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British 'Hoodie Horror'

Lauren Stephenson

There are several stock landscapes that have become iconic of the horror film at large. The haunted house, the forest wilderness, and claustrophobic suburbia are particularly recognisable as monstrous landscapes, and from *The Haunting* (Wise, 1963) to *Deliverance* (Boorman, 1972) and *The Blair Witch Project* (Myrick and Sanchez, 1999) to *It Follows* (Mitchell, 2014), these landscapes have become so integral to horror as to take on a life of their own within the narrative. The importance of the landscape is explicit in the categorisation of several horror subgenres, exemplified by *home* invasion, *wilderness* horror or haunted *house* narratives, all of which are defined by their setting, and whose setting dictates the conventions and narrative expectations of each film. Similarly, the hoodie horror is defined in part by its use of landscape; the spaces present in hoodie horror are both rural and urban, and draw inspiration from wilderness horror, survival horror and haunted house narratives in order to create a dominant presence which allows the landscape to become a character in its own right. Not only are these landscapes visually powerful, but they are also psychologically and physically affecting. The male bodies within these spaces have intense, symbiotic relationships with their environments, and this chapter will articulate not only how landscape is employed to evince commentaries on class, but how the relationship between men and space speaks to both the history of class conflict in Britain and the contemporary understanding of the male working and middle class bodies.

In her book on the history of Britain's council estates, Lynsey Hanley observes: "to anybody who doesn't live on one (and to some who do) the term 'council estate' means *hell on earth*".ⁱ Having grown up on the Chelmsley Estate on the outskirts of Birmingham, Hanley's work is an enlightening account of the perceived stigma attached to estate living, felt keenly by both residents and outsiders. She continues: "the crushing inevitably [sic] of the saddest lives lived on council estates lends itself to a pejorative shorthand used by the rest of the population".ⁱⁱ It is these 'saddest lives' that have captured the public imagination and the interest of the media, yet garnered little sympathy or empathy from either, leading to 'poverty porn' TV programming and a particularly poisonous class rhetoric which refers to the least

fortunate in British society as a “feral underclass”.ⁱⁱⁱ These representations paint the estate as the habitat which fosters said underclass; a dystopian landscape which has become prolific in British Horror Revival texts.

The council estate plays a prominent role in the modern British class narrative, integral to the defamation and fetishisation of the poor. Its use in film and television is reliant upon the audience’s implicit understanding of the estate as a ‘poor space’ — a site of both financial and moral bankruptcy. The implicit understanding of the estate as an ‘othered’ space, apart from the gentrified spaces of the city or the bucolic rural backdrop of the English countryside, makes for an effective horrific landscape. The contemporary mythology attached to the estate presents a stark, uncomfortable space with a pre-existing narrative of crime, substance abuse and violence. This mythology, Imogen Tyler argues, is a recent development, compounded if not instigated by Tony Blair’s government. She observes: “under New Labour...a powerful consensus emerged that council estates were abject border zones within the state which were not only *liminal* with regard to wider societal norms and values but were actively *antisocial* spaces”.^{iv} This “territorial stigma”, as Tyler puts it, leads to a blanket condemnation of not only the estate landscape, but also the entirety of its population, encouraging a “revolting class discourse that was inscribed upon the bodies of those who lived in these abjectified zones”.^v Hoodie horror, therefore, understands contemporary working-class Britain as a world of devolution. The working-class are characterised by moral decay, which sometimes also manifests as physical decay, and the regression of this demographic is mirrored in the dilapidation of their surroundings. More often than not these landscapes resemble the dystopian worlds of apocalypse narratives, and are set up to emphasise the supposed degeneracy of the space and its residents. The inscription of working-class bodies, both figuratively and literally, is a major preoccupation of the hoodie horror film, as this chapter will demonstrate. However, despite this particular incarnation of classist discourse being a recent development, the classing, and subsequent devaluation, of a landscape and its inhabitants is nothing new. In order to locate this symbiotic relationship between the inscribed male body and its landscape in a specifically British context, one must first investigate past class narratives and realities from which the stereotypes of the working-class body and landscape emerged.

In 1865, Henry Mayhew published an early example of investigative journalism in a collection of three volumes entitled ‘London Labour and the London Poor’, within which he provided a platform for the poor of London to begin telling their own stories to a wider public. However, Mayhew’s work is problematic in its insistence upon identifying the poor by their physical appearance. Within the first volume, ‘London Street Folk’, Mayhew qualifies the ‘folk’ of the title as such: “we must allow that in each of the classes above mentioned [beggars,

prostitutes, street performers, street sellers etc.] there is a greater development of the animal than of the intellectual or moral nature of man, and that they are all more or less distinguished for their high cheek bones and protruding jaws”.^{vi} The implication of this belief is that the poor are inferior not only aesthetically, as suggested by the physical description Mayhew provides, but also intellectually. By likening the ‘street folk’ to the animal, Mayhew effectively removes signifiers of humanity from the poor — they become physically, psychologically and morally deficient. There is no scope here for considering the poor as intelligent, autonomous or morally sound, as such privileges are written off as impossibilities. Instead, the poor are distinguished by “their lax ideas of property — for their general improvidence — their repugnance to continuous labour — their disregard of female honour — their love of cruelty — their pugnacity — and their utter want of religion”.^{vii} Whilst Mayhew does indeed speak of both men and women throughout his tome, his assertions and his case studies are often centred on the male population. His pointed criticisms of the poor’s violence, pugnacity and lack of respect are certainly gendered as male issues. Furthermore, upon his visit to a cheap London lodging house, Mayhew observes that the tenants are all male, and that the majority are under 20 years old. He speaks of his concern regarding the idolisation of such penny dread characters as Jack Sheppard, the tales of whom are read on an evening for the men’s entertainment. As has elsewhere been observed of the penny dreadful, and much later the video nasties scandal, once again the middle class moral guardian troubles himself with the leisure-time consumption habits of the poor, sure that this must be a partial cause of their delinquency.

Throughout his study, Mayhew employs the medical expertise of a Doctor Pritchard, who believes that one can physically identify the “three principal varieties” in mankind, and claims that men, specifically, can be categorised using certain facial features and/or skull shapes. He asserts: “The most civilized races... have a shape of the head which... may be termed oval or elliptical” whilst ‘hunters’ or ‘savages’ possess an “extension forward of the jaws”. Lastly, he speaks of the ‘wanderer’, with his “broad lozenge-shaped” face.^{viii} Quoting from a medical professional such as Pritchard not only lends authority to these assertions, but effectively pathologises the poor as being genetically different, suggesting that poverty is almost predetermined by your genetic makeup. In 1876, Cesare Lombroso would use similar physical identifiers to pathologise the criminal, stating in his book *Criminal Man*: “[b]orn criminals, programmed to do harm, are atavistic reproductions of not only savage men but also the most ferocious carnivores and rodents... these beasts are members of not our species but the species of bloodthirsty beasts”.^{ix} The conflation, therefore, of poor spaces and criminal spaces is a result of the qualification of the poor and the criminally disposed as a species apart. Following this route of thinking, the poor space becomes a habitat, a zone which must be quarantined to prevent a contagion of crime and poverty from spreading to the higher

classes. The language used by Lombroso, Pritchard and Mayhew requires the use of such medicalised terms to articulate the necessity of enforced separation; just as would be necessary were there an outbreak of disease.

By marking the poor as physically different, the disparity in fortunes between richest and poorest is made reassuringly visible for the middle or upper class reader. We can see the same kind of codification applied to the working-class space, a space of darkness and decay juxtaposed with the light and progress of the upper class space. The symbiosis between body and space in class narratives works to distance both from the rest of society. Pritchard, as a medical professional, legitimises the need for solid differentiations between the classes, as Swafford articulates: “By putting the poor on display, late-Victorian slum narratives work to solidify and naturalize the boundaries of class”.^x In this way, the paternalism for which Mayhew has been commended is no less damaging than the condemned discourse used by the Blair government over a century later, encouraging the public to accept the inevitability of poverty and poor behaviour within certain British landscapes. Mayhew’s London slums have made way for the modern ‘sink estate’, yet the perception of these spaces, and the rhetoric that surrounds them, remains markedly unchanged. All of the concerns communicated in Mayhew’s work remain the subject of political debate to this day. He notes the poor quality of the education afforded to poor areas, the lack of opportunity, and fears that some ‘vagrants’ may be taking advantage of, and abusing, the Ward house system — a ‘benefit’ that was supposed to support men whilst they searched for work. Mayhew, for all his derogatory observations and beliefs, does recognise these failings to be, at least in part, the responsibility of the state and the higher classes.

Mayhew could therefore be considered as a social realist long before the cinematic movement came to be. His attempt to shed light on the world of London’s poor is as tonally misguided and voyeuristic as the class tourism and spectacle Andrew Higson recognises within certain social realist films.^{xi} The hoodie horror film, taking its lead from the widely revered social realist tradition, exemplifies the long-standing British fascination with, and fear of, working-class spaces and stories. The hoodie horror is in many ways reminiscent of the Victorian slum narrative, both in its treatment of its subject, and in the context which seemingly inspired it. Both hoodie horror and the slum narrative found popularity during a time of economic insecurity and societal shift, both highlighting concerns around the urban poor. As Kevin Swafford observes of the slum narrative:

“we might speculate that as [Victorian] Britain faced the horizon and reality of economic decline... The narrative focus upon empire, the condition of the working-class, slum life, and, to some extent, full-scale class conflict

served a variety of social and historical purposes, not the least of which was to provide imaginary and symbolic solutions to real social problems in ways that were palatable and reassuring to the status quo".^{xii}

This claim highlights the need to consider the hoodie horror film not just as coincidentally similar to the slum narrative, but as part of a cyclical historical phenomenon: the attempt to work through and respond to economic crises via an examination of contemporary social conflicts. As Britain lingered on the precipice of the 2008 financial crash, hoodie horror gained momentum (*Eden Lake* (Watkins, 2008) kick-started the cycle, fully realising themes present in the earlier *The Great Ecstasy of Robert Carmichael* (Clay, 2005) and was released just months after the crash was first reported in 2008). In light of Swafford's observation, the hoodie horror increasingly appears to be a contemporary equivalent to the slum narrative, affirming the necessity of class hierarchy whilst appearing to offer solutions in the form of incarceration or murder. The narrative then becomes a tool for misdirection, encouraging the audience to direct their vitriol towards the lower end of the class spectrum, and away from those culpable for the country's financial misfortune. It would be convenient to condemn the hoodie horror as politically sanctioned exploitation of the working-class, and investigate the cycle no further. However, this approach denies the hoodie horror its importance as artefact, and would continue down a path of reactionary criticism which devalues horror texts based purely upon their disreputability amongst cinephiles and high-brow intellectuals, preventing a rigorous interrogation of the films and of the world they reflect. Instead, this chapter seeks to situate the working-class landscape and its inscribed bodies within a larger narrative of class conflict, of which the slum narrative is only a small part.

In the interim between the First and Second World Wars, providing a better standard of living for those in the slums was prioritised, and the need for housing became even greater when almost 4 million homes were lost to the bombs between 1939 and 1945.^{xiii} Throughout the first half of the twentieth century the slums were gradually cleared. However, in the early twenty-first century, the attitude towards and representations of council housing are scarcely different to the nineteenth century portrayals of the slums; the working-class landscape today, however dissimilar in appearance it may be, still inspires the same fascination and horror as the Victorian slums. The council estate also serves as an unavoidable, unwelcome reminder of the enormous chasm between the country's richest and its poorest. The hoodie narrative exposes both fear and guilt on behalf of the state and those further up the class ladder, whose wilful or accidental perpetuation of the class structure often precedes working-class vengeance. The hoodie character has inherited Mayhew's faceless, transient characterisation and the estate, itself a strange place, enables the hoodie to remain strange to the observer. In his criticism of modern life, David B. Clarke states: "the stranger...was immediately

proximate in *physical* space yet distant in *social* space... [this] gave rise to a new kind of virtual or spectral presence...characteristic of the stranger".^{xiv} On the council estate, where the majority of the population is transient, the tenants can indeed seem spectral and elusive. There can be hundreds of tenants within a single tower block, but with little communal space and no local amenities, the landscape dictates an insular and isolated existence.

Nowhere is the essence of Clarke's statement captured as successfully as it is within Ciaran Foy's *Citadel* (2012). Whilst our protagonist Tommy is not the only resident of his estate, the spaces he traverses are so empty, and his exchanges with others so devoid of connection or emotion, that one could be forgiven for thinking that the estate was a post-apocalyptic landscape. Any genuine, human connection Tommy experiences with another person is fleeting and often ends in death, an extreme allegory for the challenge of sustaining meaningful relationships within such an isolated and isolating landscape. Conditions being as they are, it is simpler and less traumatic to remain strangers to each other. Hoodie horrors such as *Citadel*, *Comedown* (Huda, 2012) or *Community* (Ford, 2012) allege that the state has exercised a manipulative control over working-class bodies, using the estate space as a kind of quarantine zone for the necessary, but abject, lower classes. Tommy's estate, whilst largely unoccupied and left to rot, is denied demolition or rejuvenation. Instead, the state persists in housing vulnerable people, such as Tommy and his newborn child, in buildings that are not fit for the purpose. In *Community*, we see an entire estate's population supporting and perpetuating a drug ring, with the only interference coming from liberal filmmakers who are easily disposed of. State surveillance in this instance is conspicuously absent, as though the estate has become an island, governed by its own and abandoned by the institutional structures that originally created it. The estate has become a space which stunts social mobility and keeps the working-class firmly at the bottom of the ladder, and the powers that be advocate the preservation of this landscape precisely because it *encourages* crime and moral bankruptcy. The estate landscape allows the state to justify its vilification of the working-class, and prevents the bottom from falling out of Britain's entrenched class hierarchy.

Furthermore, whatever world there may be outside of the estate is completely unknown and unacknowledged. There is no discernible relationship between the estate and the outside world, as close as it may be, and this is a pattern which continues across many hoodie horror texts. The estate is the perfect tool to exemplify this paradox, being a space which is so often in immediate proximity to middle class communities, and yet always apart from them. The boundaries between these classed spaces are permeable, but — in hoodie horror at least — rarely crossed. In literal terms, the distance between the estate and what surrounds it can be a matter of metres, but within hoodie horror the estate functions in much the same way as the Nostromo in *Alien* (Scott, 1979) or Summerisle in *The Wicker Man* (Hardy, 1973) Once the

threshold is crossed, the protagonists become aware that they do not belong, finding themselves trapped within the confines of the estate. Jack Halberstam argues that: "skin houses the body and it is figured in the Gothic as the ultimate boundary... slowly but surely the outside becomes the inside and the hide no longer conceals or contains, it offers itself up as text, as body, as monster".^{xv} In the hoodie horror film, not only can this analysis be applied to literal, physical skin, but can be further put to use in analysing the estate. As a body of class significance itself, the perimeters of the estate can be imagined as the skin to which Halberstam refers. As with the skin on the human body, the 'skin' of the estate is made up of several layers of meaning. For example, the estate in *Community* has multiple literal and figurative boundaries. A road runs parallel to the estate, separating it from the nearest town and the surrounding countryside, and inside of that, a band of woodland also forms a barrier. The estate has also gained a fearful reputation of mythological proportions which surrounds and isolates it from the larger landscape. Finally, the patchwork of fences and garages on the periphery of the estate adds yet another layer to the skin which isolates the estate as a cohesive body from the outside world.

This 'ultimate boundary' between two differently codified spaces is constantly penetrated by those who leave the estate, and those who enter it (usually uninvited). This constant movement and violation of the estate's skin weakens it, threatens to destroy it, making it redundant in containing or concealing what is within. The estate's perimeters, therefore, create the monster, which serves as a constant reminder of the fragility of a boundary as exposed and permeable as skin. It is the potential of the skin to fail in its duties that gives it its monstrous status. The estate's potential to allow the working-class beyond its boundaries, or failure to keep them within, creates a monstrous body. The idea of multiple boundaries can also allude to the idea of the landscape and its boundaries being sutured together. *Community* director Jason Ford noted himself that his intention for the film was to create "a Frankenstein picture about modern day Frankenstein monsters".^{xvi} The act of suturing in the literal sense is a mainstay of horror, and the image of abstract pieces being brought together to form a monstrous whole has been reworked time and again, most notoriously for the antagonists of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974) and *The Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991). In hoodie horror, the suturing does indeed happen to human bodies, as we will later explore, but the suturing of the estate is equally evident. Considering *Community* or *Comedown* and their estate landscapes, each is notable for its haphazard, chaotic appearance. The various buildings are distinctly council-built in style, and yet the sum of the parts is not aesthetically cohesive — different heights and age of buildings affords the impression of disparate parts being pulled or sutured together. This suturing also suggests that the isolation of the estate, and its incompatibility with the world around it, has

developed over time, with greater, newer boundaries joining with the old. In the broader, more figurative idea of the cinematic suture, as explored by Kaja Silverman, the audience become the suture, effectively stitching themselves into a subject position within films where they, as subject, do not exist.^{xvii} This encourages the audience to forget the camera's presence and suspends the artificiality of the cinematic experience. The meaning is made at the joining of the two disparate parts, each needs the other to exist in interpretation. Unpacking this idea with regard to the sutured landscape of the council estate, the intruder is therefore characterised as suture — inserting themselves into the signifying space and giving themselves meaning. As Silverman notes, however, this pursuit of meaning comes at the expense of being.^{xviii} What it was to 'be' middle class outside of the signifying space ceases to matter, and the middle class suture invariably ceases to exist inside of the estate.

The middle class visitors to estates in *Harry Brown* (Barber, 2009), *Community* and *Attack the Block* (Cornish, 2011) find themselves in a place where their middle class identities, and the perceived privileges and wealth that come along with them, crumble or are punctured and dismantled, along with their bodies and other signifiers of their status. The middle class protagonist does not belong in the working-class landscape, and the structures and expectations that would protect them elsewhere were abandoned at the threshold to this unheimlich space. Life appears to lose its value — there is very little to attribute value to the working-class body here, and the middle class body, particularly to *Community's* drug-addled antagonists, is merely a commodity. Often the value of the middle class male body is perceived as superficial and external to the body itself — denoted by a nice car, an expensive video camera, or designer sunglasses, all of which take on a kind of phallic resonance in the signification of power and maleness. The working-class man is seen to covet these possessions far more than the middle class body itself. We therefore witness a self-inflicted devaluing of middle class life and the middle class body in the pursuit of a consumer driven image of middle classness.

In her response to the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017, Hanley acknowledged that the architecture itself has the symbolic power to erode individual identity to such an extent that class identifiers become irrelevant. Inhabiting space within these structures is enough to invite indifference and contempt from the state and the wider public. In articulating the particular stigma attached to social housing architecture, and how it puts residents in danger, Hanley observes: "It's the perception of social housing, particularly high-rise, as being 'for poor people' that leads to the maltreatment of residents, *regardless of their class or income*".^{xix} This statement, when considered in conjunction with the estate's characterisation in hoodie horror, paints a picture of a landscape so tainted by public perception and state neglect, that it poses a danger to any and all within that landscape, working-class or middle class, employed or

unemployed, resident or non-resident. The tower block, in particular, is a central focal point in many hoodie horror narratives; perhaps precisely because of how powerfully it signifies class in the public imagination.

As a setting for hoodie horror, the tower block is a gothic gift; floor upon floor of endless corridors and identical flats, mimicking the anxiety-inducing characteristics of the labyrinth. The unstable, unusual and disturbing behaviour of residents of the estate in hoodie horror support Hanley's concern that the estate "has insanity designed into it".^{xx} As Hanley notes, the standard design of council-owned housing works to instantly codify the building as 'council' and this design typically relies on row upon row of uniform houses encircling a brutalist tower block. The uniformity of such designs creates a landscape where, to the outsider at least, each street, house and corridor can look the same. Council estate architecture, therefore, is an ideal contemporary gothic landscape, an urban labyrinth where tales of violence and entrapment reside. Like the trope of the haunted castle, the tower block is visually imposing, and its influence and mythology extend beyond its walls, achieving a notoriety that keeps most intruders at bay. Additionally, many of these buildings are in a state of disrepair, and many await an uncertain future as the effects of gentrification seep into city estates. In both *Comedown* and *Tower Block* (Nunn & Thompson, 2012), the shadow of gentrification is directly addressed, with each narrative making a centre point of a condemned tower block, bought up by developers and destined to become middle class space. These reclaimed spaces quite literally throw shadows over the estates below, a visual metaphor for the so-called regeneration of working-class space, which succeeds in driving out working-class residents and moving in the middle classes. As once notorious estates, such as the Thamesmead, are bought up to become artist's housing, or apartments for young professionals, the obsolescence of the working-class space seems increasingly possible. Once again, the estate and its residents are seen only as commodities, as potential business ventures, compounding the resonance of such spaces being labelled 'brutalist'. Owen Hatherley suggests: "the remnants of brutalism are in the popular imagination precisely what the old slums always were — places of crime and intrigue, places where you could easily get lost, where strange people do strange things, *and from whence revolt and resistance might just emerge*".^{xxi} It is this fear of revolt and resistance which we see exaggerated and allegorised in hoodie horror.

Tower Block uses the brutalist landscape to particularly claustrophobic effect. The last remaining residents of a condemned block, due to be demolished to make way for a gentrified middle class space, are targeted by a lone sniper. It transpires that the sniper is the father of a teenage boy, murdered in the block a year previous. The residents did not act to help the boy, and as punishment find themselves trapped on the top floor, imprisoned in the space that

is supposed to be their home. This entrapment is particularly lethal for the men of the block, who desperately try to salvage some of their tough, fearless exterior as the prospect of death edges ever closer. Kurtis, played by hoodie horror regular Jack O'Connell (*Eden Lake*, *Harry Brown*), is a particularly fascinating character in this regard. Initially performing the same thuggish, alpha male role as O'Connell had undertaken for Brett in *Eden Lake*, Kurtis' posturing does eventually erode to reveal a moral code and a vulnerability that has long been disguised under a veneer of hostility. This erosion of Kurtis' masculine performance happens in synchronisation with his physical mutilation and alongside the gradual destruction of the block itself. The destruction of the block is inextricably linked with the male characters' corporeal destruction. Kurtis' adaptation, or at the very least acceptance, of the changing balance of power, is reflective of R.W. Connell's assertion that "when the conditions for the defence of patriarchy change, the bases for the dominance of a particular masculinity are eroded".^{xxii} Where Kurtis' previous persona was built upon a delicate patriarchal structure, internal to the block, which he upheld as alpha, his adaptation is required when an external patriarchal force destabilises the block's hierarchy. That the block was due for demolition by the external forces of state and big business suggests that even without the threat of the sniper, Kurtis' masculinity would have been eroded eventually as the parameters of his power were forcibly destroyed by external patriarchal structures. This allegorically speaks to a prior erosion of masculine roles, identified by Andrew Spicer in social realist texts of the late 20th century: "[the men's] male confidence is eroded because they lack the traditional strengths of working-class masculinity: a secure place as the principal breadwinner of the family, and comradeship with mates at work or in a union".^{xxiii} A generation on, Kurtis has replaced the security of breadwinning with the security of superior positioning within a criminal hierarchy, and replaced mates with henchmen, which in and of itself represents the dissolution of meaningful relationships in the working-class male sphere.

O'Connell's form for playing working-class, roguish characters across a wide range of British film and TV marks him as a pivotal character from the film's outset — his brand of working-class masculinity suggests a tenacity and pragmatism that makes him a likely candidate for survival. As the siege begins, Kurtis cuts a desperately unlikeable character. His swagger and notoriety as the block's drug dealer marks him as dangerous and unpredictable. When he discovers that Mark and Gary, two of his associates, are responsible for the death of the sniper's son he exacts his own brand of vigilante justice. It is unclear whether this justice is meted out on the behalf of their victim, or Kurtis himself, who is angered that his henchmen have endangered him by acting without his authorisation. Kurtis challenges Mark, who is already suffering with a gunshot wound to the leg, to fight him — a cruel and deliberate move by Kurtis to make a fool of Mark and reassert his authority. The scene ends with Kurtis quite

calmly throwing both Gary and Mark into the sniper's line of fire, apparently unaffected by the violence he is a party to. Many of the characters in estate-based hoodie horrors seem to have a similar blasé attitude to violence, and it is represented as an inevitable consequence of an environment whose hierarchies and profits grow from gang activity and the drug industry. Not only this, but it suggests that a wider violence in the form of state negligence and police brutality hardens estate residents to what would otherwise be exceptional, violent circumstances. During the narrative, Kurtis effectively moves from one realm of violence to another, and it is his pragmatic attitude to the extremity of his existence that ultimately enables him to persevere when under attack. As he descends from the top of the block to reach salvation on the ground, his returning humanity and the revelation of his sensitivities become more pronounced. The correlation between Kurt's isolation from wider society and his antisocial behaviour is clearly drawn. Moreover, his descent represents a deflation of ego, and a realisation that he does not hold the power he had assumed prior to the attack. In a landscape that is not only brutalist in aesthetic but in practice, Kurtis has always been under attack in one way or another — the landscape has conditioned him to survive an existence defined by violence. Perhaps it is only his displacement from the top of the hierarchy of violence that will provide an escape from it.

The filmmakers' fascination with the architecture of council estates is evident in that, even in the few hoodie horror films where the hoodies become the victims of greater threats (aliens, serial killers) the estate is still the prevailing setting for the murderous intentions of the antagonists. The estate's labyrinthine and disorienting nature, particularly potent for those who come into the estate from outside, physically represents the confused, perhaps unstable, psychology of the characters within it, borrowing from a trend which Andrew Higson recognised within 'kitchen sink' films (*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Reisz, 1960), *A Taste of Honey* (Richardson, 1961) etc.): "place becomes a signifier of character, a metaphor for the state of mind of the protagonists, in the well-worn conventions of the naturalist tradition".^{xxiv} However, where Higson identified the gaze in social realism to be "the sympathetic gaze of the bourgeoisie",^{xxv} the estate and its inhabitants in hoodie horror are only occasionally regarded with any sympathy, and only afforded it when the threat they pose has been superseded by a greater one. The gaze here shows not just patronisation but outright contempt towards the working-class which was not present in its 'kitchen sink' predecessor. Walker observes: "the hoodie horrors were often discussed by the press as lacking a sympathetic outlook for their protagonists",^{xxvi} a feature which stands in stark contrast to the perceived sympathetic nature of social realism. Hoodie horrors present the council estate as a concealed, identifiable environment, even when it is not central to the narrative, towards which moral outrage and vitriol can be directed. Even in the suburban-set

Cherry Tree Lane (Williams, 2010) the spectre of the estate is arguably ever-present; its existence insinuated in the protagonists' concerns about local drug dealing and by the feature on a local news programme, blaring from the couple's television, in connection with anti-social behaviour. Neither assumption about the space is flattering, but reinforces the idea of the estate as the locus of the horrific. However, for many hoodies, the estate is also the site of their redemption, and so the estate remains ambiguous in its position in much the same way as the films do, moving backwards and forwards between transformative space and destructive power.

As with Kurtis in *Tower Block*, the landscape is often seen as an extension of, or contributor to, the hoodie's masculine power and identity. For example, within the perimeters of a social housing estate, there are accepted hierarchies of authority which would not hold sway in the world outside of this particular landscape. This link between a working-class man's power and his landscape is articulated most often by showing many working-class characters exclusively within the boundaries of their estate (*Community*, *Comedown*, *Attack The Block* and *Citadel*). In several of these films, if working-class men are seen in any other environment, they are transformed from a leader to a marginalised and mocked individual, making their perceived authority conditional upon their environment. Jason Ford's *Community* is particularly provocative in its representation of the hoodie and the estate; seemingly drawing inspiration from *Deliverance* and its hoodie horror predecessor *Eden Lake*, with its feral, backwoods dwelling antagonists, and *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960) with its cross-dressing character 'Auntie', as well as fitting neatly into the hoodie horror cycle. The residents of the Draymen estate are similar in characterisation to what Bernice M. Murphy calls "the bad backwoods family".^{xxvii} Predominantly male (there is a conspicuous absence of female children) and completely self-sustaining thanks to a successful marijuana industry, the community in question is an insular and hostile one. To quote Murphy once more, "[t]hey survive, but at the cost of their humanity".^{xxviii} The estate in this instance is characterised more as a habitat than housing: a place that the animalistic and inhuman community have made their home. The estate is the culmination of familiar, anxiety-inducing stereotypes which have been consistently propagated by the media since the turn of the century. It is therefore pertinent to discuss how the bleak characterisation of the Draymen estate influences the identity of its male inhabitants, as well as exploring the possibility of gendering the estate landscape as male itself.

Community opens with some amateur interview footage, within which members of the public speak about the estate with a sense of morbid fascination, echoing the American horror hit *The Blair Witch Project*. Their responses serve to mythologise life on the estate — none of the interviewees have visited Draymen, nor do they know the people who live there, their

stories are based purely on speculation and rumour, and mimic the discourse surrounding class and its signifiers. The filmmakers ask their participants; “would you mind answering some questions about the Draymen Estate?” The replies vary in nature, from banal to dramatic, from bickering over the existence of the estate to tales of kidnap and murder. Again, the film borrows from outsiders’ perceptions and misconceptions to create the estate itself. The buildings are in a state of disrepair, there are items of furniture abandoned in gardens, and several windows are boarded up. The houses are stained with damp and visibly decaying. Every view of them is obscured by fences, garages and wire mesh, providing one of several visually imposed barriers to the outside world. The initial shots of the estate communicate an oppressive, confining, claustrophobic space within. Throughout the film, the recurring motif of aliens, seen in graffiti and on children’s clothing, again solidifies the impression that the estate and its residents are somehow unknowable and strange to outsiders. This practice of ‘tagging’ provides a nod to the earlier hoodies who used the garment to prevent identification whilst spray painting, and represents a similar reclamation of public space by the working-classes. It also gives the estate an irreverent, post-apocalyptic feel, recalling the graffiti that litters the dystopian spaces of *The Walking Dead* (Darabont, 2010- present) or *Stake Land* (Mickle, 2010). More directly linked to British trauma, the graffiti serves as a warning to outsiders not to approach, recalling the red cross on the doors of plague victims to prevent contagion. This echoes the pathologisation of the poor by Mayhew and Lombroso, and encourages the idea that this poor population have to be contained or quarantined. However, to some degree, the residents of the estate actively encourage a continued isolation from the outside world. Whilst they may not have originally chosen to be placed in class quarantine, Draymen’s men, in particular, have used their alienation to their advantage, creating a microcosm unfettered by social expectation or police interference.

The youngest boys on the estate are pre-pubescent — and with a period of physical development imminent, have begun to train themselves to go into the estate’s main line of business; farming marijuana and using the bodies of intruders as a fertiliser to give the product a unique potency. They are preparing to graduate to murder by torturing and killing smaller animals, establishing with glee their superiority over smaller creatures and their ability to destroy others’ bodies. Unlike several other hoodie horrors, which make a playground the focal point of the estate (*Attack the Block*, *The Disappeared* (Kevorkian, 2008)), there is a conspicuous absence of any such childhood iconography here. Instead of adhering to common ideals of childhood and youth, the boys and young men on the estate develop along a similar curve to an alpha predator. While young, they are encouraged to hone their killing skills on small prey — as they grow, their prey gets bigger until, as young adults, their prey becomes other people. The young adult men are lean and muscular in order to hunt effectively,

whilst the older men are slower, larger, on account of their backseat role in the 'hunting' process. The animalistic nature of these characters is compounded by the way that they communicate through guttural screams rather than using language. The 'urban jungle' environment of the estate bleeds into the surrounding woods, suggesting a crucial slippage from civilised space to wild space, from human to animal. Their primitive behaviour is contrasted with middle-class filmmaker Will, whose naivety and clean-cut appearance eventually makes him ideal prey. The children first appear as the filmmakers arrive at the estate — their approach is not seen or heard, suggesting a predatory pursuit, and alluding to the ability they possess to navigate the estate unseen. Despite a clear intellectual division between the adult visitors and the children, it becomes apparent that the children have control of the situation, and skilfully manipulate Will and Isabelle to keep them inside the parameters of the estate, their knowledge of and relationship with the estate overwrites the apparent physical and social disadvantages.

Despite the all-encompassing, and overwhelmingly negative influence of the estate, it does privilege the men on it with the superior knowledge of its 'body' which they then utilise to hunt and/or survive. In some cases, the estate and the male bodies within it begin to resemble each other in discreet ways. Graffiti on the walls match images on the men's clothing and bodies (tattoos) and the physical uncleanliness, aging and deterioration of the men's bodies is mirrored in the dilapidation of their surroundings, suggesting that the men's relationship with the estate has transcended psychogeographical bounds and become physically affecting. The close relationship these representations suggest gives the impression that these landscapes belong more to the men on them than any overarching authority. Directly contrasting with this characterisation is Will. Dressed in a casual shirt and beanie hat, he has the stereotypical look of a college student, which again is a privilege we assume the estate's residents have not experienced (with the exception of Auntie, we never see any of the characters leave the estate, and doubt that they are ever given the opportunity to leave). He is, as Murphy suggests, a typical victim from a backwoods horror — white, middle class, suburban.^{xxix} This appearance does not last long, however, as once the sun begins to set the young, feral men come out to hunt, and Will's body is beaten and brutalised. His status does little to protect him from his torture, in fact it only guarantees it, and throughout the latter half of the film, the residents of the estate take great pleasure in destroying Will's body, which is recognised as representative of the middle-class social body at large. In this way, *Community* subverts the use of the de-individualising logic ordinarily targeted at the working-class, refocusing the same irrational and poisonous disregard towards the middle classes.

Paradoxically, despite the ownership that the films' men exert over 'their' estate, the very premise of the social housing estate suggests lack of ownership on behalf of the tenants.

Therefore, this sense of ownership is no more than a performance, and yet it is a performance that convincingly threatens middle class characters. The residents of the estate are aware of the lack of legitimate ownership, and in some ways their abuse of the estate's body, as a state-owned space, mirrors the destruction of Will's middle class body, a rejection of middle class values such as home ownership, and a rejection of what social housing has become. In this way, they exert ownership over their situation, but not the landscape itself, a characteristic often associated with survival horror, within which the landscape seems to conspire against the protagonist and take on a life of its own. Compounding the sense that the estate has its own sense of motive, the middle class body politic do not control the landscape either, bringing us back to the conclusion that this particular estate has transcended human ownership and has become a vast, unwieldy space that can no more be controlled than the ocean in *Jaws* (Spielberg, 1975) or the forests in *Long Weekend* (Eggleston, 1978).

It stands to reason, then, that in hoodie horror the working-class man is equally as likely to be under threat within the estate landscape as the middle class man. Films such as *Comedown*, *The Disappeared* and *Attack the Block* create spectacle from the brutalised working-class body. *Attack the Block* is an anomaly here, given that its narrative is the only one to feature an external, as opposed to internal, threat to the estate and the working-class (physical and social) body. This changes the dynamic between the landscape and the working-class body considerably. With the estate under attack, it is no longer envisioned as a horrific landscape, but rather as a valued *home*, endangered by the presence of external forces. In this way, *Attack the Block* is a home invasion narrative on an unusually large scale, and it provides rare glimpses of the estate as a home, with all the accompanying connotations of comfort, family and security.

The block of the title can be understood as a patriarchal figure within the film, with a power and authority greater than the petty criminals we are introduced to at the film's opening. Several shots place the gang in the foreground, with the block towering behind them, illustrating the influence the block has upon them. In lieu of father figures, who are conspicuously absent throughout the film, the block represents shelter, familiarity and constancy. When the attack on the block threatens to destroy it and all it provides, the boys respond by taking on the outside force with improvised weapons and the type of heroism that would not be out of place in *The Goonies* (Donner, 1985) or *Home Alone* (Columbus, 1990) two films which also see children attempting to protect the familial home, in the absence of parental figures. Again, as with the aforementioned films, it is only the young men of the gang who can defeat the evil — police are shown to be ineffectual, and the presence of any other adult authority is scarce to non-existent. In the absence of any assistance from a wider community, the gang effectively shed the limitations and low expectations that are pushed

upon them, both by other characters and the audience themselves. In their desire to protect the block, they discover a potential for intelligence and bravery that had not been evident in their previous behaviour associated with petty crime and drug culture.

Nevertheless, it is possible that the affection and loyalty the gang feel towards the block is misplaced. The tower stands as an emblem for the failed paternalism of the welfare system, and in this way contributes to the trend of failed father figures within hoodie horror. When analysed more closely, the relationship between the block and the gang takes on a darker tone. The aforementioned shots of the gang and their block reveal the real power dynamics within the estate, suggesting that the state-owned building possesses far more power and control than either the young gang or the estate's fearsome resident drug lord. As Foucault would suggest, the tower represents: "an omnipresent and omniscient power that subdivides itself in a regular, uninterrupted way even to the ultimate determination of the individual, of what characterizes him, of what belongs to him, *of what happens to him*".^{xxx} It is this environment that seems to be encouraging the boys into a life of crime. It is also the environment which fosters a thriving drug culture, a culture that the boys are in danger of being engulfed by. The patriarchal influence of the block is damaging to the boys, and yet it also offers them a semblance of stability. Importantly, this problematic characterisation of the block communicates the plight of those relying on the failed paternalism of the welfare system in Britain — the block offers both sanctuary and condemnation.

The films discussed here exemplify the inherent Gothic qualities of not only the classed space, but the British relationship with, and perception of, class itself. In British hoodie horror cinema, landscapes are constantly, and noticeably, shaping, influencing and endangering characters and their bodies. The working-class body is seen as both indebted to, and entrapped by, the landscape around it, a paradox that mirrors the one surrounding the cycle itself as it treads the line between exploitation and exploration of the British class system. The symbiotic relationship between body and landscape comes to represent the long-standing treatment of the British working class as 'other' – this relationship facilitates moral and behavioural codes that oftentimes stand in direct opposition to the supposed societal norm. For the British horror filmmaker, these landscapes have become as iconically bleak and exceptionally dangerous as the moors at night or the abandoned house on the hill. These spaces are part of the fabric of British society and British identity, and can be found in multiplicity in any town or city countrywide. It is the proximity of these spaces and bodies to everyday that resonates so profoundly within the films. This chapter locates the hoodie horror cycle in a liminal space somewhere between exploitation and exploration, between social condemnation and social commentary, which seems appropriate given the extensive discussion of boundaries, borders and liminality throughout this chapter. Hoodie horror is in

good company -- many of the films considered as influential texts throughout the thesis also reside somewhere on this fragile boundary between art and excess. *The Wicker Man*, *Peeping Tom* (Powell, 1960) and many of their contemporaries presented extreme, exploitative imagery which has, at various times, overshadowed the insidious and incisive commentaries which underpin their narratives. Whilst hoodie horror does not perhaps match the iconic, canonical nature of these films, they do stand as important artefacts of a country struggling with austerity and a confused political identity in the early years of the new millennium. Hoodie horror has captured a very specific moment, not only within British society but with filmmaking history itself. Even as new folk devils appear to give hoodies a rest from the limelight, one can comfortably predict, having looked back across centuries of class conflict and its cinematic representation, that it will not be so long before the working class has reinvented itself and reappeared, like any good monster, within the realm of the British horror film, to terrorise the comfortable middle classes once more.

Notes

- ⁱ Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: An Intimate History* (New Edition.), (London: Granta Books, 2012), 5.
- ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, 8.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ken Clarke, 'Punish the feral rioters, but address our social deficit too', *The Guardian*, (05/09/11).
- ^{iv} Imogen Tyler, *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*, (London: Zed Books, 2013), 160.
- ^v *Ibid*, 162.
- ^{vi} Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: The Condition and Earnings of Those That Will Work, Cannot Work, and Will not Work*, (London: Charles Griffin & Co. 1865), 4-5.
- ^{vii} *Ibid*, 4-5.
- ^{viii} Pritchard in Mayhew, 3.
- ^{ix} Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, (5th edition), (London: Duke University Press, 2006), 348.
- ^x Kevin Swafford, *Class in Late-Victorian Britain: The Narrative Concern with Social Hierarchy and its Representation*, (New York: Cambria Press, 2007), 20.
- ^{xi} Andrew Higson, *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema*, (London: Cassell, 1996), 143-50.
- ^{xii} Swafford, *Class in Late Victorian Britain*, 19-20.
- ^{xiii} Hanley, *Estates*, 51.
- ^{xiv} David B. Clarke, 'Introduction: Previewing the Cinematic City' in David B. Clarke (ed.). *The Cinematic City*, (London: Routledge, 1997), 4.
- ^{xv} Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, (London: Duke University Press, 1995), 7.
- ^{xvi} Jason Ford in M.J. Simpson, 'Interview: Jason Ford', *M.J. Simpson: film reviews and interviews*. (14/03/13). <http://mjsimpson-films.blogspot.co.uk/2013/03/interview-jason-ford.html>. [accessed 06/07/18].
- ^{xvii} Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).
- ^{xviii} *Ibid*.
- ^{xix} Lynsey Hanley, 'Look at Grenfell Tower and see the terrible price of Britain's inequality', *The Guardian*, (16/06/17). <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jun/16/grenfell-tower-price-britain-inequality-high-rise>. [accessed 17/06/18].
- ^{xx} Hanley, *Estates*, 44.
- ^{xxi} Owen Hatherley, *Militant Modernism*, (Winchester: Zero Books, 2008), 42.
- ^{xxii} R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (2nd edition), (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 77.
- ^{xxiii} Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 188.
- ^{xxiv} Higson, *Dissolving Views*, 134.
- ^{xxv} *Ibid*, 150.
- ^{xxvi} Johnny Walker, *Contemporary British Horror Cinema: Industry, Genre and Society*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 87.
- ^{xxvii} Bernice M. Murphy, *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture: Backwoods Horror and Terror in the Wilderness*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 149.
- ^{xxviii} *Ibid*, 149-50.
- ^{xxix} *Ibid*, 150.
- ^{xxx} Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (London: Penguin, 1991), 197.

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Filmography

- A Taste of Honey* (dir. Tony Richardson, 1961)
- Alien* (dir. Ridley Scott, 1979)
- Attack the Block* (dir. Joe Cornish, 2011)
- The Blair Witch Project* (dir. Eduardo Sanchez and Daniel Myrick, 1999)

Candyman (dir. Bernard Rose, 1992)
Cherry Tree Lane (dir. Paul Andrew Williams, 2010)
Citadel (dir. Ciaran Foy, 2012)
A Clockwork Orange (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1971)
Comedown (dir. Menhaj Huda, 2012)
Community (dir. Jason Ford, 2012)
Deliverance (dir. John Boorman, 1972)
The Disappeared (dir. Johnny Kevorkian, 2008)
Eden Lake (dir. James Watkins, 2008)
The Goonies (dir. Richard Donner, 1985)
The Great Ecstasy of Robert Carmichael (dir. Thomas Clay, 2005)
Harry Brown (dir. Daniel Barber, 2009)
The Haunting (dir. Robert Wise, 1963)
Home Alone (dir. Christopher Columbus, 1990)
It Follows (dir. David Robert Mitchell, 2014)
Jaws (dir. Steven Spielberg, 1975)
Long Weekend (dir. Colin Egglestone, 1978)
Peeping Tom (dir. Michael Powell, 1960)
Psycho (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1960)
Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (dir. Karel Reisz, 1960)
The Silence of the Lambs (dir. Jonathan Demme, 1991)
Stake Land (dir. Jim Mickle, 2010)
The Texas Chain Saw Massacre (dir. Tobe Hooper, 1974)
Tower Block (dir. James Nunn & Ronnie Thompson, 2012)
Urban Ghost Story (dir. Genevieve Jolliffe, 1998)
The Walking Dead (Creator: Frank Darabont, 2010 - present)
The Wicker Man (dir. Robin Hardy, 1973)