such a tragedy.

The principal aim and affect of the sequence is the construction of an empathetic alignment with Melanie through the expression of a single

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continuous duration. We see the different stages of her disbelief, anxiety and pain unfold over the course of two minutes. As Melanie is driven by Rhys's coach from her home to the site of her son's shooting, the long-take creates an intense focus on her figure which visualises her rising emotional distress. By showing this all in real-time, the sequence emotionally 'moves' the spectator; we move through time as Melanie does, and experience the same duration, fraught with anxiety, that Melanie experiences. Just as in Johnson's example of *This is England*, this is a *form* of empathy where we primarily identify with movement and temporality. For instance, the representation of the car journey utilises gestures and moments which play on Melanie's experience of time. For instance, we see her repeatedly shifting in her seat, a physical nervousness which gestures towards the agony of waiting to see her son and being unable to act in this moment. These gestures and moments powerfully communicate how Melanie's emotional distress is felt as a particularly anxious movement through time (Figs. 4.13 – 4.15).
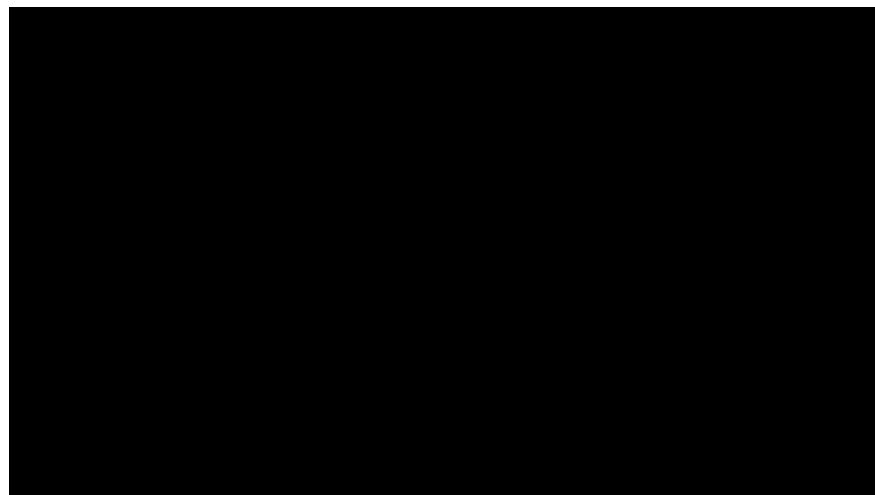
Fig. 4.13
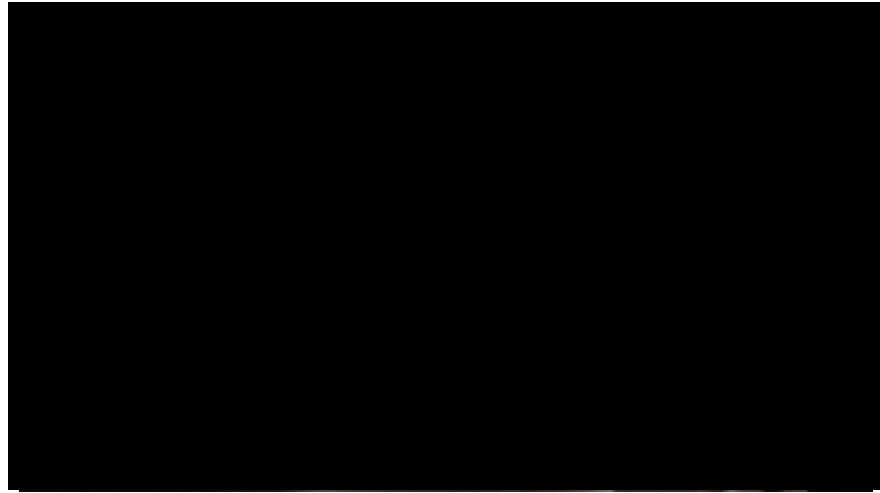
Fig. 4.14
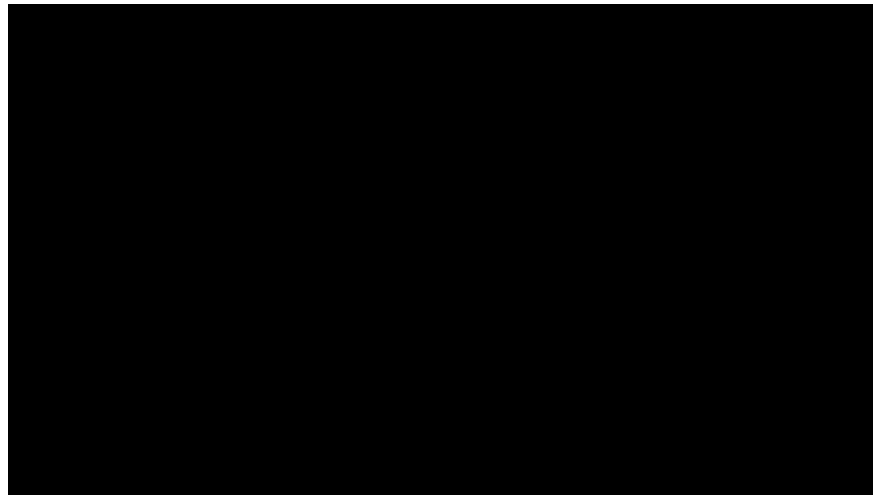
Fig. 4.15

When considering the ethics of true crime recreation, the set-up of this scene is an appropriate and deeply emotive storytelling decision. Yet, this does not mean that there are not aesthetic consequences to this decision that we need to consider. Namely, by opening the series with such a sequence, the programme utilises the historical and cultural significance of Rhys's death to establish a narrational approach interested in the real, the human, and the emotive. But it also uses the significance of the real event to give the moving camera, and physical movement, an emotional and moral resonance; the long hand-held take, as a device which continues beyond this sequence, becomes a privileged marker of emotional empathy from this moment on.

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And yet, its selective use means that it becomes attached to characters and particular bodies. Different figures in the story of the killing and subsequent investigation are introduced with this style of hand-held shooting. Both chief investigator Dave Kelly and the witness Kevin Moody (Michael Moran) are first seen via hand-held tracks that follow them and detail their precise emotional reactions when confronted with the news of the shooting (Fig 4.16 and Fig 4.17).
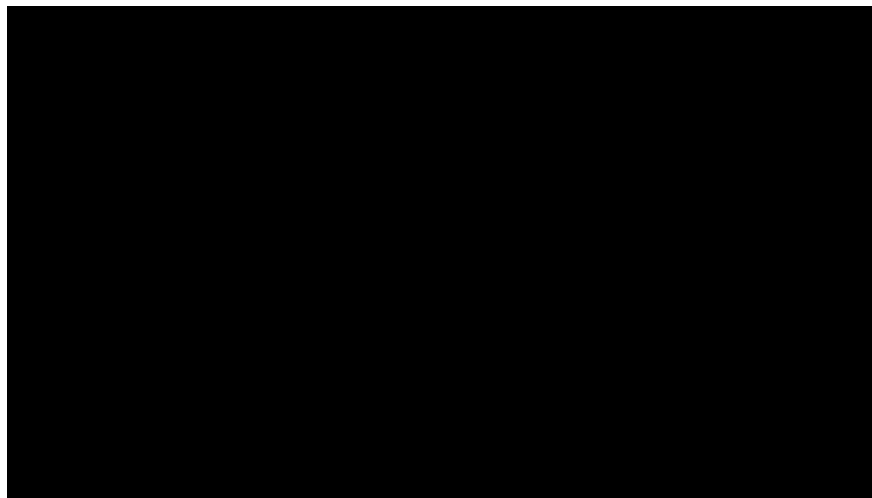
Fig 4.16
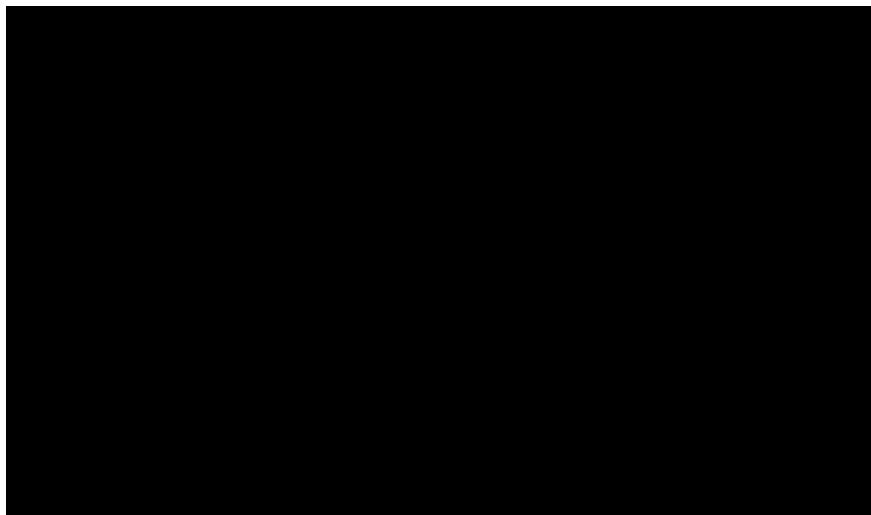
Fig 4.17

The ideological resonances of movement are further clarified when contrasted with the representation of Rhys's murderers, figures whose

abjectness is visually communicated by the extent to which they appear
unmoved. Not only are there no comparable moments of alignment between
moving camera and these boys' bodies, the killers' apathy towards their
actions is also dramatised via moments of visible stillness. An early scene in
the second episode shows James Yates (James Nelson-Joyce), the boy who
provided the gun that killed Rhys, at home watching the coverage of the
killing on Crimewatch. The scene begins with recreated home movie footage
of Rhys innocently playing on holiday, before cutting to the Yates family
watching the footage on television. Before we have seen the living room
space, the quotidian and personal nature of this footage provokes a feeling
for the disparity between the images of a carefree Rhys and the unfairness of
his death. This depth of emotion and sympathy contextualises the
representation of Yates and his parents that follows. An over-the-shoulder
shot of Yates slumped in a settee suggests an indifference to the images
being broadcast (Fig 4.18 and Fig 4.19). This is confirmed in a reverse-angle
close-up, in which a bored James stares at the television as he absently picks
at the arm of the chair. Subsequently, a two-shot of his parents reveals a
similar attitude. As Rhys's parents speak despairingly of their loss, both
watch on still and silent; the father mirroring his son's slumped posture,
similarly apathetic as he drinks from a can of lager (Fig 4.20). It is not until
Detective Kelly tells the Crimewatch presenter that he has received tip-offs
that Yates's mother moves for the first time, rising from her seat to snatch
her son's mobile phone so that she can burn the SIM card. It is this action
alone which communicates a sense of emotional and even human response,
her hands shaking as she desperately tries to destroy evidence. The
characterisation of the family is totally villainous; they are shown as people
without any remorse or empathy. The stillness and lethargy of these figures
is an important contrast to the moving intimate camerawork that
predominates *Little Boy Blue's* approach to recreating the events of the crime

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and its investigation. The visible contrast between movement and stillness constructs clear distinctions of moral and emotional alignment that ground our sense of emotional empathy and our understanding of Rhys's death as both a social and personal event.

Fig 4.18
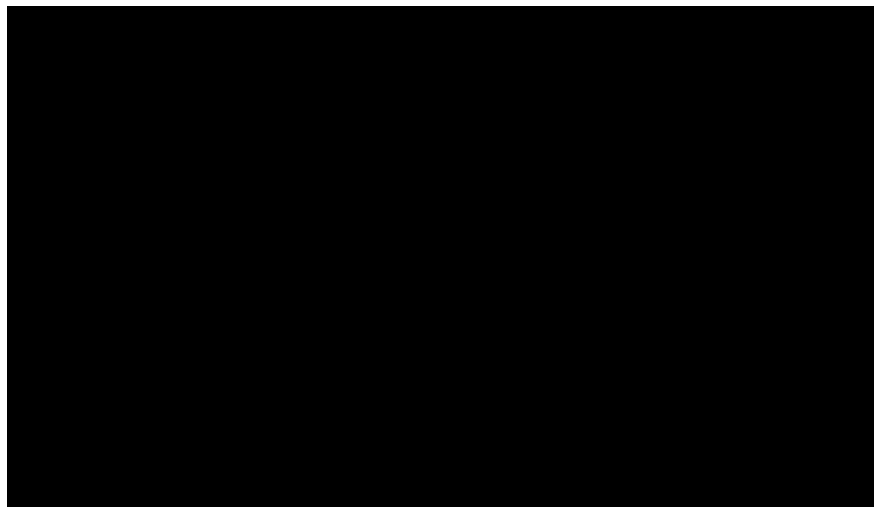
Fig 4.19
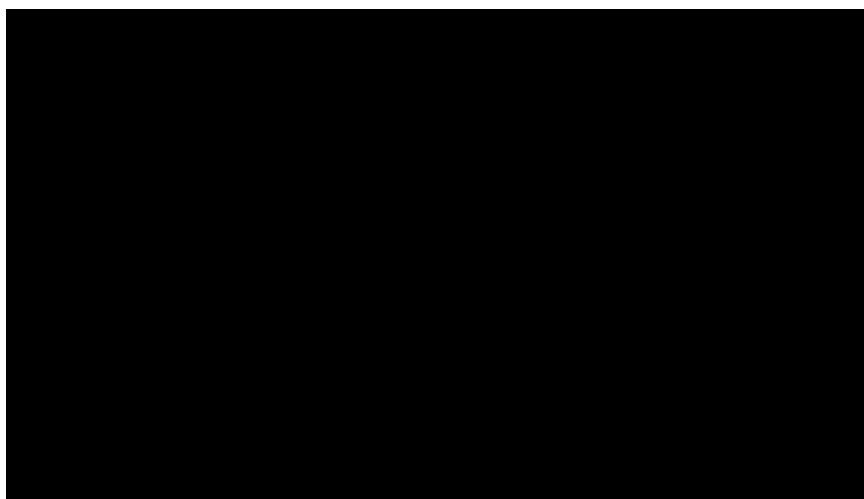
Fig 4.20

Considering the gravity of the real-life events, a perspectival and emotional alignment with the victims of the crime is appropriate as a means of doing justice to the personal and communal significance that such an event represents. However, there is a degree to which this contrast of movement and stillness is fed by, and contributes to, the images of underclass chav as idle and feckless. Movement, as an emotional and moral reaction to the horrific events depicted, is conflated with a second sense of bodily movement as a signifier of a (lack of) social, and implicitly economic, value. The visible stillness and lethargy of the characters is primarily a signifier of their moral vacancy, and of their inability to recognise how their personal failures have resulted in the death of an innocent child. However, the way these characters are visualised overlays this affective response and moral commentary with a value judgement on their physical idleness as a characteristic of their personal failings. This is true particularly for how the male characters of Yates and his father are shown. Both slumped in their seats, with depressed postures and vacant expressions, the bodies shown here are visibly idle. Through the context of the scene, this idle embodiment not only reflects a moral indifference but seems to produce it. If the self-stated aim of Pope's dramatization of Rhys Jones's murder was to reflect on

a moment when something had "gone wrong" in British society, then the programme's aesthetic emphasis on movement not only repeats the social diagnosis of 'broken Britain' but also its rhetorical construction of masculine working-class value.

<center><u>Brassic</u></center>

While underclass bodies might function as abject subjects, they nevertheless require a material representation that, as Stephanie Lawler argues, means that 'their presence cannot always be ignored' in the production of contemporary class politics.[358] These are bodies which reaffirm the same kinds of symbolic values which have dominantly characterised Northern masculinity – judging the *real* working-class community according to the capacity of bodies to move – by representing the failure of its continuity as a primarily moral issue. However, because this process of cultural affirmation is performed through negative images, which only reference the abstract values of working-class Northern identity as they are absent, these bodies might also be read as holding a materiality which affectively communicates the potential for other ways of negotiating regional identity. What is intended as reaffirming dominant values of Northern masculinity might symptomatically become a site for the questioning of the material reality of those values.

Beth Johnson's work on the televisual body offers one route for considering how television as a medium itself might provoke this questioning. Her discussion of how television allows the viewer to 'feel' class opens up the potential for thinking about how television's core qualities of intimacy and seriality might provoke an affective understanding of

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[358] Stephanie Lawler, "Heroic Workers and Angry Young Men: Nostalgic Stories of Class in England", European Journal of Cultural Studies, 17:6, 2014, p. 716

experience of class, gender, and region as it is physically lived through.[359] Although my discussion of *Little Boy Blue* highlighted the question of which bodies are granted this capacity to move, this is not to argue that the moving nature of bodies is already pre-determined by existing discourses of social value. While these discourses create a context for the construction of Northern bodies, Johnson's work also illuminates how television, and particularly the serial drama, might provide a means of subverting these discourses through its potential appeals to a physical empathy and a shared sense of duration within the open-ended, long-running text.

The final case study of this chapter, Sky One's *Brassic*, offers a recent example of how contemporary televisual representations of the North might subvert dominant values of masculine embodiment. Rather than frame the body itself as a morally problematic presence, *Brassic* narratively foregrounds the problems and struggles which young men actively negotiate as part of the post-industrial left. Central to this process of attempting to imagine a different image for young male Northern embodiment is *Brassic's* intimate and serial engagement with how such bodies navigate everyday life within Britain's margins.

Anti-Social Realism

Brassic is a serial comedy-drama which follows a group of young men living in a rural Lancashire town, who get by through performing a string of petty criminal activities. The gang is comprised of leader Vinnie O'Neill (played by series co-creator Joe Gilgun) - a self-described "gentleman" thief with bipolar disorder who balances his criminal exploits with frequent therapy sessions – his best friend Dylan (Damien Maloney), Dylan's partner Erin

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[359] Beth Johnson, "This is England: Authorship, Emotion and Class Telly", *Social Class and Television Drama in Contemporary Britain*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017)

(Michelle Keegan), and a strong group of long-time childhood friends: Cardi (Tom Hanson), Ash (Aaron Heffernan), Tommo (Ryan Sampson), and J.J (Parth Thakerar). Across both series, they juggle several illicit enterprises; from operating an underground cannabis farm to disassembling stolen cars. However, the primary activity governing the programme's serial narrative structure is the series of ludicrous heist-style robberies which the lads execute, with most episodes following these jobs from planning to their (often bungled) realisation. These robberies are weaved around *Brassic's* more personal overarching plots, with a key theme of the drama being a collective feeling of ambivalence towards the promise of escaping the town and "achieving something". The remoteness of the fictional Northern setting of Hawley is a major theme of *Brassic*, and the question of what it means to speak about such Northern towns as geographically and socially excluded is referenced by the characters themselves.[360] The narrative world of *Brassic* is one which could be constructed in the social problem text. In representing almost all its characters as making their livelihood through crime, the drama deals with the kinds of endemic masculine exclusion that social realism has typically associated with the deviant underclass. However, *Brassic* treats the criminal behaviour of Vinnie and his friends with an empathetic and unserious attitude which differs wildly from a text like *Little Boy Blue*.

In theme and tone, the most obvious antecedent of *Brassic* is *Shameless* (2004 – 2013), the long-running comedy-drama that was created by Paul Abbott but also, in part, written by *Brassic's* own executive producer Danny Brocklehurst. Set in the fictional Chatsworth Estate in Greater Manchester, *Shameless* centres on the chaotic Gallagher family, led by the hedonistic and alcoholic father Frank Gallagher (David Threlfall). Produced during the

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[360] The town of Hawley is a facsimile of the Lancashire town of Chorley, which is the birthplace of lead actor Joe Gilgun.

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height of the New Labour government's legislation against anti-social behaviour, *Shameless* captured a zeitgeist of mid-2000s chav stereotyping, engaging with all the most intense social anxieties around ASBOs, sink-estates, teenage pregnancies, and work-shy families.[361] Although some commentators read the programme as perpetuating these stereotypes,[362] Glen Creeber argues that *Shameless* actually challenges the 'authenticity and ethical superiority' assumed in representations of the troubled underclass.[363] For Creeber, the drama's humour and its visually hyperbolic style – defined by heightened optical effects, self-consciously noticeable editing techniques, and highly subjectivised points-of-view – constructs an 'anti-social realism' which undermines 'many of the fundamental moral assumptions on which social realism is based'.[364] Rather than constructing working-class life as a problem in need of (outside) intervention, *Shameless* conveys the 'rich intensity' of the Gallagher's life, and the physical pleasures of drinking, drugs and sex.[365]

Shameless' anti-social realism, and its disregard of the moral ideals traditionally governing working-class representation, is also clearly apparent in *Brassic's* more contemporary concerns with the plight of the left behind youth of the North's post-industrial towns. In the second scene of the drama's first episode, as the gang attempt to escape the police in a stolen car, Vinnie delivers a voice-over monologue which addresses the notion that Britain's working-class men represent a "problem" in need of solving. Vinnie's monologue closely resembles the sentiments of Frank Gallagher's speeches that comprise the title credits of *Shameless*, in which Frank

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[361] See: Imogen Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, 2011

[362] See Owen Jones, *Chavs*, pp. 128-129

[363] Glen Creeber, 'The Truth is out there! Not!: *Shameless* and the Moral Structures of Social Realism', *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 7:4, (2009), p.433

[364] Ibid., p. 436

[365] Ibid., p. 433

acknowledges that while Chatsworth is "no Garden of Eden" it has nevertheless "been a good home" to his family. These speeches repudiate the stigmatisation and reification of Northern underclass spaces by stressing their reality, for insiders, as places of everyday domestic life. Similarly, Vinnie declares:

> They call us Blair's forgotten youth. Kids that grew up in a town that offered nothing; no opportunities, no prospects, no hope. But what they'll never understand is this: we're not victims! We just have a different way of living, it's about having your mates, man. Having a laugh. And just finding a way to survive.

Just as Frank's monologue stresses the warmth of domestic life in rejection of the stereotypes of the urban sink-estate, Vinnie reframes his criminal activities (in this case, car theft), not as an indication of wider social and moral privation, but more simply as one way of getting by.

Furthermore, the sequence's formal characteristics echo *Shameless'* anti-social realism to similarly present crime as a source of affectively lively experience. As opposed to the previous case studies covered in this chapter, in which the representation of crime centres on male bodies which are inhuman and unmoved, the criminality of Vinnie and his friends is introduced in a high-speed car chase across the hills and valleys of rural Lancashire. There is an emphasis on the depth of Vinnie's visceral experience of the chase, created by a multiplicity of movement and scale within the frame. On one hand, the chase has a kinetic intensity, as quick close-ups of cars are intercut with soaring multi-directional crane shots which show the vehicles from above as they tear through the landscape. Such shots create a sense of forward propulsion which associates the criminal escape with dynamic movement. However, this hyperbolic kineticism feels bracketed within

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the compositions that focus on the gang inside the car, as they look uninvolved and listless. One emblematic shot, captured from a Steadicam located on the bonnet of the gang's car, frames the car frontally but also at an angle, utilising a long depth of field so that the pursuing police car is visible in the far background. This framing divides the composition as two distinct planes of movement. While the background conveys the high-speed nature of the chase – with the tracking of the camera capturing the road and countryside as it rushes past – this is contrasted, laterally, by the stillness of the gang's car as it is framed in the immediate foreground. While the police car is visualised with a clear sense of momentum, Vinnie (visible through the windscreen) moves in a more languid manner (Figs. 4.21 – 4.24). Thus, Vinnie and his friends appear both in the throes of intense kinaesthetic experience and calmy navigating from the chaos as if it were an entirely ordinary quotidian activity.

The sequence serves as an emphatic rejection of the bodily logic underpinning the stigmatising representations of underclass men. On one level, the anti-social realist style portrays crime as a moving activity, subverting the moralising of underclass bodies as physically deficient. Crime is portrayed as an act of physical extension; with the cars' forward momentum used to demarcate a rural Lancashire landscape that is ironically Northern. There are resonances here of crime as a continuation of the valued Northern masculine body-liness, and its active physical extensiveness, found in the British New Wave. However, the physicality conveyed in this scene is not shown to be excessive. If crime can be physically intense and attractive, there is no sense that it must be inevitably reconciled with a more stable domestic world. Rather, the transgressive elements of the criminal anti-social act

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are bracketed by the pragmatic corporeal performances of Vinnie and his friends. These are not unmoved bodies, but bodies that move with an unremarkable and pliable gait, gently rocking in rhythm with the car. In effect, crime is also rendered an unremarkable fact of life; it does not transgress the social world but seemingly makes up its ordinary abeyance.
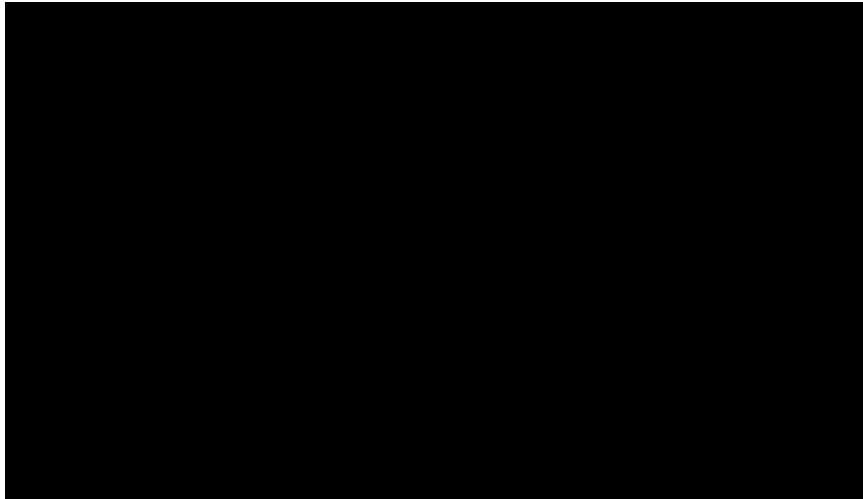
Fig. 4.21
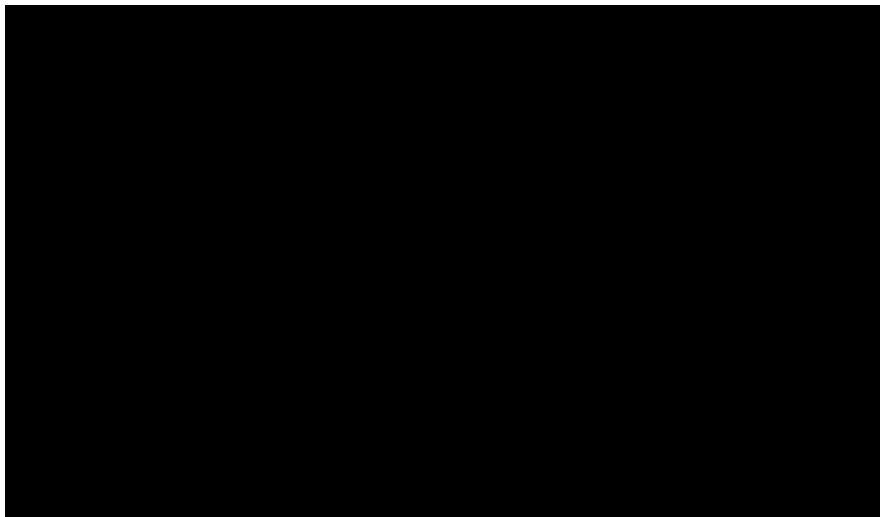
Fig. 4.22
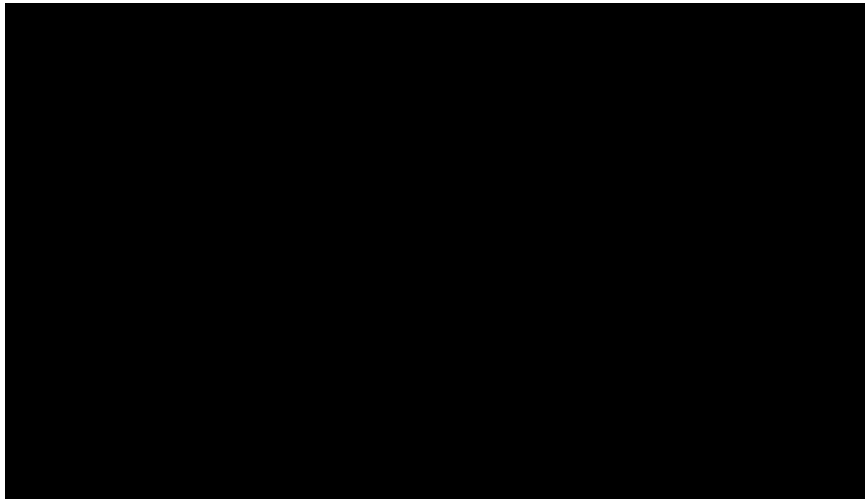
Fig. 4.23
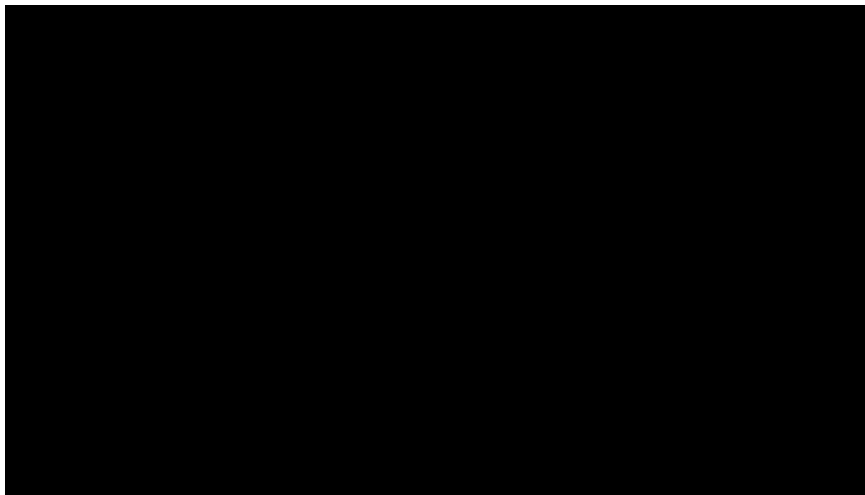
Fig. 4.24

In *Brassic's* version of anti-social realism, the relations between bodies, agencies and moral judgements are shown to be contradictory. In a town with "no hope" and "no opportunity", *Brassic* treats crime as one of the few ways in which young men can embody the traditional values of Northern masculinity. I would also argue that this emphasis on contradiction also distinguishes *Brassic* from the more rhetorically straightforward anti-social realism of a text like *Shameless.* While *Shameless* problematised the looking relations assumed in realism, to reject its moral terms, it also emphasised a hyperbolic display of underclass bodily-ness that echoes dominant stereotypes of

Northernness and underclass identity. While the programme rejected the authenticity of realism, it did little to challenge underlying rhetorical terms which cast the Northerner as primarily an embodied category, or which valued underclass subjects within a bodily economy based on productivity. In the years since it went off air in 2013, *Shameless'* display of excessive states of embodiment has become common to the aesthetic repertoire of the 'poverty porn' genre of factual television programming. As Louise Cope argues, the emphasis on bodily excess and waste (which in *Shameless* is a source of comedy) has, in the context of austerity Britain, become implicated in the construction of benefits claimants as 'abject-grotesque' figures who authenticate the common neoliberal discourse that the poor suffer through their own lack of self-regulation.[366] Where a programme like *Shameless* revels in a hyperbolic display of unproductive underclass bodies, *Brassic's* central focus on issues of masculinity and homosocial community reveals an interest in the contradictions of working-class male embodiment and its social and symbolic values.

<u>Northern Escape and the Serial Drama</u>

Unlike a figure such as Frank Gallagher, who is portrayed as hedonistically secure in his lifestyle, *Brassic's* male protagonists negotiate "finding a way to survive" with an acknowledged sense of the unfair expectations facing working-class men in contemporary Britain. The drama addresses these expectations in its lighter, more comedic moments and as a wider theme which defines its overarching serial stories. The question of how one embodies a socially valued Northern masculinity is referenced in passing

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[366] Louise Cope, 'Benefits Scroungers' and Stigma: Exploring the Abject-Grotesque in British Poverty Porn Programming', in Reifova and Hajek (eds.), *Mediated Shame of Class and Poverty Across Europe*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021)

exchanges such as Vinnie asking the other lads to inspect his receding hairline but also forms more serious plot points, such as Ash (a tough fighter from an Irish traveller background) struggling to make his parents accept that he is gay. *Brassic's* serial form, which moves between episodic plots and overarching personal stories, is central to how the drama pays attention to the ongoing process of "finding a way to survive".

As recent scholarship has argued, seriality is a form which constructs narrative and political meaning through the different possibilities of the body's movement. Zoe Shacklock argues that serial drama is an inherently kinaesthetic form, which 'reverberates with the embodied experience of movement – a rhythm of unfolding progression combined with interruption and segmentation'.[367] For Shacklock, this tension between progression and interruption forms a central framework for the expression of affective meaning within the serial:

> Movement is always a dynamic, unfolding action. It gestures beyond itself, pointing towards a particular direction or aim, and creating a projective sense of both space and time. Of course, this is not to argue that movement is always explicitly goal-oriented; movements can exist along the whole continuum of direction and aim, sometimes circular, often untargeted, and at times unrealised entirely.[368]

In applying this 'continuum' of the aim and direction of movement to the serial, Shacklock's work elucidates how certain bodies are identified – in terms of their class, race, and particularly gender – by the ways in which they kinaesthetically inscribe the wider progression or interruption of time

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[367] Zoe Shacklock, 'The Kinaesthetics of Serial Television', (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Warwick, 2017), p. 104

[368] Ibid.

and space. This is not just a case of how the serial imagines a body's future, but also how it imagines bodies as holding relations to the past. Amy Holdsworth's work on television and memory similarly asserts that the serial drama is uniquely capable of expressing the 'folding and unfolding' of memory, and the past's 'patterns of return and retreat', because of its potential long-running sense of duration in the viewers life.[369] Like Shacklock, Holdsworth's work maintains a sense of the potential variability of how the past is invoked within the serial narrative, holding open the possibility that different bodies move through time in different ways.

In the television dramas covered so far in this chapter, the young Northern male body has been most produced as a site of interruptive forces. These are bodies which are constructed as obstacles to the unfolding progression of the narrative and the future of the community. In *Little Boy Blue*, the underclass bodies of the teenage gang-members not only interrupt in the narrative act of murder but their lack of physical and emotional movement also represents a moral degradation to which the police and wider community must respond. In *Happy Valley*, the emotional progression of Catherine is predicated on her ability not only to move past the trauma – the repetition and retreat – caused by Tommy Lee Royce, but also, as Gorton argues, in her supplanting of the 'hard' masculinist forms of working-class identity which Royce embodies.[370] Read in the context of the television serial, we can describe another aspect of the problem of the young male Northern body as representing British culture's difficulty with representing a sustainable future for men. How might the young male body sustain the progressive unfolding of the serial drama in these conditions?

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[369] Amy Holdsworth, *Television, Memory and Nostalgia*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.64

[370] Kristyn Gorton, "Feeling Northern: 'Heroic Women' in Sally Wainwright's Happy Valley (BBC One, 2014 -), *Journal for Cultural Research*, 2016, p. 76

Unlike the other case studies, *Brassic* makes this question central both in its serial form and its construction of male embodiment. Vinnie's opening declaration that growing up in a neglected post-industrial town is "about finding a way to survive" signals the drama's concern with portraying how a marginalised and precarious working-class navigate the everyday. *Brassic* makes seriality itself a thematically significant quality of the drama; using the narrative form to motivate its attempts to imagine a progressive form of social purpose. The balance between serial and episodic narrative forms is particularly significant in *Brassic*, drawing attention to the circumscribed ways in which the male characters try to get by. In general, the heists determine an explicitly episodic narrative structure for the drama; with single storylines for each episode introducing temporary and often ill-conceived goals involving theft. However, these episodic goals are consistently framed as questionable. The first series involves numerous arguments between the characters Dylan and Erin, in which Erin, a single-mother looking to support her infant child, admonishes Dylan for his pursuit of the short-term fleeting pleasures offered by crime. In a scene in Episode One, when she questions Dylan over his ambition, he simply replies: "maybe I just like getting stoned and stealing things". In these conversations, *Brassic* constructs an initial tension between the prospective aims of the serial and the immediate pleasures of the episodic. Erin's speeches reference the notion that the masculine North offers no hope for the unfolding of a secure and stable existence, and she repeatedly asserts that the only way of building a life is to escape Hawley. The promise of "escape" is voiced by several characters throughout the drama, but it is always framed as a vague and unconvincing goal. Although *Brassic* conveys that its characters believe in

this truism, the series only visualises escape as another form of fleeting and episodic mode of action.[371]

The sense that escape is no more of a future than criminality is made evident through the character of Vinnie. Like Erin, Vinnie also alludes to wanting to get away from Hawley, but, for him especially, escape is always framed as an impulsive wish. Throughout both series, Vinnie's emblematic form of movement is running; multiple episodes begin with him running away from his problems. These sequences range from a flashback to his youth when a teenage Vinnie runs from school to escape the ridicule of his teacher, to a dream sequence in which Vinnie runs across the Lancashire moors to escape mysterious hooded figures. *Brassic* clearly gives this act of running a personal and psychological dimension, placing it within the context of Vinnie's biography (and his family issues). However, Vinnie's emblematic act of running is also used to critique Northern realism's privileging of escape as part of the myth of Northern working-class masculinity. In these sequences of Vinnie running, the sense that movement 'point[s] towards a particular direction or aim' is repeatedly undermined. For instance, the opening scene of the second season, 'The Circus', involves Vinnie attempting to escape a local gangster who chases him through the middle of Hawley.[372] Accompanied by the lively tempo of *Brassic's* rhythm and blues theme music – Barrett Strong's "Money (That's What I Want) – and a variety of mobile framings (from hand-held to sweeping crane shots)

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[371] Although Erin makes reference to escape a number of times throughout the first series, it has been dropped entirely as a legitimate goal for her character by the beginning of the second series, where she uses her education to a run a local business in town: the local strip club, "The Rat and Cutter".

[372] This is the narrative context of the chase: The finale of *Brassic's* first season ends with Vinnie elaborately faking his own death to escape the retribution of local criminal kingpin Terence McCann (Ramon Tikaram). In between the events of the first and second season, Vinnie has been living in an underground bunker and only making periodic trips into town, in heavy disguise, for groceries. In this opening sequence, Vinnie is spotted by one of McCann's associates as he attempts to walk back home.

the sequence emphasises a kinetic urgency to Vinnie's getaway. The sequence also references the symbolic Northern escape – with a number of high-angle frames capturing Vinnie's figure counterposed against the townscape from the god's-eye perspective associated with 'that long shot of our town from that hill' (Fig 4.25).[373] However, elliptical editing entirely undermines our reading of Vinnie's escape as a progressive movement "outwards"; rather spaces and streets within the town reappear between shots, conveying a circular and directionless path of movement (Figs. 4.26 – 4.27).

In this sequence, and elsewhere in the programme, escape is momentary, fleeting and rendered visually inappropriate to the dynamic unfolding of the serial narrative. As inscribed through Vinnie's body, and the quality of its movement, *Brassic* conveys how individualist notions of escape are no more legitimate than petty criminal activity when it comes to the imagining of a long-term future for young Northern men. However, in equating these forms of physical agency – the criminal act and masculine escape – the programme highlights the circumscribed possibilities for young men in contemporary Northern towns. By subverting the moral terms typically associated with the underclass, and by using the serial form to draw attention to questions of futurity, *Brassic* constructs an image of the contemporary young male body that recognises its existence within less judgemental terms.

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[373] Andrew Higson, 'Place, Space, Spectacle: Landscape and Townscape in the "Kitchen Sink" Film', *Screen*, 25:2, (1984)
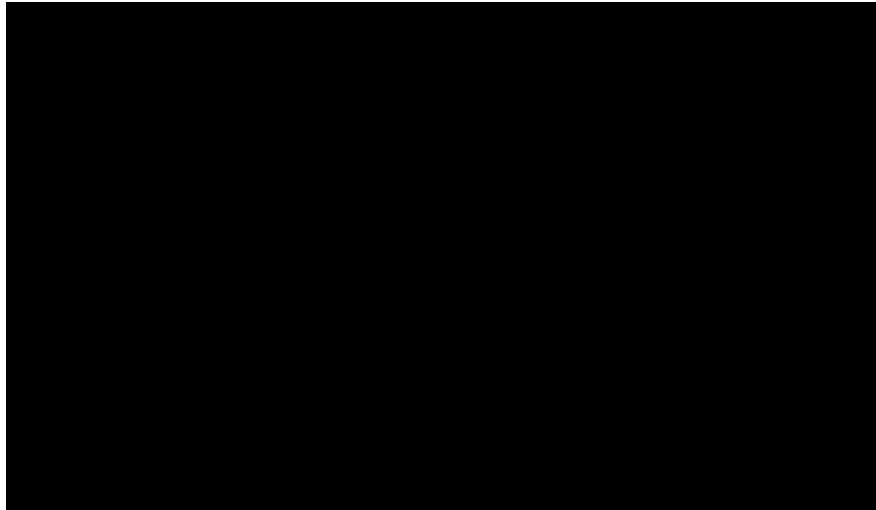
Fig 4.25

Fig. 4.26
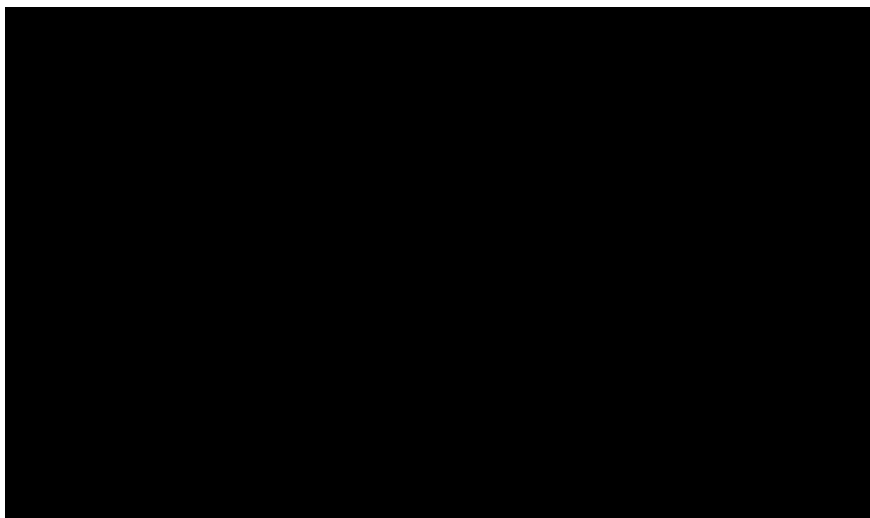
Fig. 4.27
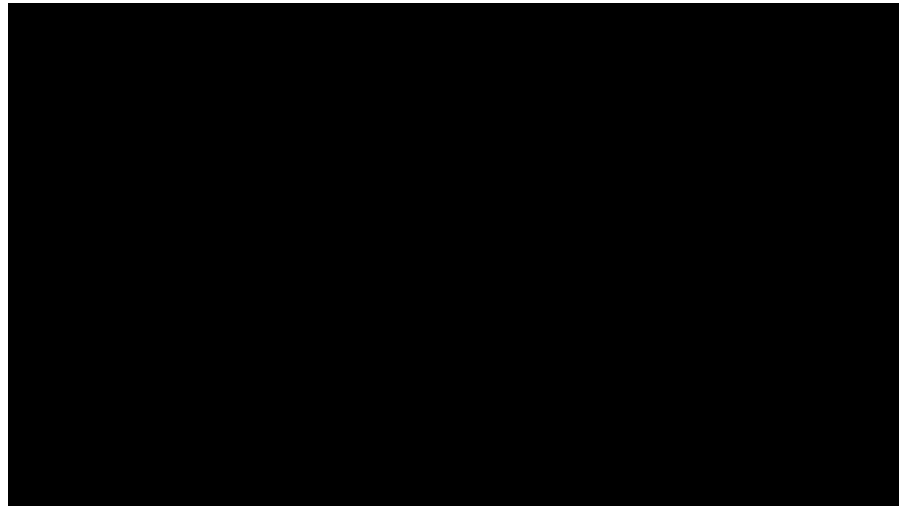
Fig. 4.28

Conclusion

While the bodies under examination in this chapter have varied widely in their visual and narrative presentation, there is a consistency in the depiction of communities which struggle through problems such as broken families, drug addiction, and economic depression. In this commonality, Paul Marris's notion of the North on screen as expressing 'the state of the nation' remains evident, and young men remain a part of how this is expressed. [374] In the History of Screen North chapter, I examined canonical texts related to significant moments of Northern representation, to explicate how the male body remained important to the timely imagining of social change. In each period of heightened Northern representation, the young male body was an image for the expression of emergent structures of feeling around the North, even as they were also visualised within a dated historical narrative of post-industrial and regional decline. Even as this body was expressive of decline from an idealised Northern working-class place-myth, its visible youth was

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[374] Paul Marris, 'Northern Realism: An Exhausted Tradition?', *Cineaste*, 2:4, (2001), p.47

often textually utilised as a signifier of a set of new experiences and potentials.[375]

By contrast, this chapter has demonstrated the specifically *young* male body is aesthetically and ideologically problematic to the prevailing structures of feeling around the North. If, as I suggested in this chapter's introduction, the young male body visually troubles the narrative of decline, what my subsequent analysis suggests is that, in the context of contemporary Northern representation, youth is still not treated as a site for imagining alternative meanings for the North. Rather, across my case studies, we can see the ways in which youth is figured as 'absence', 'waste' (in terms of wasted potential), 'the residual', and overall, a mark of a world gone wrong. These set of associations are significant. I believe that they reveal, especially within the context of their texts, that the epistemologically troublesome nature of young male bodies within the narration of dominant discourses of Northern decline becomes itself configured as a sign of a trouble. The youth of these bodies is constructed as expressive of a persistent sense that things have gone terribly wrong.

In each case study, the young male body is divorced from visual and ideological notions of good agency. Not only this, but there is an underlying sense in all the case studies that such agency is no longer possible or plausible. Considered against the other eras of Northern representation that we have considered, in the screen history of the North, the post-recession image of young Northern men is not mournful (as in the 1980s) nor re-worked to re-imagine future forms of agency (as in the 1990s). Instead, it is a

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[375] Take, for instance, *Boys from the Blackstuff*. While the programme clearly responds despondently to what is felt like the definitive loss of a working-class Northern milieu, it uses Yosser's and Chrissie's bodies as sites where this lost working-class agency becomes a kind of defiant anger. Whether or not the series could be said to imagine a positive future for its characters, these were bodies that were visibly expressive of an alternative form of agency and their physicality was a key part of this of expression.

body which is displaced from agency as a form of future-facing, goal-orientated, and physically extensive mode of action.

CHAPTER FIVE:

THE RACIALISED NORTHERN MALE BODY

So far, the Northern male body has been read as marking a breakdown in British narratives of social progress and operating as an imaginative site on which the changing terms of class, gender, and national identity are anxiously worked through. I now want to direct attention to another crucial element in these processes of cultural mediation: the racialisation of the North through the male body. As I argued in the Literature Review, constructions of racial identity and community play a more complex and influential role in the Northern place-myth than is usually conveyed in scholarship. Many of the contemporary narratives and rhetorical forms used to represent the North, which have been covered so far, are imbricated with discourses in which bodies are produced, categorised and valued with racial meaning. Specifically, the structures which implicate the Northern male body in narratives of post-industrial decline inform racialising historical narratives. Consider the previously discussed melodramatic structures of deterioration. A similar mourning of a lost knowable history is at the heart of Paul Gilroy's concept of Britain's 'post-imperial melancholia'.[376]

Race and racialisation have always been informing if often marginal concerns within the representation of the North. In the History of the Screen North, I drew attention to the characters played by Indian actor Om Puri in the 1990s and argued that Puri represents an ambivalent but nevertheless emblematic figure in the representation of a multi-ethnic North. Puri's circumscribed visibility, in the texts and in the canon, attested to the ways in which race functioned in the maintenance of the symbolic values of working-class Northern masculinity.

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[376] Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?*, (London : Routledge, 2004)

However, if Puri's body felt out-of-time and out-of-place with the popular Northern cinema of 1990s, where industrial labour retained a potent if residual value, his body can now be understood as an emergent form for many of the structures of feeling discussed in the previous two chapters. Puri's beleaguered body in *My Son the Fanatic* anticipates a deteriorated figure such as Ricky in *Sorry We Missed You*; for both figures, the temporal demands of short-term and flexible forms of labour produce a weariness which cannot be rhetorically connected to the heroic connotations of hard Northern working-class masculinity. At the same time as this representation of weariness becomes more emblematic, the experience of race and racism, once marginal to canonical Northern representation, have become increasingly significant to the wider articulation of Northernness in terms of moral panics around the underclass and social decline. The emergence of the white-working-class and concerns surrounding the 'parallel lives' of different ethnic communities up North represent key narratives in social and political discourse. This chapter is interested in how, why, and to what extent, these discourses of racialisation interact with representations of deterioration and the underclass.

If race has always been important, it is now an explicit concern of cultural representation of the North. The encounter with the racial other forms a key narrative trope in film and television over the past decade. As will shortly be discussed further, the three primary case studies discussed in this chapter – *White Girl, Catch Me Daddy, and God's Own Country* - each mark a distinct moment in the representation of the race in the North, and each centre different kinds of racialised figures: from the white working-class father to the Muslim man, and the Eastern European immigrant. However, in each text, it is the encounter between two differently racialised bodies that provokes a textual examination of what Northern masculinity means in the

period of neoliberalism's breakdown. Each case study uses the emergence of the North as a racialised, and racist, place-myth to consider what has changed about working-class masculinity. Furthermore, they ask whether the recognition of bodies in terms of racial identity allows for new modes of belonging to be articulated. Before these questions are tackled, though, it is first necessary to unpack the dominant critical themes of the history of the race in the Northern imaginary, and the ways in which culture has been seen to contribute to the dual production of racialising and spatialising narratives.

<u>The North and Race</u>

In scholarship on the North, topics of race and ethnicity are most often approached under the belief that the Northern imaginary is a white imaginary. The cliché that the decline of the North is also the fracturing of a regionally unified white working-class community does represent a potent narrative within British culture. As Tony Blackshaw's study of the post-war North suggests, it still retains potency within the self-representation of white communities.[377] However, in analysis of the construction of the North's whiteness, it is too often taken-for-granted that the processes of racialisation comprising these narratives are totalising and can be neatly aligned with other strategies of stereotyping the North. Such assumptions are evident in Dave Russell's work, in which the North's characterisation as 'the land of the working-classes' is unaccompanied by any discussion of race, as if the whiteness of the region were obvious.[378] Karl Spracklen does acknowledge the racialisation of the Northern simulacra, as he argues that 'the north is a place where *white*, working-class masculinity is constructed and performed' [my emphasis], but does not expand on how whiteness specifically is

[377] Tony Blackshaw, *Working-Class Life in Northern England*: *The Pre-History and Afterlife of the Inbetweener Generation*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 191
[378] Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004)

marked or performed, or provide any analysis of whiteness as a historically produced category.[379] Rather, as part of his wider argument that Northernness is a performance of identity which is nevertheless determined by 'the constraints placed on our agency by the hegemonic elites of the cultural South'[380], Spracklen reproduces Russell's assumption that the North's whiteness is typical of a homogenous and undifferentiated cultural imaginary produced from a distance.[381] This conflation of the region's class and racial stereotyping indicates one tendency of writing about the North's whiteness, which draws from an understanding within white studies, typified by Richard Dyer's work, in which whiteness is characterised by its social transparency and ubiquity.[382] As Dyer puts it, Black is socially connotative of race itself whereas white is 'placed as norm', with white people represented not *as* white so much as 'people who are variously gendered, classed, sexualised and abled.'[383] This understanding of whiteness clearly underpins Russell's blindness towards race, but even in the analysis of Northernness modelled by Spracklen, where race is noted as contributing to the production of Northern identity, it is conceptually indistinct from strategies of stereotyping which have always succeeded in fixing the Northern working-class as Other.

It is not only this characterisation of the North's unremarkable whiteness that assumes a totalising process of racialising representation. Other theorists have associated the North with a different and more marked

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[379] Karl Spracklen, "Theorising Northernness and Northern Culture: The North of England, Northern Englishness, and Sympathetic Magic", *Journal for Cultural Research*, 20:1, (2016), p. 10

[380] Ibid., p. 14

[381] See also: Karl Spracklen, Stan Timmons and Jonathan Long, 'Ethnographies of the Imagined, the Imaginary and the Critically Real: Blackness, Whiteness, the North of England and Rugby League', *Leisure Studies*, 29:4, (2010)

[382] Richard Dyer, *White*, (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 3

[383] Ibid.

construction of whiteness which Stephanie Lawler outlines as 'extreme whiteness'. This term is borrowed from Dyer's work, but whereas Dyer associates this visibly marked whiteness with connoting 'the heights of humanity'[384], Lawler observes the construction of extreme whiteness within a set of contemporary stigmatising discourses aimed at the working-class.[385] The categorisation of the working-class as a *white*-working-class has become a major concern within sociology, cultural studies, and media studies alike. Analysing the emergence of this category in the period of New Labour and its growing resonance after the recession, scholarship on the white-working-class typically reads the category as a discourse which seeks to homogenise (and, as Lawler would argue, reify) an increasingly fractured group of people across the contemporary working-class, underclass and precariat.[386]

This work is typically interested in class rather than the North, but Lawler's characterisation of extreme whiteness is echoed in Het Phillips's conceptualisation of Northientalism. As Phillips argues, 'there remains a faint sense of a differently inflected whiteness coded onto white Northern subjects, as part of the continuing process of racial stratification of hierarchical whiteness.'[387] For Phillips, this racial coding is another part of the intra-national colonial gaze that defines the North in British culture; this 'de-humanising racialised white-but-not-quite-ness' further contributes to the North's production through othered forms of embodiment.[388]

Phillips's attention to the contemporary whiteness of the North opens the opportunity to describe the relationship between regional and racial

[384] Ibid., p. 223
[385] Stephanie Lawler, "White Like Them: Whiteness And Anachronistic Space In Representations Of The English White Working Class", *Ethnicities*, 12, (2012)
[386] Ibid.
[387] Het Phillips, "Cultural Representations of the Moors Murderers and Yorkshire Ripper Cases", (PH. D Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2016), p. 25
[388] Ibid., p.27

identity as it is produced and historically changing. Nevertheless, like Russell and Spracklen, her Northientalist method conceives of racialisation as a subordinate discursive process within a larger spatialising representation. This coding of whiteness aligns with already existing strategies of othering based on constructions of space. However, this treatment of the North's racialisation is not total. Other scholarship draws our attention to the possibility that rather than racialisation being subordinate to spatialisation, the ostensibly hierarchical relationship between these processes might be more fluid and even reversed. For instance, Alistair Bonnett's sociological history of the symbolism of race within representation of the working-class, elucidates the changing meaning and cultural value of whiteness in Britain throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.[389] For Bonnett, social changes were mediated through the shifting racialisation of the industrial working-class; at one time constructed as a 'dark' race, with the potential for proletarian rebellion framed through the discursive terms of the threat of the colonial Other, this class were increasingly addressed through an inclusive form of whiteness in the early 20th century as Britain's receding colonial power required a renewed imagination of a holistic national community.[390] What is significant about Bonnett's discussion of whiteness is the rhetorical reversibility of representations of place, class and race in the construction of a national imaginary; rather than race shaping the North, the North might also shape how race is conceptualised.[391]

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[389] Alistair Bonnett, 'How the British Working-Class Became White: The Symbolic Re(formation) of Racialized Capitalism', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 11, (1998)

[390] Ibid, p. 319

[391] While Bonnett's analysis of racialisation centres on the working-class and urban, as opposed to the North specifically, we can nevertheless see parallels in his description of the 'images of colonial voyaging and the conquest of 'dark' regions… [used] to narrate and justify bourgeois incursions into working-class environments' and aforementioned

This explication of how spatial imaginaries can feed wider racial and national agendas is particularly important in discussions of the contemporary North which consider the visibly multi-ethnic characteristics of the region's representation. The scholarly emphasis on the North's imagined whiteness overlooks an important and pernicious aspect of the North's recent cultural construction in which the region has become imagined as the nation's emblematic 'failed space of multiculturalism'.[392] For Miah et al., 'failed spaces of multiculturalism' marks a prevalent set of social discourses which strategically conflates the North's association with social and economic decline with a wider moral panic about immigration and cultural segregation. Rather than cast the North as the homogenous land of the white-working-class, these discourses emphasise the increasingly diverse ethnic populations of the region's towns and cities to represent the North as a place marked by racial tension. The whiteness of the region, as an unmarked coding, is replaced by a construction of spatial polarisation between two extreme racialised communities; the anachronistic and economically 'left behind' white-working-class and the culturally unassimilable Muslim immigrant communities.[393] This binary structure of racial identity reformulates a series of anxieties that arose in the second half of the New Labour administration, which were particularly sparked in reaction to rioting by Muslim youth in the Northern urban centres of Burnley, Oldham and Bradford. Although, the self-declared reason for this unrest was racist treatment from the police, these events were nevertheless framed by the media, and by officials within the Blair government, as the

constructions of the North as a separate nation derived from middle-class travel writing of the time. Ibid.

[392] Shamim Miah, Pete Sanderson, and Paul Thomas, *"Race", Space and Multiculturalism in Northern England: The (M62) Corridor of Uncertainty*, (Cham; Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020)

[393] Ibid., p. 10

failure of the ideal of a pluralistic British society and provoked a shift towards the promotion of integration and cultural cohesion as necessary social values.[394] In a 2001 report produced by Ted Cantle, it was argued that these spaces were ethnically polarised and organised around 'parallel lives' which 'often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote any meaningful interchanges.'[395]

These anxieties can be read as a continuation of othering strategies within Northern representation. Lawler argues that the association of the category of extreme whiteness with an essential characteristic of pastness offers a means by which the progressive gains of multiculturalism can be refused in British media while projecting such refusal on an improper classed subject.[396] However, at the same time that these racialising discourses reiterate some reifying constructions of Northernness, they also point to dramatic changes in how the boundaries of Northern racial identity are negotiated. As opposed to the othering gaze of the outsider looking in (central to Russell's, Spracklen's and Phillips's theories) the 'failed spaces' thesis suggests how difference now has to be delineated within the cultural and affective space of multicultural encounter. Rather than a homogenous spatialisation of race, the official analysis of racial difference represented by the Cantle Report now accounts for difference within a much closer sense of scale. Tellingly, Cantle refers to the sensation of 'touch' as a metaphor for the lack of multicultural exchange. Even as the contemporary North is constructed as a reactionary place, the terms of this new representation suggest the space for a potentially different articulation of the racialisation of

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[394] See: Ben Pitcher, *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Race and Racism in Contemporary Britain*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 75-108

[395] Ted Cantle, *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team*, (London: Home Office, 2001)

[396] Stephanie Lawler, 'White Like Them: Whiteness And Anachronistic Space In Representations Of The English White Working Class', *Ethnicities*, 12, (2012)

the Northern male body. Specifically, I want to consider the screen North through the lens of one theory of multicultural contact as an embodied meeting between racialised subjects: Paul Gilroy's concept of 'convivial culture'.

Conviviality and the Parochial North: Bodies and Visual Culture

As models of cross-ethnic encounter, the antagonistic discourses of 'failed spaces' and 'parallel lives' are opposite to the 'convivial culture' that Paul Gilroy theorises as a potential quality of the multicultural urban environment and its representation. Conviviality refers to 'the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculture an ordinary feature of social life' within urban spaces.[397] This is a co-existence which does not care about cohesion or forging a unified imagined community of Britain based around a coherent sense of national identity. As Gilroy argues, such notions of inclusive national identity necessarily assume a structural hierarchy of majoritarian and minoritarian identities where national 'belonging' is always contingent and unequal. Instead, convivial culture promotes an outlook of 'indifference to difference'[398] – as Ash Amin frames it – based in the phenomenological 'ordinariness' engendered by interacting with others in the quotidian spaces of urban life.[399] Crucially, this 'ordinariness' is not universalized by Gilroy – it is not a liberal humanist construction of experience which treats the ordinary as absent of racial, linguistic, and religious particularities – it is rather an acceptance of difference that is never overcome through integration but rather becomes commonplace. Ordinariness names a bodily and affective experience is

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[397] Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?*, (London : Routledge, 2004), p. xi

[398] Ash Amin, 'Land of Strangers', *Identities*, 20:1, (2013), p.3

[399] Paul Gilroy, *After Empire*, p. 131

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which ethnic difference is actively negotiated within practical realities, as opposed to acting as a broader signifier of fixed national identities.

Visual culture is a key site in the production of convivial culture, with Gilroy frequently referencing film and television to demonstrate the potential for convivial forms to deconstruct and rework the myths of Britain's class, gender and racial identities. Dealing with texts as varied in mode and medium as the comedy film *Ali G in da House* (2002) and home makeover programmes like *Changing Rooms* (BBC One, 1996-2004), Gilroy suggests a certain political potential within even popular forms based on their capability to convey a 'liberating ordinariness'.[400] The relationship between convivial culture and the televisual medium, specifically, has been similarly emphasised by scholars of public service broadcasting, who have demonstrated the ways in which television – with its intrinsic embeddedness in domestic space as well as its dailiness – brought the first images of difference, of the post-war migration, into British homes.[401] However, as Sarita Malik argues, the terms of the televisual multicultural encounter have always been ambivalent, with British public service broadcasting operating throughout its history to define the boundaries of a nationhood based in an 'implicit social whiteness'.[402]

This ambivalence brings the discussion of convivial culture around to the issue of the North and its status as the 'failed space of multiculturalism' in Britain. In sociological analysis, the post-industrial North is aligned with an ambivalence to conviviality that is characterised as parochial, with an attachment to locality that complicates the experience of belonging, diversity

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[400] Ibid., p.114

[401] See: Gavin Schaeffer, *The Vision of a Nation: Making Multiculturalism on British Television, 1960 – 80,* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

[402] Sarita Malik, *Representing Black Britain: A History of Black and Asian Images on British Television*, (London: Sage, 2002), p. 179

and difference imagined by Gilroy.[403] Similarly, where Gilroy sees visual culture as aiding in the construction of conviviality, studies of the British culture industries have drawn attention to the material and symbolic unevenness of this convivial culture. As Anamik Saha has argued that structures of economic support for independent cultural projects over the last three decades have created an uneven field of representation of regional ethnic identity.[404] Saha's work pinpoints the neoliberal thrust of New Labour's promotion of multiculturalism; with policy that empowered British-Asian self-representation within the framework of a free market ideology. One consequence of this approach to diversity has been the centralising of cultural production to London, which has left ethnic minority communities in Northern locales underrepresented.[405]

This lack of self-representation remains an acute problem and one which scaffolds all subsequent analysis of contemporary Northern texts in this chapter. All of case studies, even those with diverse casting, involve white British directors and writers and are produced under the auspices of major production and broadcast companies. A key question posed by this chapter is how the normativity of whiteness within production manifests in the kinds of bodies which are imagined as subjects belonging to the North. However, at the same time, the notion that the North's cultural association with parochialism leads to reifying and reactionary representations of racialised bodies also requires consideration. John Tomaney defends

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[403] See: Robin Finlay, Anoop Nayak, Matthew C. Benwell, Peter Hopkins, Rashka Pande, and Michael Richardson, 'Race, Place and Young People in the Age of Brexit', *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 37:1, (2019)

[404] Anamik Saha, 'Funky Days are (Not) Back Again: Cool Britannia and the Rise and Fall of British South Asian Cultural Production', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 17:1, (2020)

[405] The result of this unequal centralisation of funding was that, as Saha phrases it, the dominant image of British-Asian identity has been that 'in London, the brown kids were dancing, while in northern mill towns they were rioting.' See: Anamik Saha, 'Funky Days Are (Not) Back Again...', p. 14

parochialism against its usual associations of insularity and racism, and argues that artistic representation of the parochial can interrogate the complexity of local belonging as it constitutes a powerful form of attachment.[406] Rather than pose parochialism against conviviality, we might treat both as intersecting concepts of spatial and racialised experience. How film and television might frame and appropriate these discourses in its representation of racialised bodies is an important analytical concern for this chapter. At a moment when the region's dominant political characterisation is as the failed space of multiculturalism, we need to consider the ways in which encounters between racialised bodies suggest the potential to re-make both the meaning of race but also the meaning of the North as it has been conventionally associated with parochialism, a homogenous working-class, and with a fatal decline. Simply, do racialised bodies allow us to imagine a different kind of North, and Northern future, or do they merely restage previous iconographies?

Case Studies

As stated in the introduction of the thesis, one of the major research questions informing this study is how the on-screen body functions as a site of mediation for contemporary social attitudes. This is a question of the mutual determination of content and context; of how much influence is exerted onto textual representation by social events and to what extent media structures and produces our knowledge of a given historical moment. These questions are particularly pressing when considering the case studies under discussion in this chapter. Unlike other chapters, the case studies here reproduce a linear timeline; beginning with *White Girl* at the moment of the financial crisis of 2008 and culminating with *God's Own Country's* release in

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[406] John Tomaney, 'Parochialism – a Defence', *Progress in Human Geography*, 37:5, (2012)

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2017, arriving in the aftermath of the Leave result. Consequently, discourses around the North and Brexit loom over this chapter's analysis of racialising representations.

While the discursive presence of Brexit cannot be ignored, the lure of reading texts as reflections of a teleological narrative - of the move towards Brexit - must be treated with caution. This is a problem which has confronted sociological responses to Brexit, and such accounts have modelled the need to appreciate the power of broader myths of race and nationalism alongside a deeper analysis of the uneven ways such myths took root in unequal local contexts. As Finlay, Nayak et al. argue, Brexit can certainly be read as a manifestation of post-imperial melancholia, appealing to a conjoined sense of white privilege and economic hardship by appearing as a 'remedy to powerlessness, an opportunity to turn back the clock, to purge, cleanse, renew and regenerate the national body politic.'[407] However, they also warn against overdetermining such discourses, and against recreating definitive moral and geographical binaries through the mapping of oppositions such as progressive/left-behind, core/periphery, developed/underdeveloped. Despite this shared discursive formation, emblematised by Brexit, the texts themselves demonstrate a variety of ways of imaging ethnic identity and the North. Each text imagines itself within a particular generic mode. As such, they evoke the region in different ways and reference different kinds of Northern setting.

Broadcast as part of the BBC's White Season, a highly-publicised season of documentary and drama programming which aired throughout March 2008, *White Girl* is this chapter's case study which most directly

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[407] Robin Finlay, Anoop Nayak, Matthew C Benwell, Peter Hopkins, Raksha Pande, Michael Richardson, 'Race, Place and Young People in the Age of Brexit', *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 37:1, (2019), p. 18

signals changing ethnic populations as a contemporary 'problem' in the North. The film centres around the figure of Leah (Holly Kelly), a young girl who moves from a council flat into a terraced house in Bradford where she finds friendship and safety amongst her Muslim neighbours. With an inner-city setting, references to troubles attributed to underclass life (such as drugs, alcohol, and domestic violence), and its central focus on the 'innocent' child, *White Girl* clearly represents its cross-ethnic encounters within the framework of the social problem film.

Catch Me Daddy, while similarly concerned with an encounter between a fractured white and South-Asian Muslim communities in Yorkshire, differs markedly in genre and narrative interest. The film's narrative content ostensibly deals with the kinds of social issues that might inform a social problem film, as its plot revolves around the threat of honour violence against a Muslim girl, Leila (Sameena Jabeen Ahmed), who has disgraced her father by running away with a white man and who is thus pursued by hired kidnappers. However, *Catch Me Daddy* was promoted as an art film, beginning its exhibition life with a premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, and, as stated by the director Daniel Wolfe, it does not treat the subject of honour violence through the lens of 'an issues thing'.[408] Instead, social problem content such as poverty and violence becomes the backdrop for the film's self-conscious adoption of a more abstract style (which we might relate to new realism) and a Western rhetoric. Framed by a desolate rural Yorkshire landscape, *Catch Me Daddy* imagines its multi-ethnic North as a frontier marred by deprivation and precarity.

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[408] Daniel Wolfe as quoted in Rachel Segal Hamilton, 'We Spoke to the Directors of 'Catch Me Daddy,' a Thrilling New British Indie Movie', *Vice*, 28th February 2018, https://www.vice.com/en/article/4w7jmj/catch-me-daddy, accessed 6th May 2020.

The final case study, *God's Own Country*, is another Yorkshire-set text but is less immediately obvious in its mode and address. The film was received to considerable critical interest for its combination of Northern realist and queer art cinema aesthetics. The film demonstrates a commitment to an aesthetic politics familiar to queer world cinema which belies any singular characterisation of its Northern setting. The film's representation of queer intimacies – in its central romantic and sexual relationship between Johnny (Josh O'Conner), the young caretaker of a struggling farm, and Gheorghe (Alec Secareanu), the Romanian labourer hired to lighten Johnny's burden of work – becomes the ground upon which various notions of the North as a space of working-class labour, as a parochial and pastoral landscape, and as a deteriorating world, are allowed to co-exist. At the same time, the film's investment in intimacy, and its potential to deterritorialise body and space, also challenges the discourses of national belonging and the ethnic difference of the immigrant.

White Girl

The BBC's White Season was advertised and received as marking a significant moment in the cultural representation of issues related to race, class, and national identity at the end of the New Labour era. In marketing, the BBC positioned the White Season as a necessary acknowledgment of changes in ethnic and civic identity that had previously been overlooked. In an article published in *The Daily Mail* to advertise the season, then editing commissioner for factual television Richard Klein described the need for the White Season by writing that while:

> [g]lobalisation, mass immigration and economic upheaval have
> helped to transform the fabric of our nation…in all the heated
> discussion about the consequences of this revolution, one voice
> has been largely absent: that of the white working class… Given

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that they are the people most affected by all this upheaval, this is a bizarre omission.[409]

Klein's positioning of the White Season contains two different and conflicting attitudes towards race and whiteness. In one sense, the framing of whiteness within the language of multicultural representation accords with Sarita Malik's understanding of the production of a racialised nationhood and sociality within public service broadcasting. Malik positions television as central to the imaginative negotiation of British national identity in the period of neoliberal globalisation, with narratives of race functioning to demarcate the boundaries of a 'united "we"'.[410] She argues that contemporary representations of race are dominantly governed by an 'implicit social whiteness' which has accepted racial difference in terms of 'liberal pluralism'.[411] Even as Klein addresses race, a liberal pluralism is evident in his attitude that representing the white working-class is part of the BBC's 'duty to reflect the views of all sections of the public'.[412] The White Season is positioned as concordant with BBC's commitment to 'reflect modern Britain's diversity through the portrayal of ethnic minorities'; an appeal to a reflectionist cultural ethos in which whiteness is not socially distinct to ethnic minority identities.[413] Despite whiteness being Britain's ethnic majority, Klein's article points to its

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[409] Richard Klein, 'White and Working-Class…The One Ethnic Group whose Views the BBC has Ignored.' *Daily Mail,* 1 March 2008, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-523351/White-working-class---ethnic-group-BBC-ignored.html, accessed 8th March 2019

[410] Sarita Malik, *Representing Black Britain: A History of Black and Asian Images on British Television*, (London: Sage, 2002), p. 179

[411] Ibid., p. 97

[412] Richard Klein, 'White and Working-Class….'

[413] This commitment was articulated in the then most recent broadcasting white paper from 2006. See: BBC Department for Culture, Media and Sport, *A public service for all: the BBC in the digital age*, (London: BBC, 2006), p. 18

absence from representation as being evidence of a cultural marginalisation that the BBC is both examining and rectifying.

At the same time, the White Season's marketing emphasises that the experience of the white working-class is also *the* key barometer for assessing the communal and civic effects of multiculturalism. Presented as the population most tied to an overarching national history, the white working-class is constructed as the group most capable of revealing how multiculturalism has changed Britain. Much of the later academic and media responses to the White Season conceptualised this element of the season's promotion in relation to Rhodes's concept of 'white backlash', where a white majoritarian identity is valorised through the reappropriation of narratives of ethnic marginalisation.[414] Rather than an 'implicit social whiteness', this is an explicit social whiteness, where the ostensible exclusion of the white working-class is treated as emblematic of a fundamentally changed society. Klein's framing of the White Season thus suggests a contradictory politics beneath the BBC's seemingly transparent reflectionist ethos. If in one sense the season could be taken as an important moment in the naming and demystification of whiteness as just *another* racial identity in Britain, this very demystification is registered as troubling and in need of investigation.

Considering the volume of debate provoked by the White Season, comparatively little has been written about *White Girl*. We might suggest both pragmatic and political reasons (even if this distinction is a soft one) for the text's lesser presence in press coverage and academic discussion of the season. On the one hand, the film's status as fiction

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[414] James Rhodes, 'White Backlash, 'Unfairness' and Justifications of British National Party (BNP) Support', *Ethnicities*, 10: 1, (2010)

distinguishes it from the rest of the programming, and complicates its relationship to the wider institutional intent behind the series.[415] It is not just that *White Girl* falls outside of his remit as commissioner of factual production, but also that its fictional imagining of a white working-class family moving into a predominantly Muslim area of Bradford problematises the BBC's project according to Klein; that is to '*reflect* the views of all sections of the public' [my emphasis].[416] On the other hand, *White Girl's* marginal position in the debate around White Season might also be attributed to its more ostensibly positive representation of multiculturalism, in terms of its advocation of a changing cultural and ethnic make-up within the Northern working-class. In terms of plot, *White Girl* differs markedly from the only other Northern-set text in the season: the documentary *Last Orders* (2008).[417] Whereas a documentary like *Last Orders* focuses entirely on a white community which it frames as both anachronistic and under siege – tying together racial difference and Northern decline - *White Girl's* depiction of a cross-ethnic encounter within a recognisably classed space does not immediately conform to the overarching criticism of White Season as reifying racial difference.

The most sustained criticism of *White Girl*, at the time of its broadcast, is found in right-wing press columns. Writing in *The Spectator*, former BBC editor Rod Liddle bemoans the film's central premise, asking: 'Can you

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[415] *White Girl's* particularity, in this respect, could be the reason for its total absence from Richard Klein's lengthy promotion in *The Daily Mail.*

[416] Richard Klein, 'White and Working-Class…'

[417] *Last Order's* main 'narrative' framework is based around the financial downturn of the Wibsey Working Men's club, in Bradford, and, through interviews and observational scenes, details the different social causes contributing to the club's declining fortunes – from the changing racial make-up of Bradford, to the loss of stable work for the younger men who might once have been members, and even the Labour mandated smoking ban in public establishments – and also draws attention to the committee's ongoing inability to arrest its terminal decline.

imagine [the BBC] commissioning a film about a Muslim girl who converts to Christianity, converts her mum — and by the denouement is proven right to have done so?'[418] For Liddle, *White Girl* is the result of the BBC catching the 'whiff of the zeitgeist — that, come on chaps, we really ought to do something about those dreadful people in the north'.[419] He argues that the film's vision of a multicultural Northern working-class encounter is authored from 'the point of view of the educated, middle-class, metropolitan white liberal elite — the very people who, as it happened, foisted the damaging and now rejected creed of multiculturalism upon the rest of us.'[420]

Liddle's words are characteristic of Rhodes's notion of white backlash – attacking what he sees to be *White Girl's* vilification of the easy target of the white Northerner as part of its defence of a Muslim culture – but, here it is the BBC itself that is implicated in this backlash. Liddle turns Klein's words against him. The sneering towards the white working-class that Klein generally identifies is located at his own institutional door, as the BBC's self-constructed role as liberal arbitrator, merely reflecting the social marginalisation of the white working-class, is questioned. Liddle's observation that White Season wants to make whiteness visible but is only able to do so in terms that make white Northerners appear 'dreadful' further corresponds with Lawler's argument that 'new codings of 'white' are coupled with – indeed intrinsically bound up with – continuing narratives of decline and retrogression.'[421] In one sense, then, Liddle's critique of *White*

[418] Rod Liddle, "The BBC White Season only shows how Little Auntie has really changed", *The Spectator*, March 11 2008, https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-bbc-white-season-only-shows-how-little-auntie-has-really-changed, accessed 11th December 2020
[419] Ibid.
[420] Ibid.
[421] Stephanie Lawler, 'White like them: Whiteness and Anachronistic Space in Representations of the English White Working Class', *Ethnicities*, 12, (2012), p.411

Girl suggests the problematic terms on which whiteness is made visible and embodied in British culture.

However, unlike Lawler's formulation of the problem, this is not simply the case of problematic marked whiteness versus middle-class unmarked whiteness; there is a more complex intersection of ethnic identifications present. What is telling is how Liddle mobilises this classed whiteness as a subject position with which he identifies, when he claims that White Season is a product of a middle-class multiculturalism forced upon 'the rest of *us'* [my emphasis].[422] This is a complicated "us". While such whiteness is rendered socially problematic, it is also suggested as worthy of identification, a frustration at its supposed lack of acceptability. Moreover, it is an us that erases British Black and Asian working-class identity from the experience of multiculturalism. Thus, while the visibility of whiteness renders it problematic, this same visibility paradoxically opens shared modes of identification with classed decline which are not available to minority ethnic groups.

It is important to stress that the ambivalent forms of value attributed to ethnic visibility here are not simply the product of Liddle's response but are anticipated by the BBC itself. Klein's article appeals to the same melancholic narratives of decline, and the same rhetoric of white backlash, as Liddle's article does. Thus, what these responses to White Season and *White Girl* suggest is an ambivalent triangulation of ethnic identifications based around the terms in which certain bodies are made visible within the text. Rather than purely a binary of extreme whiteness and invisible ordinary whiteness, the value of working-class whiteness is also constructed through its assumed value over and above other ethnically marked bodies.

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[422]   Rod Liddle, "The BBC White Season…"

<u>Extreme Whiteness and the Male Body</u>

As Rod Liddle's scathing article attests, *White Girl's* plot appears as an attempt to imagine the terms on which a white working-class family might be socially reformed by contact with a previously unfamiliar Muslim culture. The film centres on the experiences of Leah who, at the beginning of the film, flees with her mother, Debbie (Anna Maxwell Martin), and her two siblings from their abusive home with her drug-dealing stepdad Stevie (Daniel Mays) to a council house in Bradford. Although the city provides temporary escape from Stevie, Leah's mother is uncomfortable with the fact that the council has housed the family on a street immediately adjacent to the local mosque, where they live within an entirely Muslim community. Leah, however, befriends a young girl in school and she begins to find refuge through the school's teachings of Islam. At the film's end, Leah's family, supported and accepted by their Muslim neighbours, finally rid themselves of Stevie and begin to construct a more stable domestic life.

Broadcast in 2008 - at a time when depictions of radical Islam were prevailing in British social life and the North particularly was depicted in national culture as a particularly unwelcome space to South-Asian immigration (the BNP was to win its first local council seat, in Burnley, the following year) – *White Girl* is clearly intended as a more inclusive representation of the ordinariness of cultural assemblage between British-Asian diaspora and working-class forms of identity. The film's centring of a child's perspective, through the character of Leah, evokes a humanism within the narrative, approximating a kind of cultural innocence. Leah engages in several typical childhood activities – participating in lessons in the Muslim faith from a kindly schoolteacher, hanging around with another young girl in neighbourhood and going to her house for tea – in which cultural difference is emphasised yet also ameliorated through the

ordinariness of the routine of childhood. However, *White Girl's* imagination of a positive multicultural encounter is one predicated on liberal stereotypes of the white working-class as a group in need of reform. The same problem that resides that in Klein's framing of the White Season – where whiteness is both *just* another ethnic identity and the *core* national identity – manifests in the narrative of *White Girl.* In visually emphasising the extreme whiteness of its white working-class characters, the narrative recuperation of Leah and her family might also be understood as a textual working through of the questions: how have the working-class become white, and how might they become invisible once more?

In Lawler's conceptualisation of extreme whiteness, the visibility of whiteness is not essentially othering but rather connotative of different problematic attitudes and bodily gestures.[423] Specifically, this 'extreme-whiteness' is materialised through the problematic masculinity of the drug-dealing stepfather Stevie. We first see Stevie laying on the sofa of his council flat, staring absently at the television while entirely oblivious to the fact that Debbie and her mother are packing up the family belongings to escape with the children. Although shots of Leah open the film, it is through Stevie's body that we are first invited to gaze into their broken home. Steve's laying down is framed through the window of the council flat to invite an explicitly voyeuristic gaze, and his lazy relaxed posture makes his body more visible to this gaze (Fig 5.1). Both this initial framing and the costuming of Stevie emphasise the visual tropes of a stereotyped white working-class embodiment. Several details immediately characterise Stevie: his shaven-head, his skinny arms decorated with tribal tattoos which are visible underneath a "wife-beater" sports vest, and the tacky gold jewellery which he wears around his neck and on his wrist. Stevie's body is laden with these

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[423] Stephanie Lawler,

surface details which are expressive of a stereotypically 'unrespectable'[424] working-class body. Echoing Lawler's characterisation of extreme-whiteness, Stevie is racialised here by the sheer visibility of these details and the tasteless consumption they indicate. Stevie's whiteness is not a racial essence, but rather a set of epidermal signifiers which *White Girl* associates with the embodiment of improper choices in his enaction of working-class masculinity.
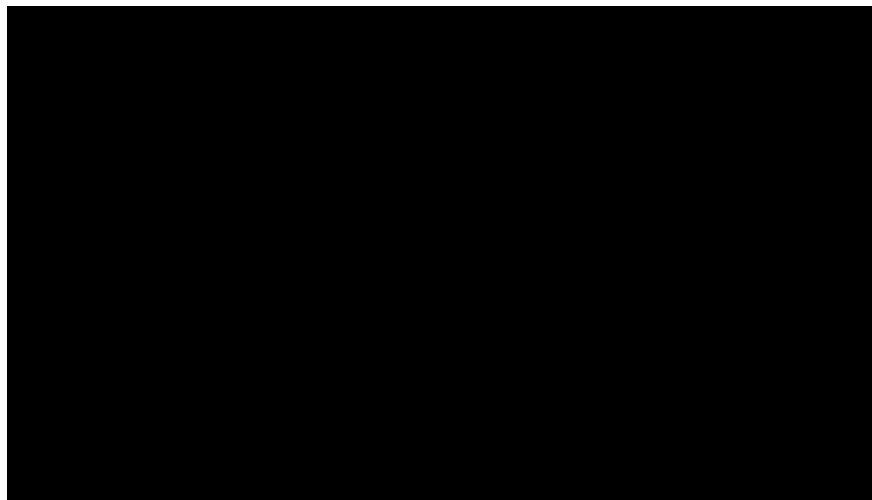
Fig 5.1

Stevie's body is available for a voyeuristic scrutiny because of a passive comportment, and yet his gestures also feel wasteful. Specifically, actor Daniel Mays performs Stevie as intoxicated here – either drunk or drugged – but this is a corporeal state that feels simultaneously exaggerated and unresponsive. The expression of Stevie's disturbing nature is closely intertwined, here, with an improper bodily economy, both idle and excessive (Fig 5.2). A particularly telling moment is when he accepts a wad of cash from Leah, who we had previously seen making drug deliveries around the council estate. An extreme close-up depicts his outstretched hand holding Leah's as she gives the money; the boundaries of this exchange are clearly

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[424] See: Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender*: *Becoming Respectable*, (London: SAGE, 2002), pp. 1-16

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overstepped, rather than grab the cash, his hand grips Leah's and pulls it towards him as he whispers, 'good girl' (Fig 5.3). This moment is significant in how it condenses the obvious typing of Stevie as a white underclass figure with an expression of his improper embodiment of a working-class fatherhood. On one level, this emphasis on Stevie's body emphasises an obvious whiteness; an immediate coding where the hyper-visibility of the racial signifier seamlessly matches the signified of extreme-whiteness's pejorative connotations. However, the visual emphasis on Stevie's body is always motivated as the narration of moral impropriety. The close-up of Stevie's hand both draws attention to his whiteness and to an implied sexual deviance and failing paternal duty. Thus, even as *White Girl* introduces whiteness as an intuitive racial coding, it is also, as Lawler argues a 'class signifier' conveying a loss of respectability and familial order.[425]
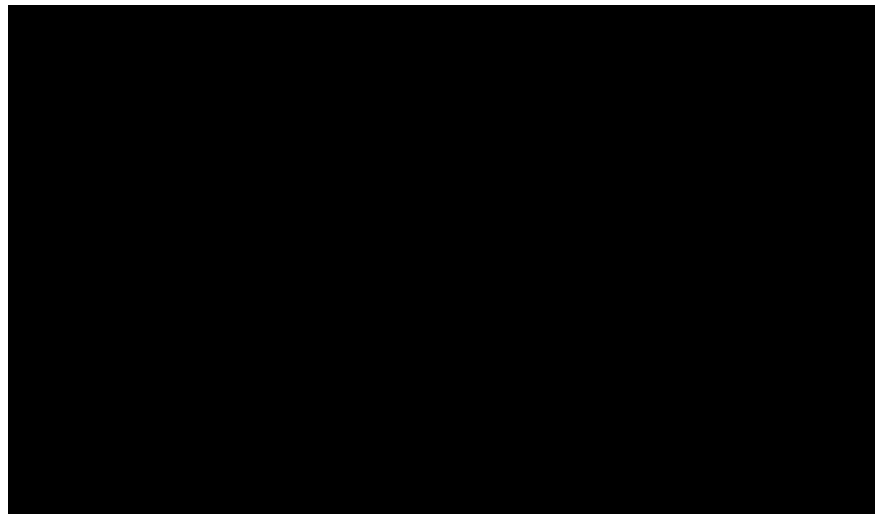
Fig 5.2

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[425] Lawler, 'Whiteness', p. 114

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Fig 5.3

Through Stevie, *White Girl* immediately associates the racialisation of the working-class with a failing patriarchal masculinity. In one sense, this is an obvious form of neoliberal abjectification – linking racialisation to improper choices and actions. However, this overlaying of race with choice also works, in this opening scene, to ameliorate whiteness as an essentialising racial coding. In contrast to Lawler's broader reading of the White Season, whereby whiteness is an identity associated with an essential pastness, Stevie's whiteness is both abject but also qualified in its presentation. The viewer is never guided to see his whiteness as a solely cultural essence. To return to Liddle's reading briefly, and its sense of understanding the abjectness of the Northern working-class in the film while still retaining some sense of identification; this reading is facilitated by Stevie's presentation here as an immediate stereotype that is nevertheless constructed through a liberal rhetoric of improper choice and action. As the film progresses, then, the introduction of Muslim characters is not so much an encounter with a superior culture, as Liddle understands it, but might also be understood as an encounter with a better set of classed behaviours and actions.

The "Progressive" Muslim Body

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The visibility of whiteness is problematic within *White Girl* because it reflects a working-class embodiment that is defined by improper action and self-presentation. This sense that racial invisibility is a valued quality, and one related to class, is evident in the film's ostensibly positive representations of the Muslim community into which Leah and her family move.

A key sequence for reading this coding of race is the sequence at the beginning in which Stevie tracks down the family to their new home in Bradford and confronts the mother in the middle of the street. Debbie, clearly terrified by the sight of Stevie, shouts at him to leave and tells him she's left for good, but her resolve falters as he waves her Job Seeker's Allowance cheque that had been posted to him. As she is distracted by the money, Stevie grabs hold before assaulting her in full view of the children and the rest of the neighbourhood.

On a straightforward level, this assault, as an act of stark domestic violence, is condemnation of Stevie's immoral paternity. Beyond the characterisation of Stevie specifically, however, this assault is also staged as a kind of spectacle of the violence of the broken home, which is implied as being distressing partly because it is so visible and marked by the signifiers of a white underclass. That the violence is facilitated through the prop of the benefits cheque establishes this underlying rhetoric. The mother Debbie initially forces Stevie away from the home, but it is the cheque, left on a nearby garden wall, which lures Debbie over and into range of Stevie who throws her into the wall and begins striking her. Here then, it is Debbie's dependency on benefits which allows Stevie to physically dominate her.[426]

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[426] The metaphor here is extended throughout the film, as Debbie's inability to hold down a job is shown to ultimately bring her back under the influence of Stevie whose drug dealing provides the family some financial support.

What is most revealing about this scene is how this violence is shown to be particularly disturbing because it is such a visible disruption of the quiet street. This very public violence not only underlines the second nature of Stevie's abuse – a inference that is emphasised by the repeated reaction shots of the children watching on with fear but also impassiveness suggestive of familiarity with such scenes – but also constructs this kind of domestic violence as markedly anti-social. The visibility of Stevie's physical abuse contrasts with the relative calmness of the onlooking neighbourhood. In the wider shots, we can see Asian families, at first engaged in quotidian activities like putting out the washing begin to look on as the scene grows more intense and frantic. The suggestion is not that these families are uncaring spectators; the use of shallow focus, keeping attention on Stevie and Debbie works also so that we don't register their presence too strongly. Rather, they reside in the background as a kind of respectable community presence precisely because of their contrast with the loud spectacle of underclass violence that is happening before them. Thus, as Lawler argues is the case for 'extreme-whiteness', the problematic visibility of Stevie and the family here is a visibility of classed marks. This visibility constructs the family not only as deficient relative to a more ordinary, invisibly white spectator, but also to the invisibly Asian community around them.

The violence is eventually halted by the intervention of a neighbour, Abdullah (Aaron Neil). Abdullah's intervention also allows *White Girl* to construct a contrast between two forms of masculine embodiment. Abdullah is one of two British-Asian characters that we spend any time with in *White Girl* (the other being Leah's teacher at school) but his presence is thematically significant as a contrast with Stevie. Narratively, Abdullah's scenes always follow and mirror sequences in which Stevie's cruelty towards Leah is emphasised. In this sequence, his intervention motivates a series of shots in

which we are invited to read his body against Stevie's. As Stevie appears violent and disorderly, Abdullah embodies an efficient and respectable way of dealing with the situation; he quietly moves Leah out of the way, before placing his body between Stevie and Debbie and calmly telling the former to 'go home mate'. The insinuation of friendship clearly enrages Stevie, who yells 'I'm not your fucking mate!' before physically confronting Abdullah with a series of wide exaggerated gestures intended to intimidate the other man. Stevie's histrionic reaction to the word 'mate' ostensibly marks this confrontation as occurring between a racist and backward white working-class man and the more tolerant Muslim father. This is less an expression of racial difference than of different class behaviours, though. Abdullah represents a traditionally valued Northern masculinity here; against Stevie's wastefulness, he appears stoic and strong in posture, standing confidently before Stevie but not rising to the threat of the confrontation. What the sequence suggests is a structure of representation within *White Girl* in which Asian Muslim characters are shown as embodying ideal and 'traditional' Northern working-class values. Abdullah's stoicism is partly a construction of his invisibility within the programme's representational strategies, the camera actively moves around him as the scene continues, returning to Stevie and Debbie's personal argument. While Abdullah is then marginalised within the frame, he remains on the edges as a safe presence (suggesting that Debbie is no longer in danger of violence). However, as implied by the importance of their relative lack of visibility in their embodiment of these ideals, I argue that these are values that cannot be visualised on the non-White body.

This repurposing of Muslim beliefs into positive white working-class values is also evident in *White Girl's* ending. This is the 'denouement' which Rod Liddle reads as endorsing Leah's conversion to Islam, as through

reconciling with her mother Debbie the family is finally able to cast off the toxic figure of Stevie. In contrast to the previous scenes of their violent arguments, Debbie leaves Stevie in a quiet moment of defiance, taking off the ring while repeating: "I divorce you; I divorce you, I divorce you." These lines are a reformulation of the neighbour Abdullah's words to Leah earlier in the story, when he tells how comparatively simple the process of divorce is for men under the practices of Islam. Abdullah states that, within Islam, all men have to say is "I divorce you" to be free. These words indicate a patriarchal control of the private and domestic world that is suggested as favourable to the disorder of the white underclass family. However, in contrast to Liddle's argument, *White Girl* is narratively careful to disassociate the positive domestic class connotations of the patriarchal family from the racial and religious particularities represented by the South-Asian male body. It is not simply the reversal of patriarchal power represented by Debbie, the single mother, speaking these word (a reversal which, clearly, attempts to progressively re-think the limiting patriarchal structures by which domestic order and stability can be constructed). Rather, this moment also marks the point in the story in which Leah forgoes wearing her hijab. This is a gesture which echoes Malik's critique of the liberal pluralism of broadcast television. Although endorsing the positive behaviours modelled by Muslim characters, and by associating them with the stable domesticity once attributed to Northern working-class life, the film implies that such behaviour can and should be disassociated from the non-white body.

In sum, if the Muslim patriarchal family carries a set of residual Northern working-class values, a past structure of domesticity that the white working-class is shown to be pathologically incapable of reproducing within a text like *White Girl*, Abdullah and his family cannot be *represented* as an ideal contemporary Northern family.

Catch Me Daddy

If White Season marked a nodal point in the foregrounding of the North as a space of ambivalent whiteness, how have these discourses developed through the decade? As I suggested in this chapter's introduction, the seemingly problematic intersection between multiculturalism and the North has been both an emergent theme in film and television and a discourse which has been open to different modes of narrativisation. A key question of this chapter is how do specific representations of multiculturalism and ethnic difference interact with discourses of post-industrial decline to produce forms of contemporary Northern embodiment? We might continue to consider this question by examining a text which moves away from the social problem genre, and the industrial context of public service broadcasting, and which also shifts the focus away from whiteness as the dominant category of identification within its textual North.

Catch Me Daddy is narratively focused on the topic of honour killing, a crime which, as Jacqueline Rose notes, only entered the language of the British legal system in 2003.[427] Honour killing has represented a particularly troubling act within public discourse not just because of the severity of these crimes but because it represents a complex entanglement of discourses related to race, Islam, misogyny, immigration and British culture. As Rose asserts, the typical reaction of the British media has been to ignore this complexity entirely, to treat honour killing in reified terms, and to portray these crimes as wholly outside the bounds of British society and instead a reflection of a backward, alien Islamic culture.[428] For Rose, while representation of honour killing holds a moral imperative 'in the first instance simply to demand that these crimes be talked about and seen…[t]he

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[427] Jacqueline Rose, 'A Piece of White Silk', *London Review of Books*, 31:21, (5th November 2009)
[428] Ibid.

question remains how to write about honour killing, and what form, or style, is best suited to the task.'[429]

In the promotion of *Catch Me Daddy,* this question of form or style is highlighted. In interviews he participated around the release of the film, director, Daniel Wolfe described how his approach to the "issue" of honour violence was to avoid the aesthetics of social realism that would merely reproduce a limited image of the North as a space of social problems. As he argued in interviews at the film's release: 'It's too easy, isn't it? Because it's up north, it's got street cast people, [they label it as] Ken Loach'.[430] This rejection of Loach suggests the film's intended context as being aligned with new realism's poetic turn, in the representation of traditionally social realist themes and settings, that, as in art cinema, favours subjectivity and ambiguity in the representation of character experience.[431] This art cinema based aesthetic was recognised in reviews of the film, which compared *Catch Me Daddy* to the work of Clio Barnard and Lynne Ramsey.

<u>Honour Killing and the Patriarchal Body</u>

With *Catch Me Daddy's* promotion echoing the complex ambiguity of the new realist film, the problem of honour killing is treated largely indirectly throughout the film. It is only in the final sequence that it is made explicitly clear that the pursuit of Laila is motivated by the fantasy of her impropriety and the punishment of death. In the film's last scene, Laila is captured and taken to an Arabic restaurant in Leeds where she confronts her father Tariq (Wasim Zakir). The scene is a distressing representation of domestic violence

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[429] Ibid.

[430] Daniel Wolfe as quoted in Rachel Segal Hamilton, 'We Spoke to the Directors of 'Catch Me Daddy,' a Thrilling New British Indie Movie', *Vice*, 28th February 2018, https://www.vice.com/en/article/4w7jmj/catch-me-daddy, accessed 6th May 2020.

[431] Although, as suggested in Chapter Three, this reading of Loach's aesthetics as unadorned and only in service of a historical materialist explanation of social problems is somewhat reductive.

and intimidation, with an emotional Tariq consistently assaulting and verbally humiliating Laila. Upon finding out that his son, Zaheer, has been killed in the pursuit of Laila, Tariq resolves to murder his daughter. Screaming "why did I create you?", the scene concludes with Laila forced to put her head into a makeshift noose, constructed in the restaurant's kitchen. The film ends ambiguously, with Laila left standing on a chair, begging for her life, while Tariq sits on the kitchen floor unable to look at the daughter he has ordered to die.

One particularly disturbing aspect of this sequence is Laila's passivity. Drugged shortly before arriving at restaurant, Laila is capable of no resistance to her father's violence. The only words of protest that she can offer is to repeat the childhood nickname given to her by Tariq, "chum-chum", in vain appeals to his paternal empathy. As Alice Pember argues, it is hard to read Laila as anything other than the 'passive victim' of patriarchal oppression.[432] The controversial aspect of this kind of passivity is the cultural determinism it might imply. By constructing Laila as a silent object of Tariq's dominance, *Catch Me Daddy* runs the risk of creating a reified and deterministic image of honour violence. As Korteweg argues, such determinism mutually informs, and is informed by, discourses of ethnic essentialism.[433] The notion that such crimes are determined solely by culture is sustained by the similar notion that no intervention is forthcoming by people within that culture to prevent these crimes.

However, in her reading of the film's feminist phenomenological qualities, Pember argues that *Catch Me Daddy* resists this kind of

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[432] Alice Pember, "Dancing Dissensus in Catch Me Daddy", *Film-Philosophy Conference*, (The University of Gothenburg, 2018)

[433] AC Korteweg, 'Honour Killing' in the Immigration Context: Multiculturalism and the Racialization of Violence against Women', *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, 41:2, (2014)

deterministic characterisation of Laila as victim. She turns to an earlier sequence of Laila dancing in her caravan to Patti Smith's 'Horses' as indicative of how the film uses mobile and intensely affective style to approximate Laila's bodily force and thus construct an act of dissensus which grants her an agency and visibility within the world of the film. Pember's recognition of the film's active foregrounding of style as a means of creating dissensus can be brought to bear on this final sequence as well. This dissensus is not embodied necessarily through Laila, but rather in our sense of Tariq's patriarchal body, and yet the result is, I believe, a further destabilisation of the determinist image of honour killing as a culturally essentialist phenomenon in which Asian men enact a natural oppression over women. Specifically, Rancière's notion of the narrative artwork's potential to produce a 'dissensual re-configuration of the common experience of the sensible'[434] can usefully be read alongside the ambivalence that Jacqueline Rose observes in the patriarchal discourse of feminine 'honour'.[435]

The dissensual aspect of the sequence is evident in the expressive use of extreme close-ups, razor thin depth of field and purposefully de-centred framings. A particularly notable shot involves Tariq preparing a handful of tablets to drug Laila. Despite the monstrous implications of this task, Tariq goes about preparing these tablets by arranging them on the bar in neat rows of two. Taking them out of a packet, he lines each one up individually on the bar. One might interpret this small action as a further performance of patriarchal dominance, as Tariq meticulously prepares how he will control and harm Laila's body. This performance of preparation might even be interpreted as expressive of the pre-meditated ritual of honour killing.

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[434] Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: on Politics and Aesthetics*, (London, UK: Connexions), 2010, p.10

[435] Jacqueline Rose, "A White Piece of Silk"

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However, the style and mise-en-scene destabilises these implications. The shallow depth of field disrupts the feeling of this act of preparation as a mark of patriarchal power, simply because it renders the space of this action so slight. Focussing on a single spot on the table, Tariq's hands slip in and out of focus as he moves the tablets which spill out of the depth of field, a visual messiness which contradicts Tariq's apparent careful act of arrangement (Fig 5.4 and Fig 5.5). There is a dissensual misalignment in this shot; between our discursive sense of what the content means - an image of a ritualistic patriarchal power - and our sensual apprehension of its form – in which Tariq's supposed dominance is offset by a feeling of his inhibited physical power. This contradiction of scale and bodily force characterises how the mise-en-scene captures Tariq in this scene. While tighter camera angles might enlarge his frame, intensely shallow focus emphasises the narrowness of the spaces he occupies.
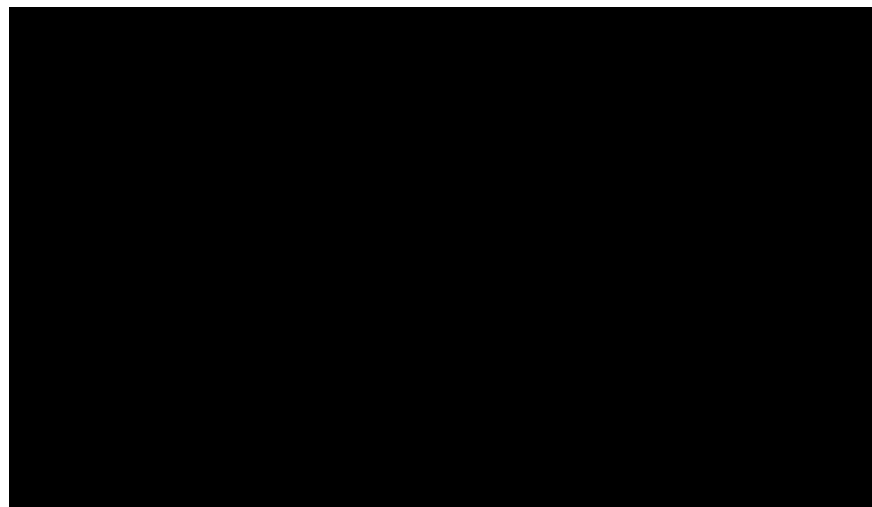
Fig 5.4
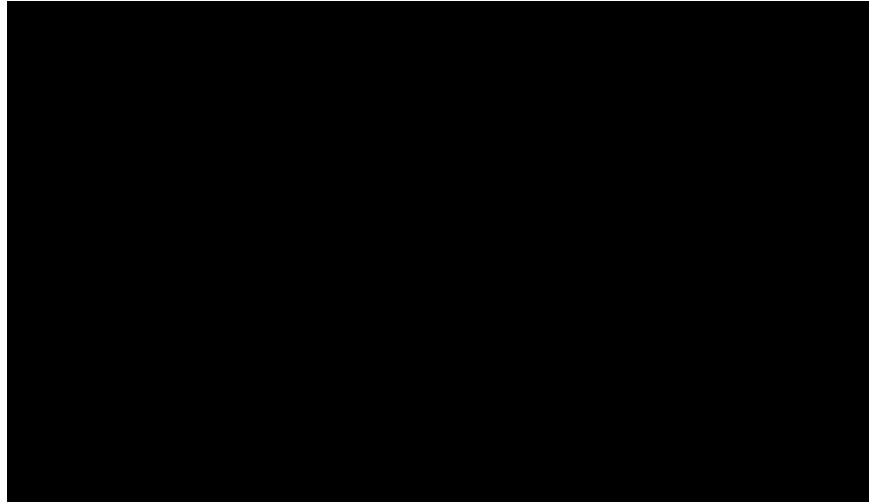
Fig 5.5

This dissensual form not only frays the dominant image of power between a Muslim patriarch and his daughter, but also redraws this image within a specifically Northern imaginary. In an essay about the legal economy of honour violence, Joanna Bond characterises the function of female honour as a form of currency that governs the economic opportunities within certain social formations. For Bond this function is felt most keenly as an absence when a woman's honour is perceived to be lost.[436] As Jacqueline Rose asserts, honour violence might be seen as a solidification of gendered hierarchies of power that emerge specifically in a postcolonial context of immigration, where immigrant communities respond to economic and cultural precarity with the reification of imagined forms of social stability.[437] Honour thus can be said to have a symbolic capital that is articulated negatively and expressive of a wider social lack. The discourses that surround the economics of honour violence bear a noticeable resemblance to the rhetoric of Northern decline; an analogy that *Catch Me Daddy* intensifies in its construction of a dissensus around Tariq's body.

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[436] Joanna Bond, "Honour as Familial Value" in Gill, Strange and Roberts (ed.), *Honour Killing and Violence*: *Theory, Policy and Practice*, (Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.92
[437] Jacqueline Rose, "A White Piece of Silk"

The misalignments of scale in this scene are not solely expressive of an inhibited physical power but tensions of agency that are both gendered and economic. We can consider this tension at work in the editing style, here, whereby the close-ups of Tariq – shot with an extremely shallow depth of field – vacillate with wider shots of the father and daughter in the restaurant. The awkward contradiction of Tariq's physical dominance with the narrowness of the scale is echoed in the contrast between these tight framings and the wide shots of the restaurant in which its emptiness is evident. Throughout the film, we only see the restaurant in this empty state, usually as an unremarkable background detail – Tariq's son passes through earlier on in the day as he prepares to kidnap his sister – but the contrast of scale here makes this emptiness an emphatic counterpoint to the narrowness of Tariq's violent agency. These shots remind us of a wider socio-economic context within which Tariq's patriarchal violence is both contextualised, and its power undermined. Namely, the repeated return to wider shots of the setting conveys the fact that Tariq's preparation and performance of this violence towards Laila is only possible because his restaurant is empty. Simply put, the failing economic circumstances in which he finds himself catalyse his decision to punish Laila.

Through this characterisation of Tariq's violent corporeality, *Catch Me Daddy* enacts a subversion of the culturalist and racialised ways in which patriarchal violence is linked to South-Asian Muslim communities. Its aesthetic diffuseness disturbs the deterministic discourses that others the Muslim body as representing an innate violence. In creating a dissensus around these cultural discourses, Wolfe's film also resists the simplified narratives at work in texts like *White Girl*, whereby the strong patriarch is posed against the decline of a Northern working-class. *Catch Me Daddy*

constructs a world of economic decline which grounds and explains patriarchal violence. This is a multicultural milieu of decline.

Negative Conviviality

Underpinning these self-stated generic aims was the promotion of Daniel Wolfe's background in music video production, a fact that repeatedly arose in promotion of the film as a means of situating *Catch Me Daddy* as the work of a unique artistic vision. This background became a key point of reference in reviews of the film. Mark Kermode connects Wolfe's music video pedigree to 'a palpable transcendence to the visual and aural landscape which elevates it above mere social realism'.[438] Here, the heightened audio-visual display attributed to the music video mode is read as how the film transcends the typical ways in which landscape and figure is depicted in representations of the North.

The assumed value here - of transcending type - both clarifies the aesthetic intentions of the music video style used and suggests a key difference between *Catch Me Daddy* and *White Girl* in terms of how they address the social problems they depict. As Richard Klein's promotion of White Season indicates, the institutional role of the BBC as a public service broadcaster informs an approach to representing ethnic (specifically, white) identity in terms which are recognisable for a wide viewership. In *White Girl*, the extreme whiteness of the white working-class is conveyed in clear stereotype, intended to condense ideas about contemporary racial and underclass identity as obviously as possible. In contrast, *Catch Me Daddy* embraces what Carol Vernallis describes as music video's influence of cinema, namely, 'an emphasis on texture, colour, and mood; and a

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[438] Mark Kermode, 'Catch Me Daddy Review – Harrowing and Powerful', *The Observer*, 1st March 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/mar/01/catch-me-daddy-observer-film-review-harrowing-powerful-honour-killing, accessed 10th September 2019.

highlighting of ephemerality'.[439] For Vernallis, the diffuseness of audio-
visual logic, within the music video, offers an intensified style for post-
classical cinema, one which offers new ways of expressing human
experience. As she argues, '[o]ften, this new visual style, based on
dislocation, free-association, flux, colour, and texture, leaves us with a sense
of sometimes being grounded in, sometimes hovering over our bodies. The
new audiovisually intensified cinema may yet help us learn something about
ourselves'.[440]

One of the key ways in which this stylistic emphasis on heightened
audio-visual display is diegetically justified is the prevalence of drugs and
drug-taking throughout *Catch Me Daddy*. The film presents consuming drugs
as a kind of exemplary multicultural experience. Within the first act of the
film, we have seen all central characters engaged in some form of drug
consumption; from the drinking of Laila's father to the cocaine abuse of the
white bounty hunters, and the weed smoking of the young Muslim men who
aid in the search. *Catch Me Daddy's* style, based around hand-held
camerawork, extreme close-ups, and thin yet constantly racking depths of
field, approximates the heightened tactile and experience of a drug high.
This relationship is most obvious in the sequences with Aaron and Laila in
their caravan, where we frequently see the pair drinking home-brewed
"lean" before extreme close-ups capture a series of various sensual textures
and physical activities (for example, a close-up of a spoon digging into a slice
of gateau cuts to a shallow focus outline of Aaron's ear that Laila playfully
flicks) (Figs 5.6, 5.7, 5.8, and 5.9). [441] In these caravan sequences, particularly,

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[439] Carol Vernallis, *Unruly Media: YouTube, Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 36

[440] Ibid., p. 41

[441] Lean is a drink which typically combines some mixture of cough syrup, soft drink soda, and dissolved codeine (or co-codamol) tablets. Although American in origin, it has a recent history of usage in Britain, particularly in prisons.

the style conveys a feeling of perpetual present, with the elliptical editing and close scale expressing a fleeting and disordered rhythm of experience. This present-ness is communicated further by the décor of the caravan which is marked both by childish decoration (we see Laila covering the walls with butterfly-shaped fairy-lights) and assorted rubbish. Through these stylistic choices, *Catch Me Daddy* represents Aaron and Laila as adolescent figures, whose drug-taking appears as one way of dissociating from wider obligations and life-projects.
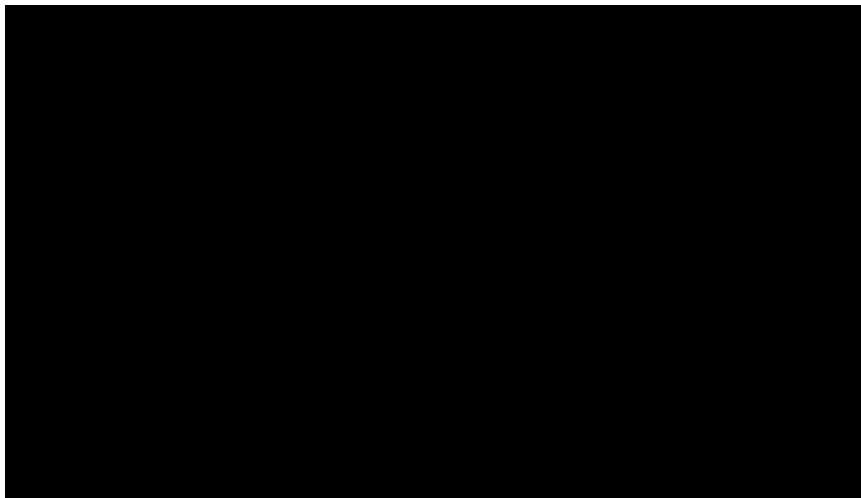
Fig 5.6
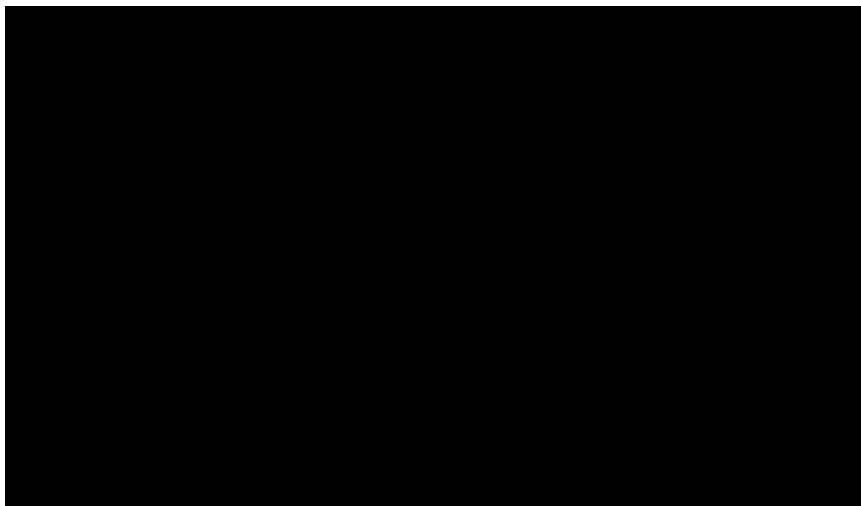
Fig 5.7
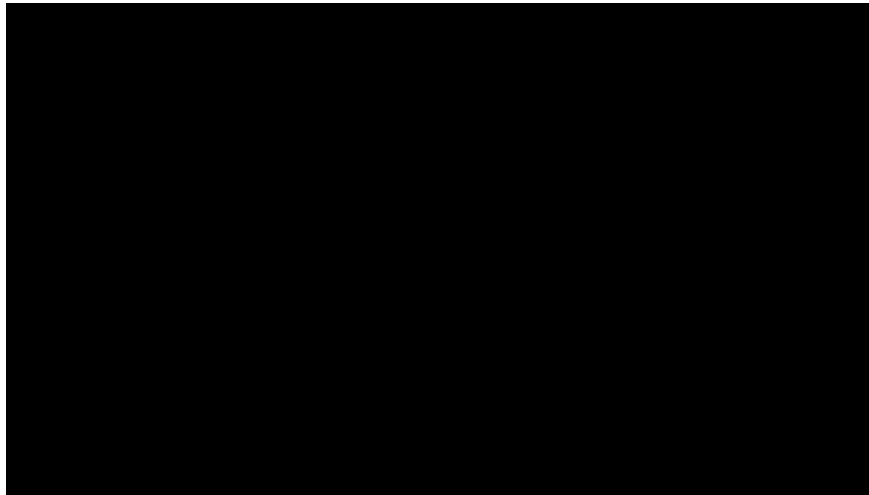
Fig 5.8
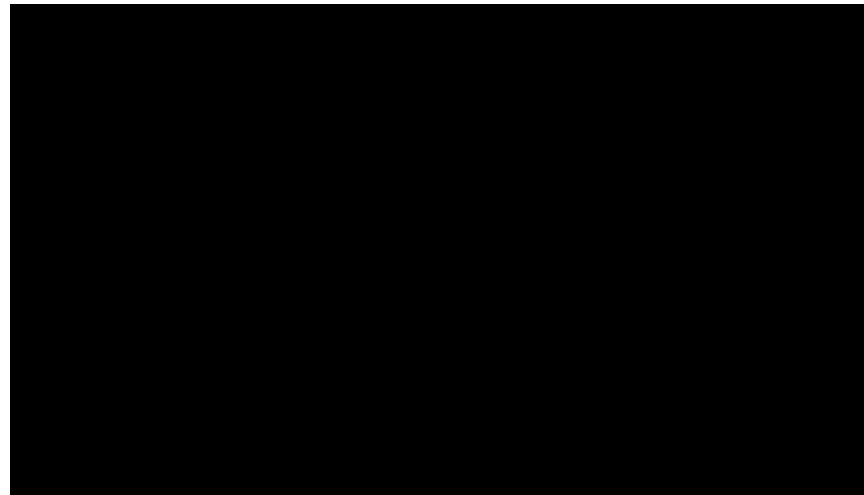
Fig 5.9

However, these experiences of affective intensity are not momentary passages associated with specific characters. Rather, this style characterises the audio-visual feel of the film world. Not only do all characters take drugs but all use these drugs as a form of support, enabling them to carry on through conditions of precarity and hardship. The film's dominant stylistic tactics, with its evocation of characters' heightened affective experience and its focus on the tactile richness of the high, are frequently counterposed against the stereotypically cramped and grim interiors of a post-industrial Northern realism; dirty caravans, fluorescent-lit public bathrooms, empty kebab houses. Thus, *Catch Me Daddy* constructs a milieu which is joined in

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'convivial consumption' as an ordinary mode of living.[442] Echoing Berlant's description of drugs and alcohol as a form of 'self-interruption' necessary to '[l]ubricate the body's movement through capitalized time's shortened circuit', the film portrays drug taking as a common defence mechanism against the conditions of post-industrial precarity, where any sense of future has collapsed.[443] In Berlant's reading, drugs and alcohol form one (ill-guided) method of soothing the body under the conditions of neoliberalism, where the stable and easily reproducible structures of work and living, tied to industrialisation, no longer exist. In *Catch Me Daddy's* narrative world, work is either a totally non-existent possibility (for the young man Aaron), precarious and off-the-books (Laila works at a hairdresser without an employment contract) or else entirely criminal. In this context, the heightened affective attachment to a present, experienced through drugs, becomes an ordinary means of navigating time.

Although Berlant's concept of the convivial has no immediate relation to Gilroy's and makes no mention of race or the conditions of Western society as they are still shaped by the forces of colonialism, *Catch Me Daddy* represents a North in which the possibilities of multicultural conviviality are structured by these looming conditions of precarity and the fleeting experiences and attachments used to keep moving forward. The film represents drugs as diffusing racial difference between characters. One of the key contentions of Gilroy's conceptualisation of conviviality is not that it represents the erasure of difference, but that it renders such difference as 'banal' and 'mundane'.[444] Consumption is similarly a fact of the world within *Catch Me Daddy*, not a cycle of addiction we believe it possible to escape. The

[442] Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)." *Critical Inquiry*, 33:4, (2007), p. 777
[443] Ibid., p. 778
[444] Paul Gilroy, *After Empire*, p. xvi

hardships reflected in convivial consumption form a shared context of experience which undermines a reified feeling of cultural difference. However, where Gilroy reads conviviality as a progressive 'social pattern', fostered by the different possibilities of living together offered by the metropolitan space, *Catch Me Daddy's* vision of Northern conviviality is deeply ironic and negative. The film's conviviality is one which seemingly incorporates racism itself as a multicultural practice.

In *Catch Me Daddy*, Gilroy's banality of difference takes on an almost ironic form. If recognition of racialised difference, and racism, is present in the film, it is does not amount to the kind of absolutist discontinuities that Gilroy recognises in most racial discourses. The most striking example of such an ironic convivial encounter is the moment when the two groups of bounty hunters – the British-Pakistani men hired directly by Laila's father, and the white bouncers subsequently hired to make the search easier – meet for the first time. Meeting up at a motorway petrol station on the edge of Bradford, the scene begins with the two white bounty hunters preparing for the encounter in a small dingy public bathroom. As they talk vaguely about the job, we cut to a close-up of one of the men, Barry, pissing on his own hand. The shot holds for a few seconds while Barry runs his hand back and forth through the stream of urine. This initially bizarre gesture is provided justification shortly after when Barry advises the other man to not wash his hands, before we see them outside to meet the other group of bounty hunters. As they greet with a handshake, the racist significance of Barry's urine covered hand is made evident. This is an act intended to violate Islamic values related to hygiene and purity.

The urine-soaked hand is, ostensibly, an abject form (as theorised by Julia Kristeva) intended to demarcate the boundaries between bodies along

racialising particularity.[445] Urine separates the white body from the Muslim body, which is invested with a greater attachment to these ideologies of purity, at the point of contact. However, the way in which this act is visually depicted denudes the gesture of any clear hatefulness. Rather, this racist expression of racial difference carries the banal qualities of a convivial encounter. Both the act of urination and the handshake are composed in indifferent terms. While Barry pissing on his own hand is initially enigmatic, it is presented matter-of-factly; the close-up holds for several seconds, while Barry idly passes his hand through the stream (Fig 5.10). Significantly, a second close-up shows Barry finishing and shaking off some last few drops before placing his flaccid penis back in his jeans (Fig 5.11). The softness of his penis, here, is notable – with the framing of the urinal changing from the previous close-up – but also unemphatic in presentation, subverting the hypermasculinity of the penis as a symbol, and suggesting instead a mundane act. Similarly, when the handshake itself occurs, a widescale shot minimises the actual moment of contact. Instead, both the white and Muslim characters' bodies are dwarfed within the wider landscape; an extreme long-shot of a disused garage located in a motorway junction which splinters in many different directions across the hills of the Pennines (Fig 5.12). Where the close-up of Barry urinating subverts the intent behind the racist gesture, this shot subverts the feeling of a coherent sense of local place that might contextualise a feeling of racial identity and belonging. This Northern landscape is less a parochial or local place than a hinterland which is transiently moved through and away from. In this world, racism itself

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[445] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,* Vol. 98, (University Presses of California, Columbia and Princeton, 1982), p.53

becomes a context for conviviality, with both groups ironically united in their antagonism.[446]
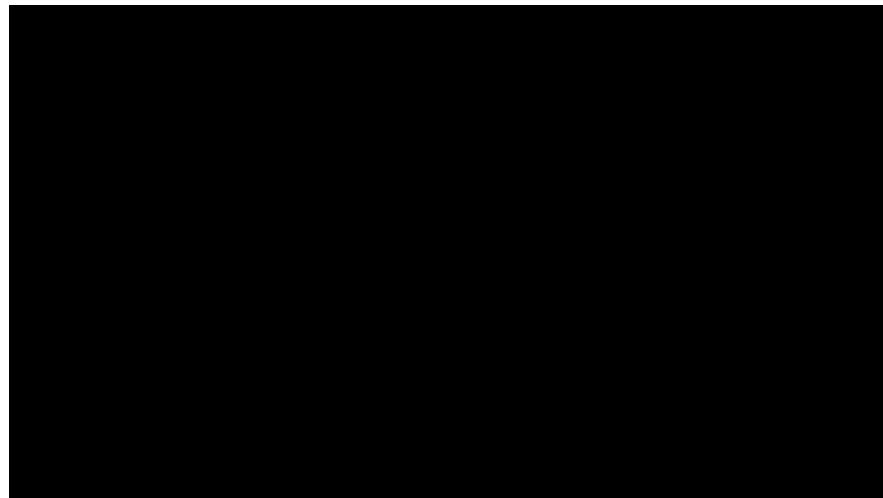

Fig 5.10
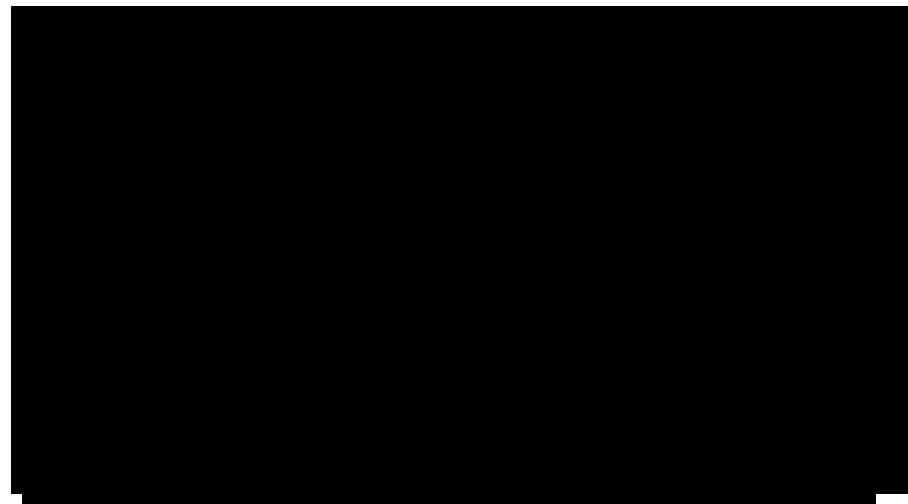
Fig 5.11

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[446] An analogous trend to this ironic appropriation of the North's stereotype as economically grim and provincial, used for the purposes of subverting representations of racial difference, might be seen in the carnivalesque strategies of comedy found in films like *Mischief Night* (2006) and *Four Lions* (2010). Both films reference discourses of Islamic extremism but undermine the otherness assumed in these discourses through their combination of ordinary Northern working-class setting (with an emphasis on day-to-day life) and a comedic levelling of types. In *Mischief Night*, Muslim men are drug dealers but also caring fathers, while *Four Lions* derives humour from its representation of a white Islamic terrorist. Racial difference is rendered ridiculous within the North's ordinariness.
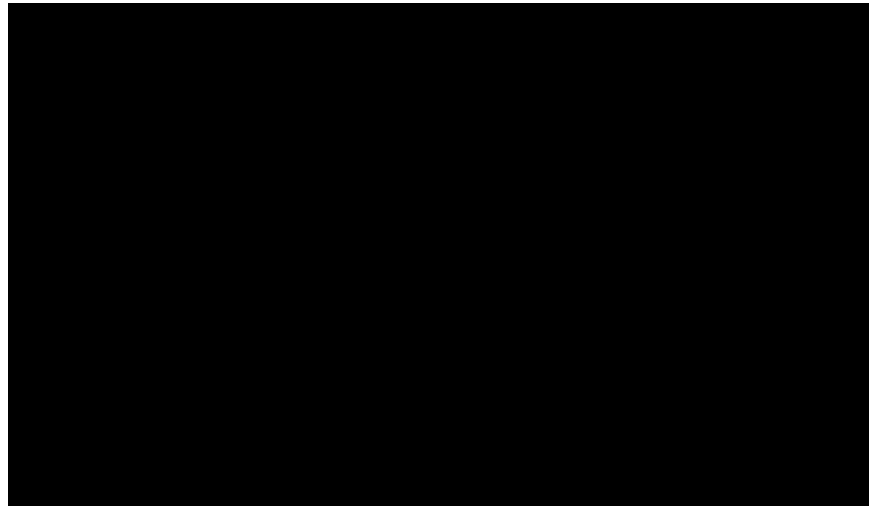
Fig 5.12

The film's style thus subverts the absolutism of racial identities by conveying how race is constructed relative to a wider social reality that is experienced *across* ethnic and cultural divides. *Catch Me Daddy* doesn't so much erase class in favour of race, as is often assumed by the white working-class label, but rather conveys how experiences of precarity which both connect people in terms of social experience and create the conditions for division along racial lines. This is a complex expression of the ambivalent and contingent nature of class and race, one which relies on a dominant structure of feeling of Northern decline which is shared across ethnicities. There is a political potential, then, in this reading. *Catch Me Daddy* might be seen to use the North's association with economic decline and social breakdown to subvert the terms of racial difference usually associated with the region. Perhaps, then, the contemporary racialisation of the North might be one way in re-imagining the working-class community across racial divides. However, even as *Catch Me Daddy* does gesture to the *potential* of these subversive re-workings of Northern racial identity, like *White Girl* it also betrays a tendency in which whiteness is still seen as marking the boundaries of a Northern working-class subjectivity.

The Northern Western and the White Subject

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So far, I have argued that *Catch Me Daddy's* foregrounding of its aesthetic influences - of art cinema and genre - creates a diffuseness in its representation that resists easy deterministic narratives around racial difference. However, this not to argue that the use of genre is unproblematic. This is particularly relevant to Wolfe's explicit evocation of the Western; a genre with a particularly ambivalent historical relationship to racial and racist ideologies. In Hollywood cinema, the Western is synonymous with America's history of genocide and the problem of the genre's relationship to the whitewashing of this colonial past. The rhetoric of Western films is coloured by a consciousness of the genre's association with antiquated (and inevitably racist and sexist) ideologies. The Western is now almost always invoked at an ideological distance. This revisionist perspective assumes that the contemporary resonance of the generic rhetoric of the Western lies in its critical – perhaps even ironic - use, whereby tropes are invoked as a way of questioning the wider ideologies that once secured their meaning. In a text like *Catch Me Daddy*, which depicts the fragile relationship between patriarchal power and class marginalisation, the revisionist Western offers a further means of deconstructing the North as a working-class masculine place. However, this revisionist aspiration, even as a film critically brackets its appropriation of tropes and conventions, is always in some sort of tension with the weight of the Western's historical meanings. In Douglas Pye's diagnosis of this problematic, 'it is impossible to escape the [Western] genre's informing White supremacist terms' which demarcate the range of meanings in its forms and images.[447]

In *Catch Me Daddy*, these tensions of genre manifest around the character of Tony (Gary Lewis), one of the white bounty hunters in pursuit

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[447] Douglas Pye, "Double Vision: Miscegenation and Point of View in *The Searchers*" in Pye and Cameron (eds.), *The Movie Book of the Western*, (Studio Vista: London, 1996), p. 229

of Laila. From the first scene, the film establishes a set of visual references which associate Tony with the Western masculine hero. After a series of barren landscape shots which characterise the Yorkshire hills as a bleak frontier of moorland and urban blight, the first character we see is Tony. Living in an old caravan on the edge of the wild hills, Tony is first shown stoking the flames of a small woodburning heater. His image here is that of the iconic Westerner, caught between the elemental wilderness and a fragile domestic civility (Fig 5.13).[448] However, in a typically revisionist manner, the material details of this sequence are shown to contain none of the romanticism of the Western. Tony's embodiment of the liminality of the Westerner between wilderness and civilisation is formulated in terms of an underclass precarity: the first action he performs is to snort three lines of cocaine from a dirty CD case lying on a coffee table (Fig 5.14).
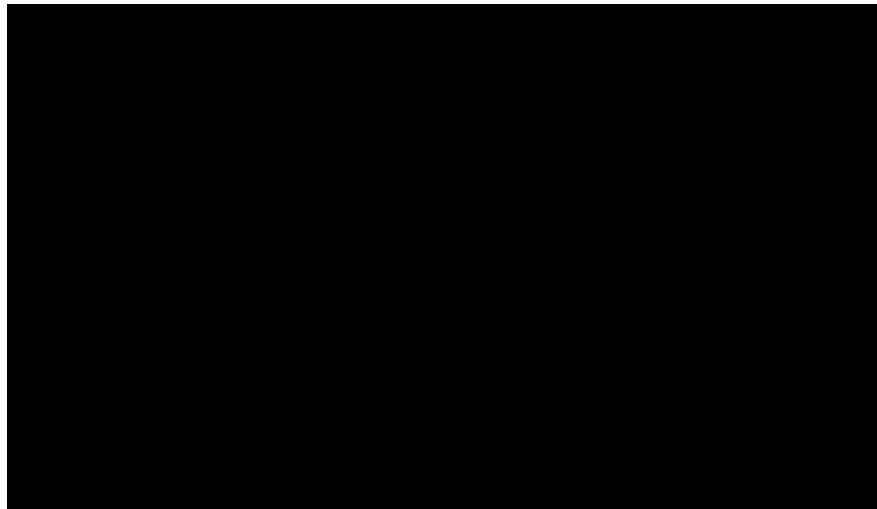
Fig 5.13

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[448] See: Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meanings in Cinema,* (London: BFI Institute, 1972), pp. 85-101
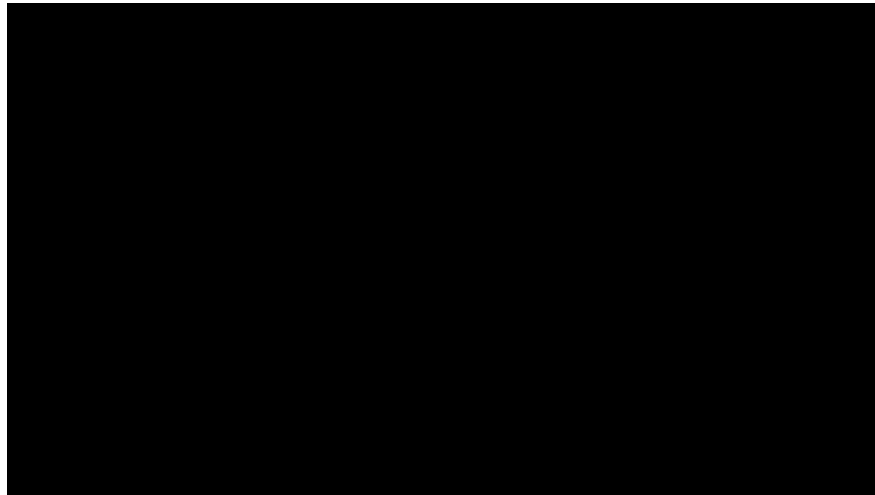
Fig 5.14

The most significant inversion of Western ideologies of masculinity is in the framing of Tony's role in the film's final act. It is through Tony that the film questions the image of stoic masculinity that has been historically crucial both to the Western and to the Northern place-myth. In her reading of its harrowing and ambiguous final shots, Alice Pember argues that the film provokes an ethical question: '[d]oes it matter to anyone … whether [Laila] lives or dies?'[449] As we have seen, the provocation of this image is informed by the film's prior interrogation of the overlaps between cultural practices, gendered power and neoliberal sociality: Laila is evidently worthless in this world not only as a Muslim woman, but also as a member of an underclass precariat in an uncaring neoliberal society. However, within the film's generic rhetoric, it is Tony, specifically who is made to symbolise the wider social responsibility.

Having been a largely peripheral figure during the pursuit of the lovers, Tony intervenes at a pivotal moment, rescuing Laila from the other bounty hunters just after Aaron has been beaten to death in a disastrous encounter with the men. Tony steps forward wielding the gun that he has

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[449] Alice Pember, "Dancing Dissensus…"

stolen from his partner and forces the men away from Laila before the pair escape in his car. By the point of Aaron's brutal murder, the film has underlined the coldness of its world, which makes this rescue a surprising act of compassion. Having provided so little information about Tony's character on which to work out his motivation in this moment, the film instead provides motivation extra-diegetically, in references made to Western tropes. Specifically, the scenario is set up as a double-cross, as Aaron's and Laila's plan to negotiate with her father's hired men is shown to be tragically naïve when he is immediately attacked. Tony's sudden emergence to protect Laila resembles the agency of the righteous gunman. Just as in the Western, the viewer is led to perceive Tony as representing the possibility of a positive wielding of male agency, capable of distinguishing between right and wrong. Yet, just a few scenes later, we discover that, in fact, Tony still intended to deliver Laila to her father but that he simply wanted all the payment himself. To return to the question that Pember identifies – '[d]oes it matter to anyone, the film seems to ask, whether this girl lives or dies?'[450] – we might read this subversion of heroism both as a refusal of patriarchal society's valorisation of masculine agency, and neoliberalism's prizing of the morality of individual action, which here operates purely for economic gain.

Tony's betrayal of Laila leads to issues in terms of how the film imagines the forms that masculine agency might take, which become acutely materialised in the conclusion. The last we see of Tony is via a series of shots, punctuating the intense scenes between Laila and her father, that show him driving away across a nearly empty motorway in the darkness. The sequence is relatively uneventful – we watch him sit in silence as he listens to innocuous country pop on the radio – and expressive of Tony's complicity in

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[450] Ibid.

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Laila's fate in his failure to act. This is failure that is inscribed in Tony's physical gestures. The sequence begins with profile shot of his face carrying a stony expression as he looks out on the road ahead. Holding this shot for over ten seconds, Wolfe's and Ryan's cinematography draws attention to Tony's stare, with the reflection of cold orange hues of streetlights highlighting his eyes. This long scrutiny of Tony's face anticipates expression; the shot seems to be waiting for him to resolve into a readable emotion. However, instead of an extensive performance of emotion or action, all we see is a slight shaking of his head as he continues to look straight ahead. This shaking betrays a nagging anxiety that is present throughout this scene. This feeling is encapsulated in a subsequent extreme close-up of Tony's hands at the car's steering wheel. Framed with such a close scale and depth of field, the camera highlights the tensing and twitching of his knuckles and muscles gripping the wheel (Fig 5.15). Again, the style here clearly implies that Tony might be fighting with the urge to reconsider; the potential that he might turn back and intervene is anticipated in these gestures of guilt. However, this potential is never realised. The scene ends with an exterior shot of the car continuing down the motorway unabated, before cutting back to Laila and her father, and never showing us Tony again.
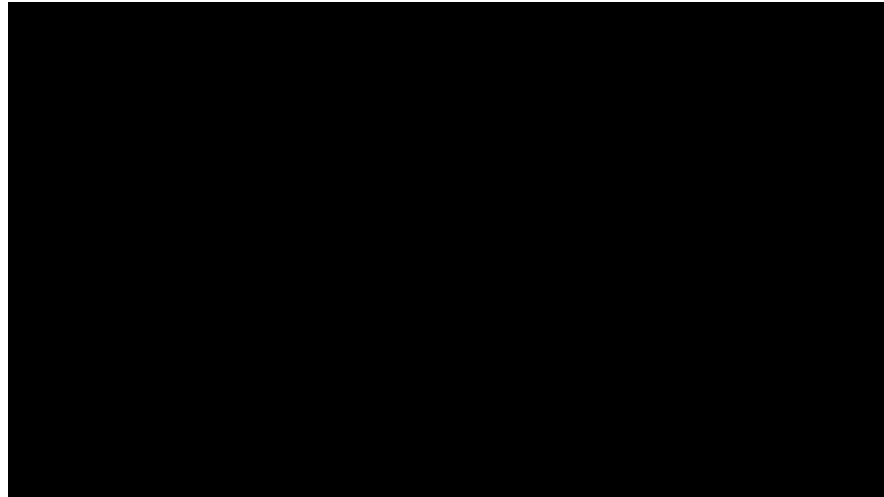
Fig 5.15

The expression of Tony's feelings of guilt over Laila's fate is significantly materialised in intensive physical forms. We can interpret the intention of this last sequence as a final refusal of the myths of individualist male agency as a moral reality in a neoliberal world where women like Laila are not worth saving. However, *Catch Me Daddy* never asks us to recognise the failure of its British-Pakistani characters to save Laila as it does with Tony. There are no comparative moments to this last sequence, where the morality of an honour killing is questioned through an image of lost physical potential.

God's Own Country

The two case studies discussed so far can both be read as expressing an ambivalence about the relationship between the Northern male body and an emergent racial identity. To varying degrees, both texts reflect a new recognition of race in the North around which more traditional notions of masculine working-class identity are reimagined. In *White Girl*, the Muslim patriarch is related to (if not shown to embody) idealised values of masculine patriarchy. More radically, *Catch Me Daddy* uses a diffuse style to suggest a

shared communal experience of precarity which subverts the often reified terms on which working-class experience is described. However, both texts ultimately betray how whiteness still rhetorically structures the boundaries of Northern identity; where a masculine agency and set of values is shown to be lost, it is the white male body which has lost them. Thus a history of Northern working-class value is referenced in the trace of whiteness, and it is the white body that remains the traditional Northern subject. As I now consider my final case study, *God's Own Country*, I want to foreground this ambivalence as a chief concern.

In foregrounding this issue, I am narrowing my concern with *God's Own Country* to the relationship between the subversive potential of cross-racial encounter to reimagine Northernness, and the boundaries of Northern identity as white.[451] This relationship appears prominently within the film's central romance between Johnny and Gheorghe, and revolves around the question of how much Johnny's embodiment of Northern masculinity is changed by his intimate encounters with Gheorghe. While appreciating the film's attempts to re-work stereotypes of hard Northern masculinity through the representation of shared cross-ethnic experience, I end my reading of this final case study by returning to the question of whiteness' normativity in the North, and whether certain kinds of racialised bodies are presented as more capable of accessing a Northern subjecthood. This is a question which has

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[451] In developing this as a primary concern of the chapter, the meaning and political significance of the racialised Northern male body, I am unable to engage with another aspect of *God's Own Country's* rich evocation of Northern masculinity which involves the relationship between Johnny and his father Martin (Ian Hart). Martin's relationship with Johnny is initially cold, based on values of stoicism and hard work that relate to hegemonic forms of Northern masculinity as based on hardness and graft. However, the film uses the representation of Martin's declining physical health – he becomes increasingly incapacitated and suffers multiple strokes – as a narrative pretext for reimagining this relationship between father and son around practices of care and compassion. This could be read as subverting the logic of deterioration which I established in Chapter Three. However, for practical reasons, pursuing this reading is beyond the scope of this chapter's interests.

been tackled within queer scholarship on the film, with Jasbir Puar's concept of homonationalism offering a conceptual paradigm for thinking how race contributes to the discursive structuring of North and nation in contemporary British cinema.

Physicality, Intimacy and Queering Northern Masculinity

Guillermo Severiche characterises the world of *God's Own Country* by describing how the film 'portrays a rural countryside in crisis, impoverished, stumbling towards bankruptcy, emotional disconnection and impotence.'[452] Severiche's slippage between economic and emotional crisis suggests the influence of a rhetoric of Northern decline and, even, deterioration. Alongside Clio Barnard's film *Dark River* (2017), *God's Own Country* is one of a pair of films, released in 2017, which uses the Yorkshire farm as a setting on which to narrate a failure of a hard stoic Northern masculinity. Using failing farm businesses as a metaphor for a crisis of masculinity that is both economic and natural, both films narratively stage the introduction of an outsider – gendered or ethnicised – to pose the question of how such masculinity might be changed.

However, despite the film's apparent reference to a Northern rhetoric which has been discussed elsewhere in this thesis, it is important to note a distinction between the world that *God's Own Country* depicts and those depicted in most my other case studies. Johnny, unlike many of the other primary male figures of contemporary Northern film and television, is not defined by his struggle for work. He has a stable job on his father's farm, which is struggling because there is too much work to be done for just him. *God's Own Country* depicts a narrative crisis more akin to the post-war crises

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[452] Guillermo Severiche, 'Embodied Nations: Masculinities, Nationhood and (Homo) Sexual Desire: From *Borstal Boy* (2000) to *God's Own Country* (2017)', *Queer Studies in Media & Popular Culture*, 5:1, (2020), p.16

evident in the British New Wave films. We might describe Johnny as a re-imagining of the alienated working-class hero of that period. This is a resemblance that Johnny expresses both in speech and through physical gesture.

Like Arthur Seaton in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Johnny voices repeated dissatisfaction with the limited future offered to him by the grinding work of farm life. In a conversation with an old school friend over a fag outside the local pub, he bemoans the freedom she has as a student who has been able to leave their small Yorkshire village: "That's what I love about folk like you. You fuck off to your posh colleges an' that and swan back here on your holidays." In admonishing her freedom to travel back and forth between the 'posh' spaces of university and the working-class world of rural Yorkshire, Johnny expresses his own feeling of being stuck in place and circumstance. Furthermore, like Seaton, this existential sense of a narrowed way of life results in extreme and self-destructive drinking. There are clear echoes of Seaton's defiant claim of "I'm out to have a good time, all the rest is propaganda" in Johnny's angry retort to his father's criticism of his drinking: "I have a few pints on a night-time. So what? What else am I meant to do apart from work, like? There's fuck all else going on round here, is there?" In my revisiting of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* through Arthur Seaton's body, I argued that many of the contradictions that critics ascribe to the film's narrative and visual framing of the working-class hero can be read as expressive of anxieties around the changing stakes of post-war labour. Johnny's corporeal state throughout *God's Own Country* is marked by these same contradictions. Like Seaton, Johnny's self-destructive behaviour expresses the contradiction between a yearning to exist as something other than a producer of labour and an inability to know oneself in any other terms.

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The burden of these patterns and structures of working-class labour is inscribed in a sexual encounter Johnny engages in early in the film. Attending a cattle market to sell livestock, Johnny picks up a young butcher while eating his breakfast. In a moment reminiscent of the practice of cruising, Johnny and the man confirm their mutual desire through an exchange of prolonged glances across the cafeteria, before the scene suddenly cuts to them pressed up against the side of a pen in the back of a cattle truck. The sex is framed and edited here to emphasise the roughness of Johnny's gratification; focussing entirely on his actions as he pulls and pushes the young man about. We only briefly even see the butcher's face with the close angles often cutting his upper body out of frame to suggest how Johnny is using him for his own personal desires. With the mise-en-scene denying any connotations of tenderness, the sexual encounter is shot as if a continuation of Johnny's physically extensive state of being (Figs 5.16 and 5.17). There is a distinct lack of mutuality in his actions; most notably, he refuses a kiss from the butcher by grabbing his shoulder and pivoting him to face away from him while they have sex. It is as if Johnny does not want to be touched but rather wants to physically maintain the distinction between his body and the butcher's body.

Johnny's inability to express himself in any way other than through external physical action is nicely emblematised by the gesture of spitting. While holding the young man against the wall of the pen, Johnny spits into the palm of his free hand to use as lubricant (Fig 5.18). This recalls an earlier moment of a hungover Johnny spitting against the wall of a barn while urinating. In both iterations of the gesture, the camera's closeness emphasises a tactile viscosity which produces a sense of Johnny's roughness and grit. In the moment of him urinating, spitting is a by-product of the taxing physical nature of his work, and in emphasising the repetition of this

gesture, the film seems to be suggesting that Johnny has been moulded by his life of tough labour and knows no other way of relating to the world.


Fig 5.16
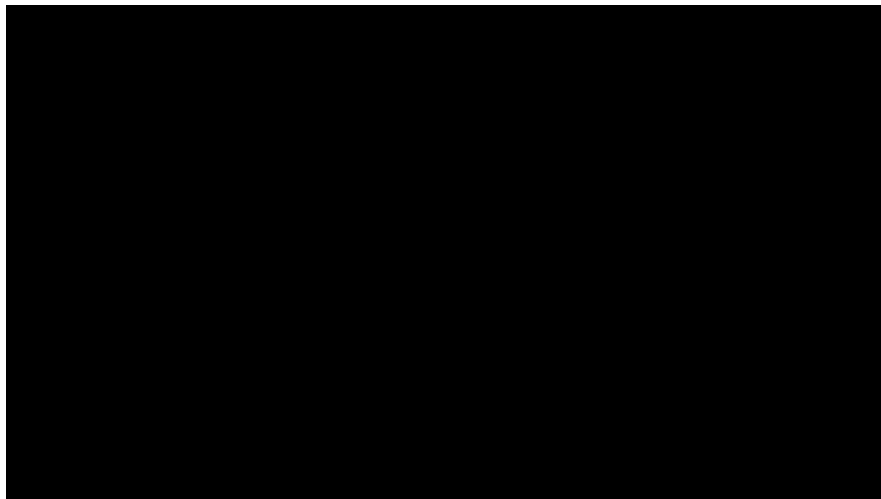
Fig 5.17
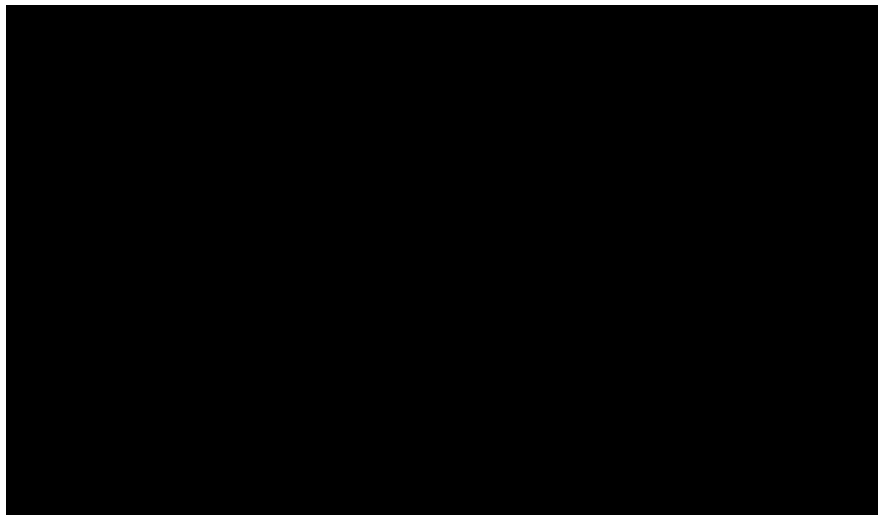
Fig 5.18

<u>"This land is beautiful but lonely": Landscape and Non-Labouring Bodies</u>

The queer intimacies that *God's Own Country* reconfigures involve not only how subjectivities are embodied, but also how the land itself is known and occupied by bodies. Where the romantic and pastoral imagery of North is contested, imaginings of the North risk straying into fatalistic structures of feeling whereby imagery of post-industrial decline configure the landscape only in terms of desolation and blight. We can see this fatalism in *Catch Me Daddy*, where the harshness of the Western frontier is reformulated as a neoliberal North in which economic precarity has fatally eroded communal bonds. The problem with this second kind of Northern landscape is demonstrated by *Catch Me Daddy*; not only does the film's landscapes envision a dead North, but, as we have seen, it is a death associated with the moral decline of a white working-class masculine subjectivity.

God's Own Country queers these normative identifications of body and landscape in its representation of the Yorkshire countryside. By figuring new forms of how the body might meaningfully occupy its spaces, the film also reconsiders what bodies might find belonging in this North. In interviews around the release of the film, director Francis Lee spoke about his intention to counter the pastoral imaginary of Yorkshire that does not fit with his experiences. Lee states that:

> [i]t was important to depict the landscape in a way in which I'd not seen in a film before; that it was cold, wet, windy, that it's hard work, that there's mud. There's only one landscape shot in the film and that's because it's the first time that Johnny sees the landscape. The rest of the time he doesn't see it. That's because of

the way he has to live and work here and it becomes very oppressive.[453]

In the director's own words, *God's Own Country* contests the Northern pastoral imaginary through an emphasis on the experience of working the land. The film evokes a harshness of the landscape not as an ontological state ('the grim North') nor as an essential consequence of post-industrial decline but, more pragmatically, as a physical orientation engendered by the demands of manual labour. This more specific orientation is evident in the dominant stylistic strategies the film employs when showing Johnny's work. The camera is kept close to the character, in low angles which obscure wider views of the surrounding hills to evoke a grounded comportment and communicate Johnny's priorities. Johnny does not 'see' the landscape because he is engaged with the land in pragmatic acts of tending and extraction which leave no opportunity for a visual appreciation of his surroundings. The film resists the heroic connotations of manual labour by emphasising the punishing physical effects of such work, and by mirroring Johnny's point-of-view in which there is no space or time from which to recognise such connotations. Intensely naturalistic sound design further contributes to the association of productive labour with an oppressive corporeal experience. Using little non-diegetic music, the film emphasises a messy conflation of Johnny's exhausted groans, heavy breathing, and toiling, with an earthy soundscape of the wet and muddy work being done.

However, as Lee clarifies, while this oppressive physical relationship between body and landscape is a way of life known specifically to Johnny, it is not the only form in which the land might be experienced. The film's

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[453] Francis Lee as quoted in Colin Crummy, 'francis lee on making his own gay romance, 'god's own country'', *i-D Vice*, 1st September 2017, https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/3kkebk/francis-lee-on-making-his-own-gay-romance-gods-own-country, accessed 23rd October 2019

narration of its Northern rural landscape, outside of its depiction of Johnny's experience, presents an alternative experience of the land that already exists, even before he comes to recognise it. Significantly, *God's Own Country* imagines the occupation of this potential 'otherwise' relationship to the land as a destabilising subject position. It is Gheorghe who comes to know this North and reveal it to Johnny. The moment of Johnny discovering the landscape, that Lee refers to, occurs the morning after they have had sex for the second time. In the early morning, while Johnny is beginning his daily duties and collecting fencing that they need to erect, Gheorghe sits quietly at a small fireside drinking coffee until, suddenly, he rises and takes off across the open field. The camerawork in this moment of recognition is notable. Shooting Gheorghe in profile sitting next to the fire, a handheld close-up maintains focus and moves with Gheorghe's body as he stands up in recognition at something seen in the distance. There is no cutaway from Gheorghe and no reaction shot to show the viewer what is seen that stirs him (Fig 5.18). Instead of providing a point-of-view which might capture the valley ahead as a static and composed image, existing outside of Gheorghe, the camerawork evokes the landscape as a movement impressed and enacted through his body. Rather than represent subject and landscape as discrete entities, the editing renders these distinction and instead communicates a reversibility of spatial boundaries that render such boundaries not quite knowable.

As the scene continues, we see Johnny initially call out for Gheorghe in confusion but nevertheless hastily follow behind with a conviction in whatever has drawn his partner across the field. The pair come to a stop at a cliff edge, where they see the wide unfolding valley of Keighley (Fig 5.19 and 5.20). Johnny, emotionally struck by both the beauty of this landscape and his previous ignorance of it, looks out with tears in his eyes. Introducing a

rare non-diegetic music accompaniment, with strings underscoring the spectacular rural views, this moment suggests the impression of pastoral beauty upon Johnny that he had previously not had been able to appreciate (Fig 5.21). What is striking about this sequence is not simply its focus on Johnny's revelation, but also how it draws attention to Gheorghe's knowledge of this space as active, assured, and, at the same time, non-normative. Spatially, the editing here disrupts the continuity of the men's movements and obfuscates a clear geographical relationship between body and land. At the beginning of the sequence, Gheorghe takes off across an open field but we cut to a markedly different space as the pair move along a pathway cutting through small hills and mounds, before they arrive at the cliff edge and the vista beyond. This elision ostensibly performs a classical function; subordinating diegetic space to the movement of its characters' bodies in a way that shapes the film world according to the purpose and meaning of their actions. However, these elisions also contribute to the implausibility of Gheorghe simply 'seeing' this landscape. The markedly changing scenery means that the landscape the pair look out on, at the scene's end, could not possibly have been what Gheorghe 'saw' at its beginning. Thus, what is significant is how this reveal of a specular sense of place deterritorialises the discursive distinctions between Johnny – the Northerner – and Gheorghe – the immigrant.

Fig 5.19
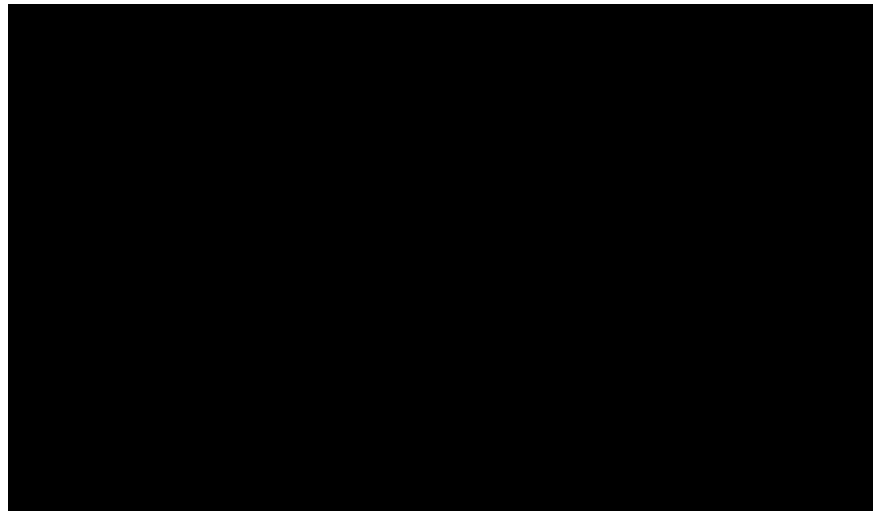
Fig 5.20
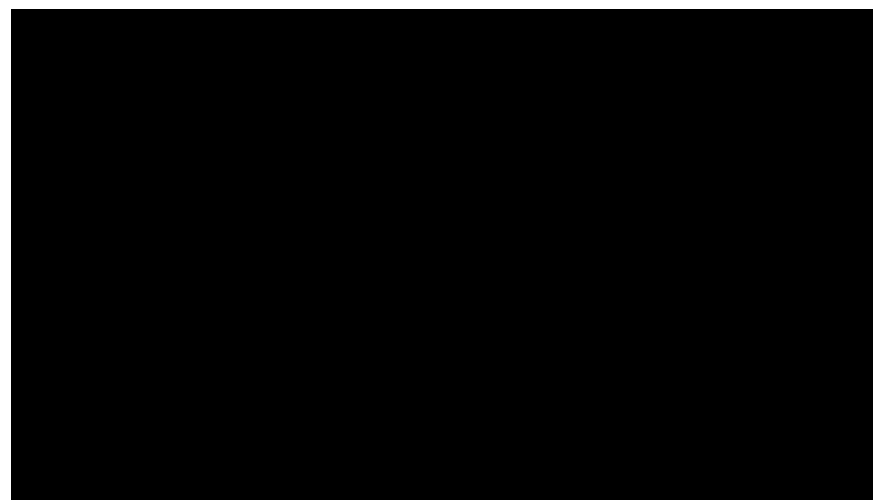
Fig 5.21
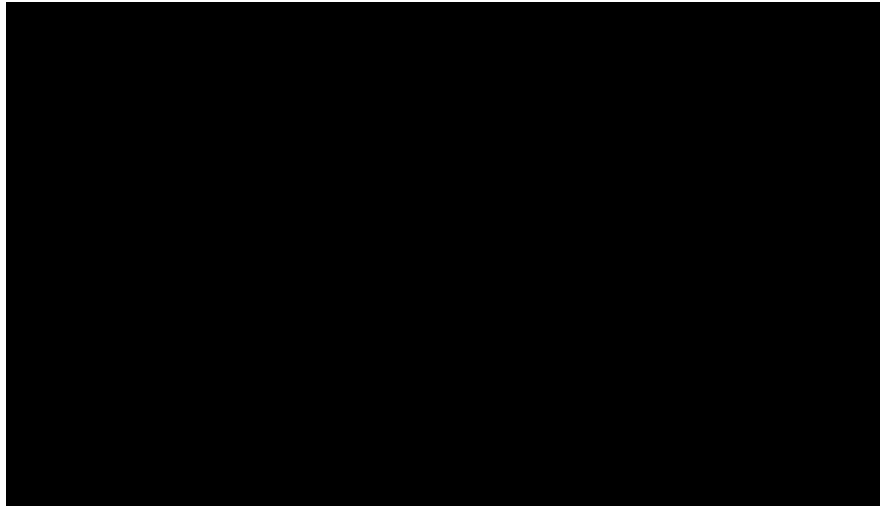
Fig 5.22

Queer Art Cinema and the Worldliness of the North

Having seen how *God's Own Country* weaves a queer deterritorialisation of bodies and spaces, we can begin to appreciate how the film destabilises notions of inside and outside, and native and immigrant, through its representation of bodily intimacy. However, while it offers these images of bodily deterritorialisation, the film also implicitly suggests certain limits that can be related to race and nation. For instance, Severiche has argued that while *God's Own Country*, with its representation of queer intimacies, subverts normative images of English masculinity based around an "emotional inarticulacy", it also reifies the body as an object of essential national belonging.[454] He asserts that the film 'portray[s] marketable bodies' and constructs images which 'do not attempt to dissolve nation-ness as a corporeal identity or to question the mere inscription of such a notion in the body, but to re-shape and revalidate it as a valid form of existence.'[455] Adopting Jasbir Puar's concept of homonationalism, Severiche's reading is marked by an anxiety that the film's representation of gay romance between

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[454] Severiche, 'Embodied Nations…', p.23
[455] Ibid.

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a Northern farmer and a Romanian labourer does not so much queer nationhood - with its attendant binary distinctions of inside/outside, citizen/immigrant - as use queerness to construct a more inclusive national body which implicitly upholds values that are normative (and as Puar would argue, colonial). For Severiche, this anxiety is rooted in how the film frames Gheorghe's ultimate acceptance by Johnny and the home nation. Gheorghe is a depiction of a foreign other that is nevertheless captured in a 'white, muscular, young, and sensitive foreign body'.[456] He represents an acceptable immigrant body because of his embodiment of a physical toughness and virility that allows him to turn around the farm's fortunes. Neither of these qualities contest dominant discourses of immigrant value deriving from economic capital. One might interpret this muscularity as a figuration of the discourse of 'the skilled immigrant' that has dominated political and media discourse of Eastern European immigration since the free admittance of EU migrants into Britain in 2004.[457]

Severiche's argument makes use of Puar's concept of homonationalism. For Puar, the figure of the queer, constructed in media and through political discourse as an exemplar of the Global North's humanism, is folded into a ethno-cultural hierarchy, cutting across global and national multicultural contexts, in which the queer subject represents the 'liberal' and 'enlightened' subject defined in opposition to the illiberal, homophobic 'bad' subject of the Global South.[458] As Puar argues, this hierarchy is routinely formulated by Western media as 'the Muslim or gay binary', a discourse which can only acknowledge queer identity practiced

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[456] Ibid., p. 22

[457] For example, see: Scott Blinder & Anne-Marie Jeannet, The 'Illegal' and the Skilled: Effects of Media Portrayals on Perceptions of Immigrants in Britain, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44:9, (2018)

[458] Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, (Durham; Duke University Press, 2007)

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within the normative values and boundaries of the liberal nation.[459] We might recognise this ideology in how Gheorghe is accepted at the conclusion of *God's Own Country*, with the towing away of the caravan. This gesture, that Gheorghe accepts being part of the home in exchange for being recognised as equal, might be read as part of homonationalism's 'careful management of difference' which Puar argues is represented by the 'exceptional [queer] citizen'. This is a citizen who exemplifies the multiplicity of ethnic and sexual identities available in modern liberal multicultural society, but who's championing functions as the management of particular instances of difference within a still hegemonically white, heteronormative, and neoliberal social order.

Severiche's ambivalence towards *God's Own Country* is instructive, but where he approaches these issues through the concept of the body's nationhood, I maintain that these questions require a consideration of the body's relationship to Northernness. As Karl Spracklen's conceptualisation of Northernness as a simulacra identity defined by racial, gendered, and classed exclusions indicates, this Northern male body enacts related but different distinctions of inside and outside. For all the film's vitally subversive queer aesthetics, is Gheorghe's resemblance to both whiteness and hard masculinity necessary for his body to be granted the possibility of changing the Northern and national spaces he inhabits? This is a question that is relevant not only to *God's Own Country*, but to the whole of this chapter's elucidation of the range of meaning inscribed through the racialising of Northern bodies. To what extent does the Northern place-myth limit difference?

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[459] Ibid, p.15

A brief but significant moment where these limits of difference are broached occurs in the film's final act, in which Johnny ventures away from the farm to find Gheorghe and convince him to come back and live with him. Johnny's pursuit takes him to a large industrial potato farm where Gheorghe is part of a mass workforce of Eastern European immigrants. Before arriving at the confrontation between Johnny and Gheorghe, how the film establishes this other farming space is telling. Having previously associated farming labour with a difficult yet intimate and parochial relationship to the land, this space is a reminder of a different form of labour; one which operates on an industrial scale and more obviously within a global circulation of capital.[460]

As Johnny waits for Gheorghe to get the message of his arrival, he sits against the walls of a barn. At this moment, the scene cuts to a shot from Johnny's spatial point-of-view, looking at two Eastern European farmworkers in the distance who are looking and clearly commenting on him to each other. While they speak about him in their own language, a reverse-angle shows us Johnny shifting uncomfortably at their words. As first seen through his eyes and then felt on his body, Johnny's anxiety at the judgement of his presence echoes the discomfort that Sara Ahmed describes as a quintessentially queer affect. As she defines it, queer discomfort is the inability to "sink into" space as if it were a natural extension of the body; queer discomfort "returns one's attention to the surfaces of the body as

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[460] This is an insinuation that is further emphasised by how this space is framed within the geography of the film world. Although we see Johnny travel to (and later, with Gheorghe, travel away from) this place, neither its location is named nor is it ever narratively situated in relation to Johnny's farm. The direction of travel is mystified. If, as the scholarship on the periphery/centre relationship of the North and South indicates, Southern England more commonly stands for the national, then the mystification of direction leaves us unable to connect this narrative space either to the North or the national.

body."[461] The implication of queer discomfort is the recognition of the contingent and socially constructed boundaries that prevent bodies from belonging to spaces. In the context of this scene, Johnny feels his body not only because of his state of emotional vulnerability, but also because of his sense of being an outsider. His body responds to a gaze that renders it illegitimate and not belonging to the space it occupies. The choice to delineate this feeling via point-of-view shots draws attention to this feeling of being alienated from space as being a reversal of a gaze. In this space, the immigrant can look back. By reversing the othering gaze within Johnny's point-of-view, the scene communicates a recognition that racial difference is always constructed relatively: the relationship of belonging between body and space is always contingent and discursively imagined.

And yet, while such a moment affirms the contingency of difference, this sequence also betrays an imagination of space and body that suggests a limit to this expression of territorial relativism. Johnny's feelings of discomfort and alienation are not just an effect of recognising his own difference. Rather, and perhaps unintentionally, the film also associates this alienation with the kind of space he is in: the impersonal setting of global capitalism. Throughout this sequence on the potato farm, the camera emphasises a sense of spatial scale that is visibly in tension with Johnny's frame (Fig 5.21). Before Gheorghe arrives, we see Johnny walk into a storage barn which is filled by a hill of recently ploughed potatoes, towering above him. The compositions here are a noticeable departure from the intimate mise-en-scene that characterises Johnny's farm life. Moreover, this space is framed as being in tension with Johnny and Gheorghe's intimacies. At the very end of the scene, after they have reconciled, the editing undercuts the

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[461] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p.148

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moment of emotional closure between the two men with a cut to a wide extreme long-shot which silhouettes the pair against the structure of the barn, with the industrial expanse of the farm in the background (Fig 5.22). This is a frustration of bodily intimacy that is visually associated with an uber industrial farming backdrop. This is a very minor moment, but it suggests a rhetoric which guides the viewer's apprehension of the potentials for queer intimacy in particular modalities of space. We can connect this rhetoric to the issue of racial difference by considering the kinds of globality it imagines.

In Puar's elucidation of the value structures underpinning homonationalism, the binary between the 'normative' and 'patriot[ic]' queer subject and 'terrorist corporealities' suggests morally distinct modes of embodying a relationship to the global.[462] Puar argues that such a binary relates certain bodies to certain valuable forms of life. Where the normative body is invested with a global citizenship, and self-evident human rights, the terrorist body is necessarily positioned outside of such citizenship based on its apparent opposition to life itself. Considering Puar's categories as relaying moral value through specific configurations of body and space, we might extend the 'normative' and the 'terrorist' as two forms of connecting the global to more local forms of community.[463] In light of this, the space of this farm is rendered in such a way that we perceive it as always somewhat illegitimate compared to the utopian fantasy of the film's ending, where the immigrant is accepted in such a way that the local and global are rendered harmoniously.

While *God's Own Country* does much to re-work the boundaries of Northernness, and to posit the possibility of a future for the Northern man

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[462] Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages…*, p. xxiv
[463] Ibid.

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beyond these boundaries, it implicitly reaffirms many of the residual forms that have repeatedly underwritten the ways in which Northern working-class men are valued within British culture. This is an ambivalence which I have located throughout the case studies in this chapter. Although *God's Own Country*, like *White Girl* and *Catch Me Daddy*, is clearly attempting to alter the North's homogeneously white imaginary, it evidences the extent to which, rhetorically, the residual images of the North's bodily-ness – its strength, its contiguous connection to labour and the land – remain powerful and valued myths for the region.
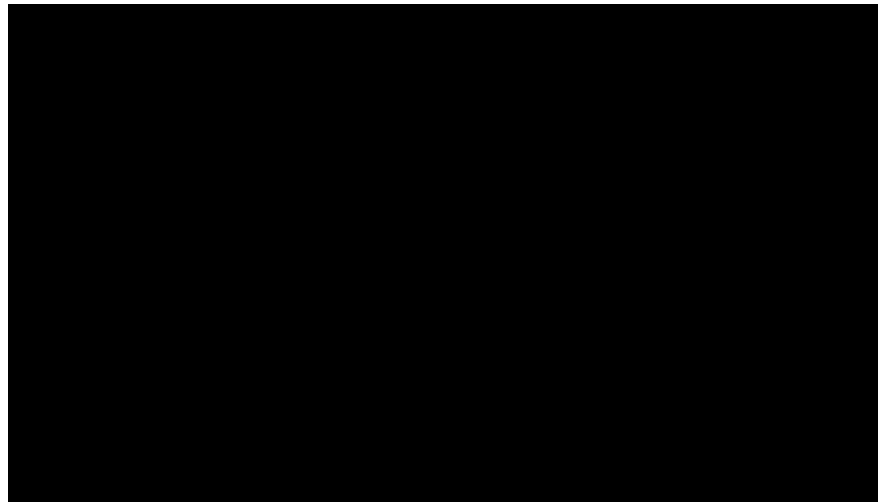
Fig 5. 23
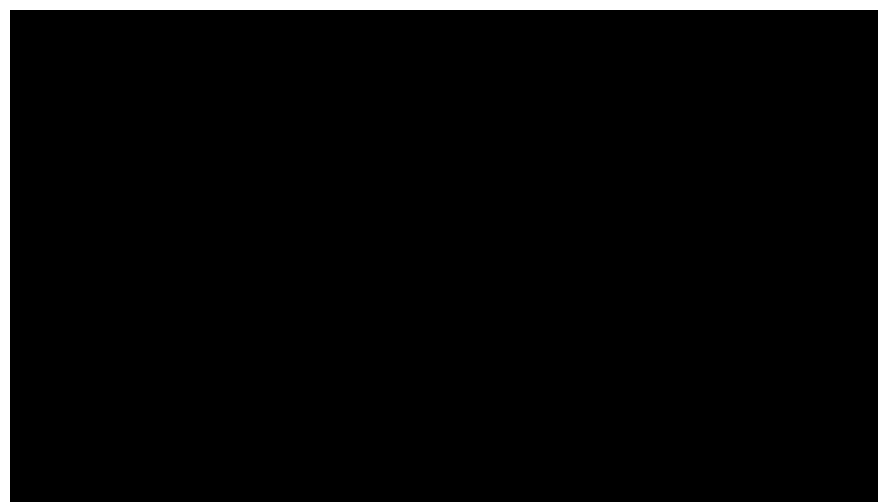
Conclusion

I began this chapter with the question of the reciprocal relationship between discourses of Northern decline and the representation of racialised bodies. The aim of this chapter has been to consider what representations of race in Northern-set fiction reveal about the contemporary boundaries of Northern identity, particularly in its classed dimensions. I asked whether the wider social discourse of the North as a failed space of multiculturalism has affected the previously dominant construction of the region as white. Had this recognition of the North as a place marked by different cross-ethnic encounters merely fostered a new rhetoric for expressing whiteness as a hegemonic category of regional and national identity? Or had it offered the possibility of envisaging new images of Northern embodiment? As the nature of my textual analysis demonstrates, the answer to these questions is marked by ambivalence.

Firstly, the case studies in this chapter attest to an intensified significance placed on race as a marker of change in the symbolic values of classed life. In *White Girl*, whiteness is a classed signifier through which to convey the lost 'worth' of the working-class. The drama implies that the racialised white-working-class is an emergent category which, in part, results from the performance of improper working-class masculinity. Consequently, the encounter between different ethnic groups provides the narrative opportunity for comparing models of masculinity through which a respectable working-class identity might be reclaimed. In my other case studies – *Catch Me Daddy* and *God's Own Country* - the intersection of Northern spaces and racialised bodies creates images in which the bounds of Northern identity might be reimagined. In *Catch Me Daddy*, the Muslim patriarchal body is a stereotype that is subverted in order to suggest the endemic structural nature of violence in a economic environment marked by

precarity. Furthermore, convivial encounters of racism offer an example how the Northern place-myth's association with economic decline might offer ways of imagining different and unexpected forms of multicultural experience. Finally, in *God's Own Country*, the deterritorialisation of bodies from categories of nation and other, insider and outsider, allows for the re-imagination of Northern working-class identity as a category not essentially tied to the values of physical labour.

However, recognition of the *potential* for the Northernness of bodies to destabilise racial difference must be tempered. While this chapter's case studies collectively suggest a contemporary demystification of whiteness, they also all feel ambivalent in their conception of a North that is not normatively white or where whiteness is not hierarchically closest to Northernness. The problematisation of whiteness, attached to the contemporary Northern imaginary, can even be seen to foster a re-affirmation of a normative status. As we have seen across the case studies, the fatalistic decline of the North is a rhetoric which, in part, imagines a failure of white people to be the idealised figures that they once were. As Anamik Saha does, we might see the normative whiteness of the Northern male body as a problem of the continuing lack of ethnic minority influence within Northern-based cultural production.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this thesis, I contended that the male body had been taken-for-granted within scholarship of the screen North. I suggested that scholarship invoked the body as a potentially complex site of meaning but often deferred the process of reading for this complexity. The result has been that the male body's influence in the construction of a Northern place-myth has often been assumed and unquestioned; a critical tendency which has affected our ability to describe why the North remains a significant cultural imaginary in Britain. By making this body, and its hegemonic status, the central object of close textual analysis, I have argued that we can engage with number of new questions related to the North and its ongoing narration of classed, raced and gendered histories.

In the first part of the thesis, I explicated the historicity of the Northern male body as a cultural formation. In my survey of the Northern screen canon, I interrogated the argument that the North appears on film and television during crisis when it is felt to hold, as Marris argues, a 'key to the state of the nation' by demonstrating how male bodies have played an active role in delimiting the cultural conceptualisation of crisis within the rhetorical terms of masculine and working-class physical agency.[464] Labouring masculine physicality provides a consistent residual place-image against which social change is measured. Read symptomatically, these residual values and forms also circumscribe the cultural imagination of the North, restricting the ability of social realist films to imagine how male and class identity might be changed by newer structures of labour, economic marginalisation, and sociality. This is particularly a problem at the end of the twentieth-century, as reflected in *The Full Monty*, where the actual demands

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[464] Paul Marris, 'Northern Realism: An Exhausted Tradition?', *Cineaste*, 26: 4, (2001), p. 47

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on working-class men to adapt to a neoliberal service economy are repressed by a symbolic attachment to labouring masculinity as the dominant model for picturing the North. A major theme of the Northern male body's historicity, then, is the tension between its timeliness and datedness. Even while the body appears to register new social conditions, it also inscribes contradictory limits on what Northernness can mean culturally. These limits are further borne out by considering the canon of Northern realism, a previously underexamined issue in scholarship. By paying attention to the male bodies which appear in marginal Northern texts, I show another ideological function of the cultural master-narrative of Northern decline. The construction of a teleological history of social downturn also serves to install the traditional North as the mythic place of stably gendered and ethnically homogenous community.

Having established these tensions within the historicity of the Northern male body, the second half of the thesis interrogated the specificity of the post-2008 period through three modalities of bodily representation. The deteriorated body is the most emblematic of these modalities, for several reasons. Firstly, this modality most closely conforms to, and thus continues, the fatalistic logic beneath the Northern master-narrative of decline. Associating economic and social marginalisation with a lacking physical agency, the deteriorated body supplies images and gestures which rhetorically support the discursive characterisation of the North as the nation's 'left behind' place. At the same time, the deteriorated body also most clearly represents the emerging structure of feeling which distinguishes the North in this period from previous moments of Northern male representation. Where this body continues the dominant elegiac narrative of decline, deterioration is an expression of Northern decline in the waning residue of post-industrialisation. Without being able to contextualise this

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body in the place-images associated with industrial labour, the male body risks becoming a reified image of decline, disconnected from a wider social history. As a result, in distinction from the canonical bodies that precede it, the deteriorated body inscribes a historical dead-end in which social agency can no longer be believably represented through working-class men. The subsequent two chapters analyse modalities which are distinct from the deteriorated body because they are less visually and symbolically assimilable to deterministic notions of decline. The youthful body and the racialised body are joined in their departure from elegiac constructions of masculinity based in physical decline. As such, these two modalities figure contemporary Northern masculinity as representing a social problem. In relation to the youthful body this is a problem related to the moralising discourses of the underclass, while the racialised body operates on the pretext that the Northerner has failed to accept multiculturalism. I argue that rendering this masculinity as problematic and not necessarily something to be mourned, is a part of a rhetorical strategy for dealing with a number of ideological contradictions related to: the need to maintain an abstract symbolic value for Northern masculinity as an authentic class identity; the social exclusion felt by many young people offered little long-term opportunity for the kinds of life projects nostalgically associated with the industrial working-class; the rhetorical implausibility of representing young men as physically and essentially declined.

To conclude, I want to reflect on how this thesis has begun to answer some of the questions set out in the introduction. I also want to speculate as to the ongoing political relevance of reading the Northern male body within a contemporary social context. Specifically, I will consider how the representational body offers a site for the ongoing expression of the breakdown and decline which, as we have repeatedly seen throughout this

thesis, is associated with Britain's current state of neoliberal social organisation. The first of the questions which arises through centring the Northern male body relates to the historicity of the North and its periodic emergence as a culturally significant space. Beginning with Chapter Two's survey of canonical Northern screen bodies, this thesis locates the body as a complex site for the expression of time and history; one which is contextualised by, but also crucially complicates, what Rob Shields understands to be British culture's mythologising representation of landscape in term of a stable industrial pastness.[465] By turning attention to the body, I have demonstrated how the North's industrial past appears as a residual set of ideals and values. Thus, Northern male bodies consistently emerge as *out of time*, either in terms of the New Wave body, typified by Arthur Seaton, whose youthful energy is posed as troublesome to the reproduction of working-class social life, or more recently in terms of bodies which feel incapable of keeping up with the demands of a liquid modernity. Thus, the contemporary Northern male body is seldom a seamless embodiment of idealised stereotypes of working-class labouring masculinity. Instead, textual analysis reveals that these bodies are often sites of historical tension, between hegemonic yet residual values, and emergent experiences and attitudes which expose the outdatedness of these values relative to contemporary life. This tension relates not only to the (im)possibility of resurrecting this residual embodiment, and way of life, but also to the very adequacy of these values.

While this thesis forwards a claim for the rhetorical importance of this formation *throughout* the North's screen history, it also contends that the Northern male body takes on a particular cultural significance after 2008.

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[465] Rob Shields, *Places on Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*, (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 61

On-screen representations of the North in the recent twenty-first century emerge not only in the breakdown of neoliberal values, but, just as importantly, during the waning of the industrial landscape as a potent place-image in British culture. As Beynon and Hudson argue in *The Shadow of the Mine*, 'processes of regeneration and commercialisation have seen much of the industrial landscape smoothed' over the past three decades.[466] Attempts by successive governments to shift struggling post-industrial areas towards service economies had resulted in the visible and 'established facts of the Industrial Revolution' – not only the factories or mines, but the streets – being replaced by shopping outlets, call centres and housing estates.[467] These historical transformations threaten what Shields calls the 'connotative power' of the dominant Northern place-images, as industrial space becomes further removed from the social architecture surrounding work.[468] A theme running throughout my case studies chapters has been that the loss of the connotative power of the Northern landscape has made the body itself both a more uncertain but equally more visible and totemic form in the production of the place-myth.

From the outset, I highlighted that the question of how certain bodies are marked as Northern is underexamined yet politically significant to consider, and this is particularly urgent in the contemporary moment. On one hand, contemporary bodies visually inscribe the increasingly inhuman logic of working-class labour, suggesting an unmooring from previously important signifiers of Northernness. We can see this most clearly in the deteriorated body. On the other hand, lacking a clear industrial iconography, the body takes on a greater importance in *defining* the boundaries of the

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[466] Huw Beynon and Ray Hudson, *The Shadow of the Mine: Coal and the End of Industrial Britain*, (London: Verso, 2021), p. 199

[467] Aneurin Bevan, *In Place of Fear*, (London: EP Publishing, 1976), p. 21, cited in Beynon and Hudson, *The Shadow of the Mine*, p. 199

[468] Rob Shields, *Places on the Margins*, p.61

North and Northernness. Notably, Northern class identities have accrued more visible racial signifiers, as shown in my discussion of the white-working-class body which often represents the conflation of class values with the implicit moral values of extreme whiteness. Like all other aspects of the body's emblematising of Northernness, this racialisation of on-screen representation is an ambivalent process. I have signalled a subversive potential in using the Northern place-myth to set stories of racial antagonism. The region's association with hardship and economic struggle opens the possibility of representing the shared injustices and struggles of navigating precarity; a tendency which runs counter to the wider characterisation of the North as suffering because of multiculturalism. However, film and television still structures these bodies so that the whiteness of Northern masculinity is a normative subjectivity. The racialised body then is primarily still a surface - reformulating distinctions between inside and outside, Northern and non-Northern, and granting symbolic capital accordingly – but it hints at the potential for a contemporary re-working of Northernness as an experience, revealing shared relations *between* bodies.

What, then, about the futurity of the North as imagined through the male body? In demonstrating the dominance of deterioration as a contemporary structure of feeling the thesis joins with scholarship of the Northern landscape in recognising the embeddedness of feelings of pastness and fatalism within the place-myth's representation. The construction of the Northern male body not only participates in this tendency, but becomes a dominant form for its continuation in British culture. Again, without the context of an increasingly residual industrial labour, the narrative and visual presence of failing male bodies operates as a signifier for contemporary Northern identity itself.

Is this to argue, then, that these male bodies are wholly fatalistic figures, inscribing an imagination of North in which decline and waste are pre-determined futures? Such a conclusion would be too bold. Rather, I have demonstrated the ways in which the assumed fatalism of the Northern male body has been appropriated in certain film and television texts, to begin to denaturalise its hegemonic position in the imagination of the North and, consequently, to attempt to construct alternate models of Northernness in terms of gender, class and race. We can see this critical tendency across a variety of the case studies examined; from the depiction of an illogical informationalised labour process in *Sorry We Missed You*, to the respectively feminine and anti-social realist appropriations of the serial crime drama in *Happy Valley* and *Brassic*, to the queering of working-masculinity and the Northern landscape in *God's Own Country*. In each of these texts, masculine bodies are depicted as failing to enact the economy of bodily action associated with the working-class labouring ideal of a past North. However, unique to these texts is the way in which this failure is critically bracketed, by the texts, as the failure of the ideal itself. Characters are shown as identifying themselves as strong Northern men only for the text itself to visually or narratively frame such identification, variously, as a melodramatic misrecognition, a psychopathic pathology, or otherwise destructive behaviour. The failing of contemporary Northern male bodies signals the need to reconsider the symbolic value of labouring masculinity and its hegemony in constructions of Northern identity.

These concluding observations attest to the complexity of the contemporary Northern place-myth and the cultural working through of dominant notions of white working-class masculinity in Britain. Methodologically, the grounding argument of the thesis is the need to first read the male body in the specificity of its individual text to then understand

its wider contribution to the construction of knowledge about the North. The thesis has followed Raymond Williams's understanding of cultural forms as capable of 'mediating' and thus actively structuring social reality, and shares his sense that this is not a particularly straightforward process.[469] My approach to textual analysis, which moves between wider survey and extended close reading, therefore nuances the broader claims made in scholarship about the hegemonic functioning of the North in national culture. Where Northern scholarship continues to posit a clear distinction between a Northern inside and outside (if not geographical, at least ideological), my close analysis of the body shows how these boundaries are also enacted on a more intimate level, and therefore open to more granular contradictions and modifications. Reading the body highlights the complex process involved in the production of hegemonic ideas of gender, class, race and nation.

This methodology has also allowed me to ascertain the coherence of these modalities across distinct genres, modes, and mediums. While I have shown that common structures of feeling are evoked around particular kinds of bodies, I have also demonstrated the complex ways in which they utilise different modes of address. This is also the case for how I understand these modalities as appearing across both film and television. However, while the structure of this thesis suggests the equal participation of these medium, it also suggests that we cannot confuse the continuity between different mediums as meaning that the filmic and televisual constructions of these bodies are identical. As the more granular textual analysis has shown, medium-specific elements of address influence the structures of feeling and the imaginations of agency related to certain male bodies. For instance,

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[469] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 98-99

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Chapter Four asserts that the seriality of the television body formally foregrounds the question of long-term futurity for working-class masculine identity. Ultimately, this thesis has attempted to explicate how film and television produces knowledge and feeling about the North through the body by providing a sensual rhetoric for describing the Northern imaginary. While centred in film and television studies, it is my hope that we might recognise the body's influence in wider social and political discourse. To end this thesis, I want to consider this influence in its most recent iteration.

<u>The Relevance of the Body Beyond 2019: A New Northern Question</u>

Such is the sense of urgency with which the Northern question has reappeared in British social and political debate that the regional place-myth is already laden with a new set of discourses which are not really captured by the films and television programmes discussed in this thesis. These discourses can be broadly grouped in relation to the 'Red Wall' North which has emerged as a vivid metaphor in the aftermath of the 2019 General Election in which several Northern constituencies, former industrial towns and historic strongholds of Labour Party support, voted Conservative. Stretching from the Mersey to the Humber, these areas were characterised in the media, around the time of the election, as the totemic spaces of Britain's ordinary "working people".[470] The Red Wall metaphor represents a newly recognised political agency for the former industrial North, but one which is ambivalently judged. In media and political commentary, the collapse of the Red Wall variously reasserts a residual history of political activism – fighting back, again, against a 'paternalistic' political system which has only served the interests of London[471] - and mourns the loss of the North's historical

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[470] See: Brendan O'Neill, The fall of Labour's 'Red Wall' is a moment to celebrate, *The* Spectator, 13 December 2019, accessed 1st January 2020, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-fall-of-labour-s-red-wall-is-a-moment-to-celebrate>
[471] Ibid.

legacy of trade unionist political action, coherently motivated by the pursuit of work rights.[472] This ambivalent construction of the North's newfound political agency[473] has remained prominent within evaluations of the state of the nation since the start of 2020.[474]

It remains to be seen how, and to what extent, film and television texts produced in Britain over the coming years will register this discursive construction of the Red Wall North. For now, my sense that the Red Wall marks a new structure of feeling, from those articulated in this thesis, is only a speculative impression which lacks any actual texts. However, even as the Red Wall North lays outside of an analysis of film and television, the rhetoric surrounding it does at least hint at the potential future relevance of one of the key observations of this thesis: that embodiment becomes the crucial site for the working out of difference and thus the construction of Northernness as an identity, when the spaces and places of the industrial North have lost their potency as place-images. Although the metaphor of the wall

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[472] See: Josh Halliday, 'Labour's 'red wall' demolished by Tory onslaught', *The Guardian*, 13th December 2019, accessed 1st January 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/dec/13/labours-red-wall-demolished-by-tory-onslaught>

[473] Not only is this agency invoked in post-mortems of the last general election but also in nascent political movements such as the Northern Independence Party, a self-described 'socialist democratic party' which has gained popularity on social media with its demands for total independence of the Northern English counties from both Great Britain and Westminster politics. Playing on stereotypes of a common Northern culture, the NIP promotes itself as returning to a heritage of left-wing and working-class political activism to tackle the 'injustice of the North-South divide' which, as with the ostensible Red Wall voter, the party associates with an apathetic London-based central government.

[474] Of course, there have been politicising references to the North in media and political debate, over the last decade, that occur before the 2019 General Election. We have discussed some of these earlier in the thesis, such as the 'Left Behind' discourses covered in Chapter Three. These discourses influenced other antecedents to the political framing of the Red Wall North, such as the campaign to 'Power Up the North' which gained publicity on the 9th June 2019 when the slogan was given front-page prominence across a number of local newspapers – including the Manchester Evening News, the Yorkshire Post, and Teesside Live – in response to the failures of George Osborne's promised Northern Powerhouse. Nevertheless, the Red Wall North represents the most sustained national attention shown towards the North's contemporary political potential.

reformulates the spatial imaginary of the North-South divide, certain commentators have noted its reproduction of classed and racialised notions of difference. Reflecting in *The Guardian* on the coverage of the Red Wall, Frances Perraudin argues that the metaphor merely reinforces erroneous notions that Labour's working-class support is comprised entirely of white working-class Northerners.[475] For Perraudin, this narrative simultaneously; excludes the significant support the party has had from BAME communities in London and other places of the country for decades; erases the shared history of working-class struggle which has often reached across the North-South divide via collective strike action; and ignores the 'significant overlap in everyday experiences' of the white, minority ethnic and migrant working-classes in all parts of the country.[476] As can be inferred from Perraudin's article, the Red Wall does not divide North from South so much as it does white from non-white working-class identity. Using a metaphor of absolute spatial division, the Red Wall continues the racialisation of the Northern working-class which this thesis has pinpointed as a key contemporary element of the place-myth. While the Red Wall North lies beyond the scope of this study, it nevertheless points to an increasingly common rhetorical elision between geographical and bodily difference. Thus, this thesis's grounding proposition - that the Northern male body must no longer be taken-for-granted, but must instead be read as a form and a site of contested meaning – holds not only a cultural interest but a political urgency.

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[475] Frances Perraudin, 'Labour must not ignore BAME base in rush to rebuild red wall, activists warn', *The Guardian*, 24th January 2020, accessed 6th August 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jan/24/labour-bame-base-rush-rebuild-red-wall>

[476] Ibid.

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