

Tuning Into The Increasing Divide: How The Soundscapes of Contemporary Social Realist Media Works Inform The Brexit Moment

To open the audio-visual content, visit www.tuningintobrexit.com

When we think about what Brexit sounds like, we tend to think of this:



Yet Brexit discussions are not strictly held in political arenas. We often tend to forget the everyday impacts of Brexit and how it threatens to re-shape social stratifications.

Using contemporary social realist films as a corpus, my research investigates how sounds begin to become symbolic of increasing division between the social classes. Specifically, my research asks:

- How does sound (dialogue, diegetic music, sound effects, mixing, soundtracks, noise, etc.) indicate the increasing social stratification in Britain?
- How do these divisions shift in the period between Tony Blair's resignation and the Brexit referendum?
- Is it possible to track changes in class divisions in the United Kingdom in a politically uncertain period?

Three Case Studies Of Increasing Social Division

Silence and the Upper Class

- In the early years, silence was representative of how upper class communities did not know how to talk about increasing difference in wealth.
- But this silence becomes violent as the upper classes strengthen their strongholds over their property rights and their familial claims to wealth. This clip from *Archipelago* (dir. Joanna Hogg, 2010) frames how communication has broken down between the upper classes over wealth differences.



Music and the Middle Class

- Music has been used by the middle classes to assist in re-imagination of space and class status. Using a desired soundtrack can assist a working-class character feel as if they can achieve upward mobility into the upper classes, such as Javed does in this clip from *Blinded By The Light* (dir. Gurinder Chadha, 2019).
- As time goes on, the ability to re-imagine one's class status disappears, and the ability to assert one's middle class status becomes more fraught.



Noise and the Working Class

- While noise can be found in many recent social realist films about the working class, the noise is starting to become deafening, as noises of post-industrial urbanity (e.g. traffic, construction, sirens) the working class from speaking to each other, making their feelings of isolation stronger.
- For an example, listen to the following clip from *I, Daniel Blake* (dir. Ken Loach, 2017).



Key findings:

- Cinematic sound can be used to assess how ongoing political events are affecting people on an everyday basis.
- In each of the case studies in this project, the soundscapes of films made during the development of the Brexit movement **become more harmful** to the character's well-being (either because it encourages a lack of connection and community, prevents them from imagining futurity, or physically silencing them from speaking about issues that threaten them).
- Tracing the soundscapes in British social realist films from the resignation of PM Tony Blair up to the Brexit moment, **the social classes are becoming more divided and thus more isolated from the political and social institutions designed to assist them.**

For more information, contact:
Claire Gray
The University of Edinburgh
c.b.gray@sms.ed.ac.uk