

‘Hate the world, it’s so romantic’:  
The Function of Song in Recent British Football  
Hooligan Film (1995-2009)

IGNACIO RAMOS GAY

Universidad de Valencia

Ignacio.Ramos@uv.es

This article argues that popular music in contemporary British hooligan cinema fosters a romanticised and nostalgic portrait of football violence that neutralises the media’s earlier stigmatisation of the phenomenon. The epic flavour provided by the films’ soundtracks and their warfare connotations contribute to the exorcising of the social fears awakened by hooliganism. I conclude by stating that the films’ musical scores aim not only at establishing an accurate, legitimate correlation with British cultural history in the 1980s, but also at revisiting the general desolation that sociologists and historians associate with it.

Keywords: popular music; hooliganism; Thatcherism; film narrative; epic narrative; soundtrack; football culture

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‘Hate the world, it’s so romantic’:  
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El objeto de este artículo es analizar la música popular en el cine hooligan contemporáneo británico en tanto que proyección de una mirada romántica y nostálgica al fenómeno de la violencia en el fútbol, susceptible de neutralizar la estigmatización mediática tradicional. El sentido épico de la banda sonora derivado de sus connotaciones bélicas contribuye a exorcizar los miedos sociales despertados por el hooliganismo. Concluyo afirmando que el acompañamiento musical cinematográfico tiene por fin tanto establecer un correlato exacto y legítimo de la historia cultural británica de los años ochenta, cuanto visitar la desolación general que sociólogos e historiadores asocian a ella.

Palabras clave: música popular; hooliganismo; Thatcherismo; narrativa cinematográfica; narrativa épica; banda sonora; cultura del fútbol

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Recent revolts in Port Said stadium in Egypt after a football game between the country's top team, Cairo's Al-Ahly, and home team Al-Masry show that hooliganism is back in the news.<sup>1</sup> On February 1, 2012, Cairo supporters fought the local rival fans, leaving seventy-three dead and hundreds injured. Far from the press's standard outraged cries, international media coverage focused on the political, rather than the social nature of the no longer exclusively English 'disease'. Headlines like *The Guardian's* 'Hooliganism on the Surface, State Thuggery Underneath' (February 2, 2012) or *Aljazeera's* 'Egypt's politicised football hooligans' (February 2, 2012) mark a stark contrast to the media's biased focus on British fans' violence in the past. Classic issues such as youth alienation and disaffection, or the disintegration of working-class communities have been replaced by a discourse of political commitment and anti-establishment sedition in the wake of the late revolutionary protests that peppered the so-called Arab Spring. Port Said's disaster refutes the zeitgeist dismissing hooliganism as a minor concern both for the state and the press nowadays (King 1997: 576; Horrocks 1995: 155), and underscores the substantial role of the media in the construction and social perception of the phenomenon.

This article argues that the contemporary representation of football violence in the cinema stands as a reaction against a specifically biased conceptualisation of the fierce 'terrace legends' fuelled by the British media in the 1980s. Recent filmmakers have been inclined towards a glorification of the disorder of the thugs, conveyed by a peculiar combination of the verbal, the visual and the musical. In much the same way that hooliganism was once the product of news sensationalism during the Thatcher administration, I argue that the musical score in contemporary cinema fosters a romanticised, even nostalgic, portrait of football violence that counteracts its classic connotations. In order to provide an insight into the function of song in recent British hooligan cinema, I will examine a number of recent productions, the soundtracks of which function as a semantic corollary to the plot. I contend that films like *I.D.* (Philip Davis, 1995), *Mean Machine* (Barri Skolnick, 2001), *The Football Factory* (Nick Love, 2004), *Green Street* (Lexi Alexander, 2005), *Rise of the Footsoldier* (Julian Gilbey, 2007), *Cass* (John S. Baird, 2008), *Awaydays* (Pat Holden, 2009), *Green Street 2: Stand Your Ground* (Jesse V. Johnson, 2009) and *The Firm* (Nick Love, 2009) use popular music specifically chosen for the construction of a glamourised image of hooliganism that neutralises the media's earlier social and political stigmatisation of the phenomenon. I conclude that such an aesthetic endeavour emerges as a conscious attempt to rewrite, and redeem, a highly controversial and now concluded period of the recent history of Great Britain.

## 2. THE MEDIA CONSTRUCTION OF HOOLIGANISM

In a pioneering analysis, Dunning et al. suggest that the advent of football hooliganism

<sup>1</sup> This paper was written at the time of the Port Said disaster. When sent for publication, the investigation of the killing of more than seventy fans was still being conducted.

coincided in time with the extensive media coverage of the World Cup hosted in England in 1966. According to the authors, during the interwar years, "English football fans tended to be praised by the media for their good behaviour" and therefore British national identity was forged by the dictum "it couldn't happen here" when reporting football violence abroad (1986: 238). However, from the early 1960s onwards, social hysteria ignited by juvenile delinquents (chiefly the 'teddy boy' and 'mod' scare) seduced the media enough to "pick on" and "amplify" the sort of "violent incidents that had always . . . occurred at crowded football grounds", resulting in a hyperbolically distorted TV, press and radio construction of hooliganism. The preliminaries of the 1966 World Cup put the country in the international spotlight: the crowd, as much as the game itself, became so tempestuously targeted by the news that "England began to focus on football hooliganism as a threat to the country's international prestige" (1986: 239).

Dunning et al.'s statement is sustained by Anthony King's understanding of football's disorder in the light of magnified news coverage as a sales strategy within the fiercely competitive media market. In King's opinion, the press's hyperbolic representation of thugs as dehumanised and animalised anti-social beings was meant to "fuel moral panics" but, paradoxically, it also launched an "irresistibly fascinating" image for readers. Fans' activities were continuously deplored by the media whilst, ironically, they "also constituted a rich source of sensational stories by which newspapers could market themselves in an ever more competitive market" (King 1997: 584). Indeed, as Yvonne Jewkes notes in her study of the interaction of media and crime in modern societies, "shock, outrage and fear sell newspapers" (2004: 28). The birth of the hooligan as a figure "who had descended into the beyond and the abnormal" (King 1997: 583) followed in the long tradition of British sensationalism, operating under the premise that a heightened fear of crime drastically increases newspaper sales. This would explain why, as Bodin et al. argue, the media frequently resorted to facts that were partially or totally false (2005: 63). In the authors' words, "the essential thing [is] maybe simply selling [newspapers]" (2005: 78).<sup>2</sup>

Newspapers, then, were striving to increase their profits by rendering a disturbing yet attractive image of abjection and liminality in contemporary society (King 1995: 585). Analogical descriptions of football thugs as "animalic", "lunatic", or "barbaric" "madmen" (Dunning et al. 1988: 108-09) may initially have been coined to further consumer strategies, but they undeniably contributed to a cultural construction of hooliganism as a postmodern transgression of society's boundaries. Several studies have revealed how convenient this vilifying imagery was for authorities keen to implement a large number of public order measures. The 1980s attested to a significant increment of state control of hooliganism, to the extent that the ultra-repressive measures adopted before, and by, the Thatcher administration have led critics to suggest that the rise in moral panic was actually a consequence of the police's zeal when arresting violent fans. Horrocks argues that the

<sup>2</sup> "L'essentiel est peut-être tout simplement de vendre". Bodin et al.'s quotes have been translated into English by the author.

social anxieties over football violence “became for right-wing politicians a spectre used to frighten anxious middle-class voters, and to whip up enthusiasm for harsh punishments” (1995: 155). In this sense, in his influential work on the State as a generator of violence, Hall identified a circular reciprocity between institutions of the British establishment orchestrating public opinion (newspapers, TV debates, etc.) and crime, which he termed “mugging” (1978a). This notion expanded the idea of ‘mugging’ as mere street theft to include the “relation between crime and the reaction to crime” (viii), placing particular emphasis on the “culture of control” (76) created to police it. As Hall puts it, “once individuals had been robbed of their rationality and humanity, then state violence could be seen as the only effective solution to their activities” (1978b: 30, qtd. in King 1997: 583). In other words, the hooligans’ violence legitimised state violence.

Furthermore, the media not only influenced readers’ perception of hooliganism but also became a deterministic tool in the development of the fans’ own self-image. A revealing article written by Peter Marsh as early as 1977, titled ‘Football Hooliganism, Fact or Fiction?’, suggested that press reports of football violence were instrumental in spreading the image of the young offender as a magnetic, attractive figure. In Marsh’s words, “attitudes have hardened and the stereotypes have become more fixed” and, as a result, “football fans begin to match up to society’s expectations of them. They begin to play the game we always thought they were playing, but weren’t” (258). So, far from being deterred by the media rhetoric, many fans moulded themselves according to the press’s representation of them: the conducts and social behaviours that had been so colourfully portrayed and exacerbated by sensationalist headlines became credentials of authenticity, and gangs of football hooligans, the so-called ‘firms’, fleshed out those same animalistic traits attributed to them by reporters in a sort of “feedback cycle” (Dunning et al. 1986: 238). Most importantly, argues King, fans enjoyed “the notorious liminal status granted by the press”, for it “added to the excitement of a Saturday afternoon, that fans could indulge their often fanciful notion that they were somehow beyond the pale and, therefore, a threat to society” (1997: 584). The tabloids had thus provided hooligans with a public reputation they had to live up to. Therefore, acting from the fringes of the social norm became the identifying trait of football liminoids, to the extent that “fans [imagined] themselves to be so” (585).

On this account, it would be logical to conclude that, in no small degree, the social danger of football hooliganism was concocted by the media through their persistent “weight of words and the shock of photographs” (Bodin et al. 2005: 78).<sup>3</sup> In fact, 1980s journalists may not have invented modern hooliganism, for coverage of social hysteria provoked by young offenders and ‘scuttlers’ dates from the late Georgian period and has been extensively documented during the Victorian era, when the term ‘hooligan’ was first recorded (Davies 1998; Chassaigne 2005; Savage 2008; Taylor 2010). Nevertheless, the press was the “amplifying, multiplying and catalysing element [that] widely contributed

<sup>3</sup> “poids des mots et du choc des potos”.

to its promotion" (Bodin et al. 2005: 79)<sup>4</sup> at a time when moral fears were inflamed by juvenile delinquency, and the affluent teenager "was promoted as the figurehead of Britain's march into a new era of prosperous consumerism" (Oliker and Krolikowski 2001: 244).

### 3. AUTHENTICATING THE THATCHER YEARS THROUGH SONG

A considerable amount of literature has been published on the representation of Thatcherism in contemporary film. This requires a synthetic insight into the cultural, political and economic atmosphere of the period so as to understand the issues confronted in such productions. Lester Friedman identifies three defining elements of the Thatcherite revolution: *laissez faire* and an "unregulated" market neoliberalism which structured the economic ideology of Thatcher's administration; closely followed by a "politically neoconservative authoritarianism"; and, in social terms, by a project "dividing the country geographically, between North and South" (2006: 30). The 'Party of Law and Order' unleashed a frenzy of dismantling of public services, the most direct consequences of which were the liquidation of the power of trade-unions, mass unemployment, the privatisation of public utilities, and the "demonisation of the working-class" (Jones 2011: 10). Moreover, social exclusion based on homophobic and xenophobic positions permeated Thatcher's New Right discourse, and a "moral crusade" was initiated to "weed out and punish the 'workshy', to encourage materialism" and to re-establish the family as a moral nucleus through the passing of "repressive legislation to 'outlaw' those lifestyles and pursuits which contradicted Thatcherite ideology" (Lay 2002: 81-82). The nation's malaise was transcribed in social realist films by Chris Bernard, Stephen Frears, Mike Leigh and Ken Loach, and more recently in productions by Shane Meadows, Stephen Daldry and Peter Mullan. Meanwhile, on television, soap operas like *EastEnders*, *Albion Market* and *Brookside* accommodated a sombre image of Britain that counteracted the glittering icons of American serials (Lay 2002: 82). Simon Gallagher (2010) has identified two antagonistic, though sometimes coexisting, schools of thought represented in the characterisation of the working class under Thatcherism in film. On the one hand, there is a penchant towards depicting working-class existence as "counter-human and stifling", rife with "morose" characters "never fulfilling their human potential". On the other, is the mainstream tendency in which "the restrictive conditions of the working class are precisely the conditions to encourage diverse and rich characters, full of colour and spirit" (Gallagher 2010). Regardless of the filmmakers' reaction to the lugubrious background of Thatcherite England through the description of the divergent (and often scant) aspirations of the working class, both trends coincide in offering a vision of the political regime of the time as one unable to provide any solutions to the problems exposed. In this sense, recent film productions focus on the social problems of the 1980s as the seed of hooliganism.

<sup>4</sup> "un élément amplificateur, multiplicateur et catalyseur. Ils en ont amplement contribué à sa promotion".

As a response to the high unemployment and lack of opportunities for young people at the time, a number of present day filmmakers have depicted football violence as a form of escapist entertainment, a “coded emblem for the disoriented and disaffected British working-class” (Horrocks 1955: 155). Bad parenting, alcohol abuse, racism, class segregation and the use of physical and verbal violence as the only means of self-assertion for working-class men within modern deindustrialised societies can be traced in the first-person biographic accounts of ‘terrace legends’ Cass Pennant (*Cass*) and Carlton Leach (*Rise of the Foot Soldier*), as well as in the lives of the fictional characters Paul Carty (*Awaydays*) and Tommy Johnson (*The Football Factory*), thereby illustrating the aftermath of Thatcherism on British young adults.

However, realism is not only achieved through the faithful transcription of settings, attitudes and characters. Apart from visual imagery, filmmakers tend to reconstruct the tumultuous atmosphere of the time by resorting to musical pieces that are emblematic of the social and cultural scene. Nick Love’s 2009 *The Firm*, a free adaptation of Alan Clarke’s 1989 TV drama, tracks the social awakening of Dominic, a wannabe teenager mesmerised by Bex, West Ham’s InterCity Firm’s ‘topman’. Set in London in the 1980s, the film is a modern counterpoint to Clarke’s original production, which was critically acclaimed for its absence of musical score. Love’s version carves out the temporal and spatial context by featuring an eclectic and telling selection of the popular songs that became landmarks of the 1980s: ‘Mad World’ (Tears for Fears, 1982), ‘Don’t Stop the Music’ (Yarborough People, 1980), ‘Tainted Love’ (Soft Cell, 1981), ‘Hip Hop Be Bop’ (Man Parrish, 1982), ‘Town Called Malice’ (The Jam, 1982), ‘Poison Arrow’ (ABC, 1982), ‘Get Down on It’, ‘Celebration’ (Kool & The Gang, 1980, 1981) or ‘I Feel Love’ (Donna Summers, 1977). The musical pastiche attests to the filmmaker’s refusal to succumb to a single, specific movement (punk, glam, new wave, etc.) and to his commitment to portray London as a multifarious cultural scenario encompassing ethnicities, geographies and music styles, whose origins range from the West Indies’s melodic walking bass lines (ska) to Great Britain’s fast, short, hard-edged songs (punk rock).

*The Firm*’s score stands as the soundtrack to a period of British history. As a musical narrative voice, it encompasses a variety of diegetic strategies. On the one hand, music is played in the background and cannot be perceived by the characters or, as Wierzbicki would have it, is “somehow apart from, or outside, the fictional world of filmic narrative” (extra-, or non-diegetic musical narration) (2009: 23). On the other, it can indeed often be heard by the characters themselves, as it is inherent in the film narrative (diegetic or *source* music) (Wierzbicki 2009: 5). All the films in the corpus resort to such strategies in order to co-locate the action in time and space. In John S. Baird’s *Cass*, ska melodies from British bands Madness (‘One Step Beyond’), The Beat (‘March of the Swindle Heads’, ‘Jackpot’, ‘Click Click’) and Jamaican songwriter Desmond Dekker (‘Fu Manchu’) intermingle with the Housemartins’s pop (‘Happy Hour’), The Jam’s new wave (‘Down in the Tube Station at Midnight’) and Australian punkrock by The Saints (‘Perfect Day’). Similarly, Joy Division’s ‘Insight’, Ultravox’s ‘Young Savage’ and The Cure’s ‘Saturday Night 10:15’

illustrate the decade's desolation in Birkenhead in *Awaydays*, and in a like manner, The Bee Gees's disco music is played in *I.D.* ('Saturday Night Fever'). Whether for adorning poetic, expository or reflexive modes of filming, or for the purpose of accompanying introductory or final credits, the extra-diegetic mode operates as a vehicle which identifies time, space and music. Furthermore, filmmakers seem to be not only interested in documenting the kind of music played at the time, but in addressing its chief role in the cultural shaping of the 1980s. This is reflected by both the characters' and the epoch's obsession with music itself. Dominic hauntingly hums 'Don't Stop the Music', mirroring the persistence with which pop songs are played on home stereos and TV sets. Like wise characters are systematically set in a wide array of pubs and nightclubs where contemporary music is played as a background to their effusive conversations.

By linking time and sound, the selected soundtrack authenticates the epoch revived in the film. What Danny Burns terms the "desolation of the Thatcher years" (1992: 7) is musically expressed by the sinister performances of Joy Division, The Cure's urban gothic and the post-punk distortion of Sham 69, Ultravox and Magazine. Borthwick and Moy state that "these tracks prefaced the national mood of the early 1980s", one which was characterised by "rising unemployment, an increasing gap between rich and poor and increased social unrest" (2004: 182). Similarly, Marxist theorist Kenneth Surin asserts that these bands represented "an iconic repudiation, at the subliminal level, of anything that Ms. Thatcher could ever have brought herself to avow as 'pleasurable'" (2009: 303), and Cavanagh notes that post-punk lyrics were directly linked to Thatcherism in their contemplation of "alienation, paranoia and morbidity" (Cavanagh 2001: 29, qtd. in Borthwick and Moy 2004: 182).

"Alienating", "paranoid" and "morbid" parallelisms between characters and actual bands and musicians are likewise worth noting. In *Awaydays*, the fate of one of the characters, Elvis, is obviously ensured by the curse of his name. The character's tragedy, however, also strongly resembles that of Joy Division's front man Ian Curtis, whose songs lacquer the film. Elvis's resolution to commit suicide to finally escape the suffocating atmosphere of Birkenhead imitates Elvis Presley's breakdown and death in 1977, and more accurately, Ian Curtis's self-annihilation in 1980. Furthermore, the twisted, dark humour of Joy Division's name, which alludes to the Jewish brothels in concentration camps during World War II, evinces a close connection with the nihilistic omens and tonalities featured in their recordings —what Wojcik terms the "fetishization of the sinister and the morbid" (1995: 23). The sombre cadences of Joy Division's 'Insight' in the closing credits voice the ominous epitaph of the film. They musically verbalise the youth's gothic sense of despair and frustration in the 1980s, as was also laconically portrayed in the Sex Pistols's cross-generational anthem 'God Save the Queen'. But while Johnny Rotten from the Sex Pistols accused corrupted politicians of robbing British youth of the possibility of a better, dignified future, Curtis pushes the aesthetic boundaries even further by glamourising existentialist disillusionment: "Guess your dreams always end / They don't rise up / Just descend/ But I don't care anymore / I've lost the will to want more / I'm not

afraid not at all". Contrary to Rotten's "no future" wake-up call, Curtis's repetitive and self-indulgent final chorus ("I'm not afraid anymore / I'm not afraid anymore") is as much an embellished premonition of his own martyrdom as a victim of suicide, as it is a death requiem to a whole generation.

The correlation between the epoch and its soundtrack denotes a narrative and semantic equivalence that legitimates the filmmakers' resuscitation of the Thatcher years. Consequently, it could be argued that the musical score functions in a manner not unlike that of sound effects. Natural or artificial sound effects that enliven the action (rattles, whistles, doorbells, banging, explosions, sirens, etc.) help create a naturalistic ambience that enhances the plot's verisimilitude. As Jill Nelmes states, "sound effects are normally perceived as part of the narrative realism, authenticating the images and informing the narrative attention" (2003: 78). Likewise, the soundtrack to these films metaphorises reality by disclosing significant information on the films' time (the 1980s), the geographical location of the plot (Great Britain), and the characters' class values (working-class values imbibed in punk, ska, and rock strains). Through the selected pieces (as opposed to classical, American or European music of the 1990s and 2000s), all these traits informatively construct a holistic image of a specific cultural group. As agents of historical accuracy, popular songs reach beyond the limits of musical language to emerge as the most authentic sound effects of the era.

Further features can be drawn from the understanding of popular music as sound effects in the films. Maria Pramaggiore and Tom Wallis assert that, apart from defining a scene's location and "suggest[ing] the environment's impact on characters", sound effects also "contribute to the emotional and intellectual depth of a scene" by "lending a mood" to it (2005: 220). This implies that not only the external, situational aspects of the characters can be sonically defined by corollary sound effects, but also their inner disposition and frame of mind. Pramaggiore and Wallis refer to such representations of the characters' subjectivity through the example of a device as common as a clap of thunder in horror films. In this case, contextual and metonymic sound effects signifying a storm stand as suprasegmental elements illustrating the character's fear and hence provoking empathy in the viewer. An identical function may be accomplished by the score. For instance, in *Awaydays*, the home demo by The Cure's frontman Robert Smith of their 1979 classic 'Saturday Night 10:15' reproduces in its melody the nocturnal, monotonous dripping of a tap which reflects the character's solitude both in the song and in the film. The tedious onomatopoeic alliteration of the piano notes and the drum's percussion couples with the lyrics to reinforce the visual and musical despair of the situation ("And I'm sitting / In the kitchen sink / And the tap drips / And I'm waiting..."). In this case, not only does the score vividly recreate the mood evoked by specific sound effects like a dripping tap at night but it actually *merges* with them, becoming an accurate sonic transcription of the character's subjectivity.

The filmmakers' striving for verisimilitude requires the use of naturalistic film techniques. Popular songs are often juxtaposed with real footage borrowed from TV



documentaries, police and CCTV cameras. Fragments of original TV interviews with hooligans are shown in *Cass*, and numerous mass surveillance recordings reflect actual fighting scenarios in football grounds and streets. This documentary-type footage is recurrently used for the opening shots of films (*Green Street*) or is intercalated within plot sequences (*I.D.*, *The Rise of the Foot Soldier*, *The Football Factory*). Furthermore, police devices like thermal night vision cameras or helicopter videos are even imitated by filmmakers in order to increase the credibility of the scene (*The Football Factory*). In all these cases, music accentuates the impact of the scene on the audience at the same time that it establishes a firm connection between the action and its invisible, sonic incarnation. In other words, the film sequences are to the eyes what the score is to the ear.

Musical authenticity parallels narrative construction. The films incorporate credits accurately pinpointing factual, significant dates and places within hooligan history. *The Rise of the Foot Soldier* is a semi-documentary chronicle of the triple Rettendon murders in Essex, in which three well-known drug dealers were found shot in a Range Rover on a farm in 1995. The film is a raw biography of Carlton Leach, a former InterCity Firm (ICF) member who eventually became involved in the murdered gang's drug-selling activities. Director Julian Gilbey's point —that hooliganism is a first step into organised-crime— is backed by substantial real footage of the police and press coverage of the investigation as well as by the musical score. Leach's chronological progression from violence on the terraces to the mob is steadily reflected by the film's soundtrack. Early, conventional fights between hooligan gangs are set to British punk melodies by Motörhead ('We Are The Road Crew') and Sham 69 ('Borstal Breakout'), whose market release coincided with the period depicted (1978). Punk electric guitars answer to a more primitive and familiar confrontation between youth gangs —one characterised by fistfights, the use of rudimentary weapons (sticks, chains, Stanley knives and 'blades') and 'one to one' fights. Punk music thus accounts for a classic, primitive style of combat. However, as the plot unfolds and time progresses, Leach leaves the terraces to embrace the flourishing industry of nightclub security under rave culture. The electronic rhythms that follow him as a bouncer and doorman manager unveil a new age of fighting and entertainment. Cappella's ('U Got 2 Know'), Felix's ('Don't You Want Me') and Kariya's ('Let Me Love You for Tonight', 'Move It Up') techno-house cadences match the advent of designer drugs and 'ecstasy culture' of Britain's nightlife in the early nineties. Similarly, classic weaponry is replaced by heavy, automatic guns. This technologisation process reaches into music just as much as into the drugs and arms scenes. Consequently, not only does the use of techno music at this point in the film testify to explicit chronology and data, but also to a mutating fighting typology that parallels developments in the entertainment industry.

A final remark on the directors' dedication to the portrayal of the authentic should be made regarding the numerous films inspired by autobiographical accounts of hooligans themselves. *Cass* is based on the 2000 eponymous autobiography of Cass Pennant, one of the leaders of the InterCity Firm in the 1980s, who eventually turned into a bestselling author and even went on to launch his own publishing house (Pennant Publishing Ltd.).

Another prominent transgeneric adaptation is Gilbey's *The Rise of the Foot Soldier*, a filmic reading of West Ham supporter and ICF member Carlton Leach's conspicuously titled memoir, *Muscle* (2003). In other cases, the films draw their material from the eyewitness accounts of authors who documented, but did not participate in, violence on the terraces. This is the case of Kevin Sampson's 1998 novel *Awaydays* (which inspired the subsequent film) and John King's *The Football Factory*, which according to the author required no further research beyond his experience of having been a Chelsea fan (Ciesla 2004). The rigorously selected soundtracks for these films endorse their plot's credibility by emphasising its evidentiary probity, turning the films into musical chronicles of the Thatcher years.

#### 4. COMBAT ROCK: FOOTBALL THUGS AND THE MILITARISATION OF MUSIC

As Ben Carrington and Ian MacDonald argue, the lyrics of one of the most (in)famous chants of English fans when England play in Germany, "Two world wars and one world cup, doo dah, doo dah" suggest, firstly, "that war is a sport" and that football "has the same value as war in the indices of a distinctive national axiology", for they are both key symbols in the construction of national consciousness. According to these critics, the equivalence of these terms is founded upon their interchangeability, as "war and sport generate many of the same emotions and libidinal investments" and "they articulate the same intense and highly-prized forms of fraternal solidarity" (2001: 3).

Mergenthal's study of John King's narrative *England Away* (1998) —the final part of a trilogy that included *The Football Factory* (1996), which inspired Love's 2004 eponymous film, and *Headhunter* (1997)— focuses on the connections between sports, war, nationalism and masculinities. She argues that the English national character is not only symbolically fleshed out in the English football player, but may be similarly recognised in the English football supporter and in the soldier hero. All three figures can be construed as archetypal "avatar(s) of idealized masculinity" (2002: 264) whose kindred lies in the acknowledgement and assimilation of strength, courage and prowess as the quintessential masculine virtues within an ideal nationhood. Mergenthal's hypothesis is in line with Theweleit's classic psychological study of masculinity and warfare as embodied in the 'soldier-male' prototype of the German *Freikorps* in the 1920s and 1930s (Theweleit 1987).

This direct connection between warfare, masculinity, and nationalism is precisely conveyed by hooliganism and its musical expression in films. The militarisation of the football thug seeps into its verbal self-definition and inner organisation: conflict with other gangs is frequently termed 'war', work tools like Stanley knives are referred to as 'weapons' or 'arms', and members, mainly men, christen themselves as 'foot-soldiers', clearly echoing a military terminology that also links them to the lexicon of organised crime. With regard to their inner structure, the disciplining of gang membership requires, as in the army, the endurance of a severe training period. To cross the threshold of this rite of passage, the initiated thugs are taught the Spartan tactics of physical confrontation,

a scenario that has become a favourite of many directors for the opening sequences of their films. Indeed, strict obedience to gang hierarchy, embodied by the firms' 'top men', is imperative in order to gain acceptance into the gang. Moreover, specialised dress codes emulate the function of military uniforms: within the battlefield of the football ground, attire (just as much as the club banners and merchandising products of, for example, the St George's and the Union flags) visibly articulates a firm's territorial identity. Finally, territorialisation is enacted through the symbolic invasion of the rival's 'ends' during both home and away matches.

This militarising schema is audibly amplified by rock music in hooligan films, particularly during fight scenes. Beyond reductive appreciations of rock as mere background music to the combats, I would argue that the music serves as a sort of diegetic narrator to the plot. Hooligan films distance themselves from 'rockumentaries' in the line of Julien Temple's *Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* (1980) and *The Filth and the Fury* (2000), Jack Hazan and David Mingay's *Rude Boy* (1980), or Jim Field and Michael Gramaglia's *End of the Century* (2003), the focus of which is to track down the advent of punk bands like the Sex Pistols, The Clash or The Ramones in the international countercultural scene of the late 1970s, and in which songs are used to illustrate the facts narrated. One of the aesthetic merits of contemporary hooligan cinema is that songs transcend their role as sheer samples ornamenting the scene and embrace their potential as marching and melodic military transcriptions of the action. The fight between rival inmates during a football game in the prison-set *Mean Machine* is musicalised by Sigue Sigue Sputnik's 1986 hardcore classic 'Love Missile F1-11'. Similarly, street rows in *Awaydays* and *Green Street 2* are respectively set to Ultravox's 'Young Savage' and Goldblade's 'Riot, Riot!'. More well-known tunes like The Jam's 'Town Called Malice' (*The Firm*), The Stone Roses's 'Waterfall' and 'I Wanna Be Adored' (*Green Street*), or Primal Scream's 'Swastika Eyes' (*The Football Factory*) go hand in hand with the harsh, alternative beats of Terence Jay's 'Run From the Pigs', Kasabian's 'Stuntman' and Junkie XL's 'One Kick Beyond' (*Green Street*) or Stage Bottles's 'Some Times Anti-Social But Always Anti-Fascist' (*Green Street 2*). Song titles themselves constitute a gallery of militarised images and motifs. The soundtrack to *Green Street*, for example, is replete with such evocatively-titled songs as Ivan Koustikov's 'Hooligan drums', Acarine and Brett Gordon's hooligan motto 'Stand Your Ground', Terence Jay's 'Run from the Pigs' (the slang term for the police) and Dash's 'Test of Man' (in which the lyrics even quote and expand the ICF hymn 'Forever Blowing Bubbles').

Despite this eclectic selection of a myriad of bands and styles ranging from post-punk and new wave sounds to electric hardcore and progressive rock, all the songs come together in their stimulation of the dynamism and energy of the fight sequences, thereby encouraging the viewer's engagement with the scene through the provocation of psychosomatic responses. Power chords, screaming electric guitars, screeching solos, frenetic drums and hard beats catapult us into the riots themselves and the orgiastic choreography of the fighting mayhem. Furthermore, the films' narrative too relies deeply on the musical score: following the frenzied motion of fights, the multiplication of swish pans and the

swift juxtaposition of panning shots are interwoven within a speeding visual texture which aims to follow the frantic rhythm of electric guitars and drums as much as to recreate the point of view of those immersed within the battle. This delirious combination of image and sound finds much of its influence in the cadences and aesthetics of the music video, thus reinstating the genre's connection to the fragmentary character of contemporary visual culture and its postmodern audiences. Through musical expressionism, where the sound of punches, kicks and cries are befittingly channeled by the energy and drive that characterise rock music and modern music videos, audiences emotionally participate in the mob fights themselves, transcending the fictional barrier erected by the screen and joining the heroic celebration of the combat.

Moreover, although in many cases it would seem that both the instruments' effects and the throat-wrenching punk vocal techniques inhibit and overpower the content of the lyrics, there remain a considerable number of instances where the lyrics in fact acquire the fundamental role of magnifying the sense of militarisation to the extreme. Ultravox's 'Young Savage' portrays a generation of young people "Condemned to be a stranger / A subway dweller, dead-end angel", naturalising the path from frustration to physical aggression ("Changing blossoms into fists / And taking bites from every kiss"). Doomed to a life as outcasts and sentenced to a 'Jekyll and Hyde' transformation from their everyday routines into the 'abject' Saturday afternoon hooligan, the characters in *Awaydays* follow Ultravox's final, disquieting words used in the opening scene "Hate the world, it's so romantic". As a tonal foreword to the plot, 'Young Savage' fuses the same purity of hatred, energy, resentment, frustration and violence that is contained in the characters' subjectivity and released in football warfare.

That rock music has become a somewhat conventionalised aesthetic tool through which to contribute to the epic character of hooligan culture is not only due to its recurrent accompaniment to fight scenes. Rock'n'roll songs also potently enhance military-like traits and motifs through their strategic usage in sequences portraying the preliminaries for combat. Scenes located in pubs where gangs gather together to drink and euphorically chant to the glory of their teams in *Green Street*, or within the prison walls where convicts train in preparation for a football match against guards in *Mean Machine* (which clearly echoes John Huston's *Victory*) are recurrently set to rock rhythms as well.

It could be argued that the reason for this is not necessarily to guarantee entertainment value, but to blur the thin line between gang organisation and the discipline of soldiers. In his study of the use of rock as a stimulus for combat for American troops during the war in Iraq, Jonathan Pieslack contends that due to recent developments in audio technology, music invaded every realm of warfare. While soldiers of earlier conflicts had largely depended on the radio as their sole source of music, American soldiers in Iraq had the "greater availability of portable audio devices, like small tape players" which provided "the opportunity for music to play a more prevalent role as an inspiration for combat" (2009: 48). Pieslack's research is based on a number of interviews with soldiers who had served in Operation Desert Storm in the Middle East. Most of the interviewees identified

hard rock/metal bands as their music of choice before going into combat, chiefly Metallica, AC/DC, Megadeth, Skid Row, Guns N' Roses, Judas Priest and Faith No More.

Bearing in mind the list of bands and songs collected by Pieslack, it is interesting to note two significant facts. First, that all these bands are originally American, just as much as the majority of rock bands featured in the score of hooligan films are essentially British, which corroborates the connection between musical nationalism and war as conveyed by the bands' national credentials. Secondly, that the thrills and rush sought by hard rock strains have a direct effect on the motivation and attitude of listeners, both on an individual and on a collective level, as they aim to "[inject] the crowd with massive shots of energy" (Campbell and Brody 2008: 360). Scholars have duly analysed this particular stimuli-response pattern of rock to further comprehend the music's galvanising potential and have frequently pointed to the electric component as the fundamental triggering source. James Wade describes Jimmi Hendrix's electric musical flow as a substance with (re)animating powers, making "living things alive" (2008: 97). On a similar note, Nick Cohn argues that the heart of rock'n'roll lies in the central, governing presence of the electric guitar, and its vast possibilities as lead instrument, for even though it had regularly featured in other types of music such as jazz or R&B, "it had never been used as bedrock, as the basis of a whole music [before]" (2001: 11). Rock bands in hooligan films reproduce what De la Fuente terms the 1970s and 1980s fascination with electric guitar sounds (2007: 81) and with the electric devices that accompany them (synthesisers and amplifiers). Thus the films succeed in securing rock's status as a cadence for fighting, a fact not lost on The Clash, who, in their aesthetic crusade to merge punk's fury with the epic rage of battle, titled their 1982 album *Combat Rock*.

Rock music, therefore, has a vital role in the enactment of rituals for bonding among soldiers. Their sense of community is strengthened as they "come together and participate, either by listening, or singing/yelling along with the lyrics, in organized pre-combat actions" (Pieslack 2009: 54). Pieslack elaborates on the collective aspect of music when he describes how "the soldiers psychologically prepare themselves for the possibility of combat through the shared experience of music" (54). Thus he follows in the line of DeNora's psychological exploration of the association between music and combat which contends that, in the battlefield, music functions as a device for "establishing a collaborative action" and as a "pretext for action" (DeNora 2000: 111, qtd. in Pieslack 2009: 55).

In hooligan films, this musical, ritualistic function of collaborative action is doubly accomplished through rock. On the one hand, as we have seen, rock is more than just a background intonation of fight and pre-combative scenes: every musical element (from the rhythmic drive to the lyrics and song titles) and contextual detail (from musicians' biographies to the countercultural turmoil Britain was immersed in during the 1980s) is manipulated to convey the characters' firm sense of belonging to something larger and more important than the individual by himself could ever aspire to: the gang. On the other hand, at a meta-narrative level, rock encourages in viewers the impulse to empathise and become emotionally involved in the characters' desire to integrate and contribute to that

larger, collective entity. As an aesthetic tool charged with several signifying layers, rock persuades viewers to give in to the characters' conviction that gangs and firms represent the protective fortress where the individual becomes fused with the group.

The firms' chants have just such a decisive role in the ritualising of group behaviours and in affirming the members' affiliation and loyalty to them. West Ham's anthem 'I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles' stands out as one of the most popular hymns in hooligan films, appearing in productions such as *Green Street*, *Cass* and *The Firm*. Originally a popular tune performed in Broadway musicals during the interwar years, it was eventually appropriated by West Ham's terrace and the InterCity Firm. Within the cinematographic context, 'I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles' is cantillated *a capella* by the hooligans as they arouse their sense of shared identity over countless pints at pubs or on their way to and from the stadium. Once again the central motif around which these practices gravitate is the notion of warfare, as hooligans reproduce and systematise within their own lines, the ceremonious conduct of soldiers during training or on their way to combat. As Pieslack puts it, the musical environment of "Basic Combat Training", together with "running and marching cadences, involves soldiers in collective singing responses that are intended to develop camaraderie" (2009: 54). Just as teamwork and unity is "vital to military service, completing a mission and, in some cases, survival" (55), the sonic environment of the chants democratises the differences between the gangs' members themselves and unifies them against the enemy. This clear buildup towards the integrative and the homogeneous explains why in *Green Street* Elijah Wood's character is accepted in the gang. Overruling what would initially appear an impediment (the character's Americanness) is his loyalty to the group, an allegiance that is at its best when he joins in the chanting of 'I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles' in absolute unison. Hence in the context of actual warfare, rock's stimulus as an awakening against defeat and as a medium to solidify and seal cracks that may potentially fracture the troops is also present in football chants. According to Pieslack, "by singing/screaming the lyrics of a song or listening to a song within the same physical space, soldiers create a sense of community through their common act in preparation for a common objective" (2009: 54). In the same way, in hooligan gangs, sharing and participating in the same musical experience both in time and space consolidates group formation as well as friendships founded on similar tastes in popular music.

It is important to note that the chanting occurs either before or after combat and not during it, since, obviously, full concentration is necessary during confrontation. In this sense, chants resemble American soldiers' reliance on metal music in that "the music is a 'pretext' for action, not a soundtrack to the fighting" (Pieslack 2009: 56). The fact that in combat scenes filmmakers resort to extra-diegetic rock music is significant for two reasons. Firstly, embedded within pre- and post-fight chant scenes, rock's prominence as a means to totalise the glamorous appeal of the *football soldier* becomes all the more evident. Secondly, directors' delicate combination of rock and the sound effects of the violence onscreen represents an interesting sonic twist to real-life military attacks. Pieslack argues that the soldier's survival instinct forces him to "block out sounds that are not

immediately useful" in the battlefield. In Buzzell's words, "the sounds of combat become the music" (qtd. in Pieslack 2009: 56). Filmmakers' creation of an environment where the natural sound effects of the action are synthesised within the rock track at hand, resonating and reverberating within the music, suggests that sole reliance on sound effects may be insufficient to reproduce the rush of thrills and the agitation aroused in combat situations. By coupling sound effects and rock, they surrender to viewers a perfected consummation of *the sound of combat*.

##### 5. CONCLUSION. REVISING THE HOOLIGAN MYTH: MUSIC AND THE GLAMORISATION OF VIOLENCE

The epic flavour provided by rock'n'roll music and its connection to a symbolic battlefield contribute to the exorcising of the social fears awakened by hooligan terror. In the light of popular music, the hooligan's toughness is conveniently set to music and hence, dulcified. The films' soundtracks aim not only at establishing an accurate, legitimate correlation with a specific period within recent British history, but also at revisiting the general desolation and dissatisfaction that sociologists and historians associate with the decade. This backwards glance into the psychological and social depths of the past constitutes in itself a re-writing of accepted historical records and reports whereupon the thug is re-examined. By activating emotional and visceral mechanisms in the viewer that appease and explain the motives underlying thug violence, the hooligan becomes, to a large extent, redeemed from the impenetrable absolutism characteristic of archetypes of social terror. That music plays a fundamental part in the aesthetic penchant towards a partial atonement of the hooligan would explain why films like *I.D.*, with almost no musical score at all, may be considered darker and cruder reflections of hooliganism. By this token, I would contend that films heavily and consistently charged with popular songs, such as *Cass* or *The Firm*, may be regarded as paler, romantic contributions to hooligan iconography.

Music contributes to the glamourisation of the Thatcher years and its side effect of juvenile violence by means of igniting what Tulving termed the "episodic memory" (1985), by which he referred to the subjective record of events surrounding personal experiences. Applied to musical processing, episodic memory is built on the assumption that emotions are induced in the listener "because the music evokes a personal memory of a specific event in the listener's life" (Deliège et al. 2011: 123). The conscious selection of an 'old-school' musical score in films like *The Firm* or *Cass* excites in the viewer a vivid recollection of the past, one that sways to and fro between these emotional possibilities. The sound, with its spontaneous connection between time, image and music conjures intense memories that evoke and redefine, if not glorify, the whole epoch by means of filtering it through nostalgia of youth. The nostalgically sentimental component should not be underestimated, for it has frequently been the object of criticism and complaint of the die-hard football fans and former hooligans themselves. In this sense, following the release of *Green Street* in the UK, Cass Pennant, evidently unshaken by its redolent sentimentality, declared that the film "failed to

impress the hardcore ICF who . . . are too close to the subject of football violence for *Green Street* to ever have a chance of being able to meet their expectations” (Pennant 2002: 310).

It is not just their sharing of subject matter (hooliganism during the Thatcher era) that yields to the consideration of these films *en bloc*; the pervading nostalgic, reminiscent tones of the countercultural, anti-establishment spirit of the 1980s demands that they be regarded as a sub-genre within the cinematographic tradition of Britain. In these films, music acts as an agent of poetic justice by assisting filmmakers in their mission to release the liminal hooligan from the abject stigmas once fathomed and perpetuated by the media. Soundtracks varnish and reshape anti-social violence, turning hooligans into romantic heroes and victims of the conservative system. As members of the oppressed, working-class kinship, their military methods —construed more nihilistically at times and at others, more quixotically— resist reductive appreciations of their conduct as acts akin to the terrorising behaviour of mercenaries. Chantal Cornut-Gentille (2006) states that ‘heritage films’ in the Thatcher years sought to retrieve a romanticised epoch of aristocratic values in order to confront the current time’s decadence, through a combination of evocative and reflexive nostalgia. We should wonder whether recent hooligan music scores have not become the new and most effective instrument of the ‘heritage’ mood of today, and should welcome further study on the aesthetic negotiations between the media’s hooligan and the films’ mystified “faux thug” (Neville 2011: 33) so as to balance out what could potentially determine the final, sempiternal words to be engraved in the palimpsest of 1980s British history.

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Ignacio Ramos Gay is Senior Lecturer in French Literature at the University of Valencia, Spain. He specialised in nineteenth-century European drama and popular culture. He is the author of *Oscar Wilde and French Boulevard Theatre* (2007), and has published a wide range of articles on theatre adaptation in journals like *Romantisme*, *Cahiers Victoriens et Édouardiens*, *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*. He is currently working on hooliganism on the stage, and on the interaction between the theatrical freak show and British TV comedy.

Address: Facultad de Filología, Traducción y Comunicación. Universidad de Valencia. Avda. Blasco Ibáñez 32. 46010, Valencia. Tel.: +34 963864100.