



Bodies of Resistance: A Sociological and Cinematographic Reading of Childhood and Working-Life Vulnerability in Ken Loach's Cinema - *Kes* and *I, Daniel Blake*

F. Neşe Kaplan, Marmara University, nesekaplan2004@yahoo.com

Ali Barış Kaplan, İstanbul University, abkaplan@istanbul.edu.tr

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Abstract: This article analyzes representations of childhood and working-life vulnerability in two films by Ken Loach, *Kes* (1969) and *I, Daniel Blake* (2016), using a sociological methodology and taking into account cinematographic elements. Filmed approximately fifty years apart, these films make visible the institutional mechanisms of oppression in modernity and their effects on vulnerable figures in society. This article examines the relationship between Loach's distinctive formal choices (long takes, use of real locations, improvised performance) and ideological content within the social realist film tradition, through the critical frameworks of Bauman, Baudrillard, and Bourdieu. The findings reveal that in both films, the child and adult protagonists are constructed as images of resistance against the system; however, the cinematographic language presents this resistance within a framework that simultaneously embodies the system's dominance. The article argues that Loach's cinema can be read not only as a practice of social representation but also as a construction of a cinematic subject that creates critical consciousness in the viewer.

Keywords: Ken Loach; *Kes* (1969); *I, Daniel Blake* (2016); British social realism; class and welfare; social exclusion; cinematic form



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F. Neşe Kaplan

Ali Barış Kaplan

Introduction

One of the defining features of Ken Loach's cinema, often associated with labor and resistance, is its invitation to viewers to examine their own sense of moral responsibility (Kaplan, 2017, pp. 366–367).

Loach generally focuses on contemporary social issues. He maintains that his relatively few films set in the past are not exercises in nostalgia and regards the “worship of the past” as one of the scourges of British cinema. For Loach, even history has become part of the heritage industry (McKnight, 1997, p. 174).

Working within the social realist tradition, Loach encourages viewers to recognize the cultural structures in which they live, question their social positions, and confront social realities. A recurring concern in his films is the limited control individuals exercise over their own lives under conditions of cultural hegemony. By exposing social problems, he raises questions about individual freedom and

subjectivity while advocating labor and solidarity. His cinema examines the cultural conditions shaped by socioeconomic policies that place pressure on bodies, minds, and labor. Human experience remains central to his depiction of British society, particularly the forms of deprivation and exclusion that characterize it (Kaplan, 2013, pp. 131–134). Films such as *Raining Stones*, *My Name Is Joe*, *Bread and Roses*, *The Angels' Share*, and *I, Daniel Blake* depict people who are oppressed, victimized, or excluded.

Loach's films do not leave viewers with a simple sense of closure. Instead, they draw audiences into the narrative and encourage them to question the circumstances portrayed and consider their own responsibilities. His use of real locations, nonprofessional performers, and improvisation lends intimacy and immediacy to his fictional worlds. These effects of realism emerge through his cinematic language and editing. Loach is also recognized for his distinctive direction of scenes and actors, including his intuitive working methods. His filmmaking combines political commitment, critical reflection, and realist craftsmanship (Hayward, 2005; Kelly, 2007, pp. 30–33).

Through a sociological and cinematographic reading of *Kes* and *I, Daniel Blake*, this study examines the isolation, helplessness, lack of belonging, and difficulties of communication experienced by a working-class child and an adult worker with serious health difficulties, who are positioned as society's "others." Its contribution lies in comparing representations of childhood and vulnerability in later working life and demonstrating how Loach's social realism is articulated through a distinctive formal language. By placing figures at different stages of the life course at the center of class analysis, the article seeks to contribute to scholarship on social realist cinema.

Aim and Method

This study develops a cultural critique of modernity through an analysis of *Kes* and *I, Daniel Blake*, asking how individuals constrained by institutions experience social reality. It draws primarily on the critical perspectives of Bauman, Baudrillard, and Bourdieu. The method integrates sociological film analysis with cinematographic close reading. Sociological film analysis treats films as texts that both reflect and produce culture, relating narrative events, characters, institutions, and social issues to prevailing social relations (Özden, 2014, p. 160). Close reading focuses on the production of ideological meaning through framing, camera

movement, lighting, mise-en-scène, and editing. Bringing these approaches together makes it possible to understand Loach's social realist cinema not simply as a reflection of social reality but as a practice that constructs meaning through form.

Scenes were selected according to three criteria: first, sequences in which concepts such as simulacra, symbolic violence, and othering intersect most clearly with cinematographic elements; second, moments when children or older adults directly confront institutional oppression or enact resistance; and third, sequences in which formal choices such as long takes, handheld camerawork, and real locations contribute decisively to narrative meaning. On this basis, four scenes from *Kes* and three from *I, Daniel Blake* were selected for close reading.

From a sociological perspective, films can be understood as cultural texts that both reflect and produce culture, helping to transmit it across generations. As Özden (2014) suggests, cinema can be understood as a form of culture reflecting upon itself (p. 160).

Made nearly five decades apart, the two films portray the social conditions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, focusing on workers, unemployed people, and others struggling to survive. Through their younger and older protagonists, they

raise questions of justice and conscience in societies governed by rigid institutional rules. Set in Barnsley, South Yorkshire, *Kes* depicts a working-class community closely connected to coal mining. Set in Newcastle upon Tyne, *I, Daniel Blake* addresses precarious employment and the challenges of an increasingly bureaucratized welfare system. From a Baudrillardian perspective, the promise of a secure welfare society may be read as a simulacrum that conceals exclusion, oppression, and institutional inflexibility. In both films, systems of authority impose symbolic violence on marginalized people, in Bourdieu's terms, while also producing forms of alienation and othering associated with Bauman's work. The analysis therefore begins by outlining the theoretical perspectives used to interpret these films.

Theoretical Framework

Civilization, which regulates childhood and marginalizes unemployed and older people, can, in Freud's terms, deepen human unhappiness. Freud argues that the restrictions and pressures imposed by civilized life contribute to suffering and inequality (Freud, 1930, p. 46). Industrialization is a defining feature of modernity, visible in factories, working-class housing, and precarious employment. Modernity also generates increasingly extensive institutional relationships, a process Giddens

describes in terms of the radicalization of modernity (Giddens, 1990, pp. 51–56).

Baudrillard regards postmodernity as a social formation in which representations become detached from their referents and consumption provides an increasingly dominant cultural language. The signs he conceptualizes as simulacra appear to stand for reality while contributing to its displacement. In this account, the apparent promise of welfare can conceal relations of domination, inequality, hierarchy, and violence. Loach’s cinema makes these contradictions visible in the figure of the child subject to school discipline and in the older man waiting for social assistance.

For Baudrillard, simulacra circulate and combine to produce a world of simulation. The concept of “seduction” is also important in explaining the appeal of consumer culture. In a world where signs increasingly displace meaning, the concept of hyperreality becomes central. Baudrillard describes simulacra as models that generate a reality without a stable origin (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 1). In *Kes*, education, and in *I, Daniel Blake*, the welfare state, can be interpreted through this framework: the discrepancy between their legitimizing claims and the harms they inflict is central to the films’ critique.

Within consumer society, hyperreality extends into economic, political, and institutional relationships, as images and signs shape perception. Representations generated through entertainment, health, fashion, and media can transform objects and even bodies into signs within this system (Okuyan & Taslaman, 2018, pp. 29–36). Baudrillard also describes the political and media practices through which public attention can be managed by apparently virtuous performances of disclosure. He calls this a form of “whitewashing” (Baudrillard, 2002, pp. 70–71).

Bauman and May offer a critical account of social relations in everyday life, emphasizing how market relations, consumer choice, and fluid identities can reshape social bonds. In their analysis, the market supplies resources through which individuals construct identities, while apparently self-evident rules and appeals to expertise help reproduce authority. Culture can distinguish and separate people as well as bring them together (Bauman & May, 2019, pp. 111–187).

Bauman argues that contemporary social divisions are mental and cultural as well as spatial. In a global society increasingly shaped by technology, rigid bureaucratic rules can produce impersonal and dehumanizing institutions. Such systems distinguish between those recognized as belonging and those designated as

outsiders. Bauman's discussions of globalization, community, and political agency help illuminate the mechanisms of inequality and exclusion that Loach represents (Bauman, 1999, pp. 51, 54, 198; Bauman, 2001, pp. 89–124).

In Bauman's account, the stranger is constructed as a figure whose ambiguous position unsettles established distinctions between insiders and outsiders. The social definition of a collective "we" simultaneously defines those who do not belong. Such distinctions may operate across economic, ethnic, political, cultural, and generational lines (Bauman, 1991, pp. 75–160; Tiryaki & Akca, 2022, p. 28). This is central to the argument developed here: age intersects with class in Loach's cinema, and childhood and vulnerability later in working life are represented as vulnerable to related forms of social exclusion.

Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence helps explain how unequal distributions of economic, cultural, and symbolic capital sustain domination. Such violence can operate through educational institutions, families, workplaces, and everyday practices. Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus, and capital illuminate the relationships between social positions and the dispositions through which people perceive and act in the world. A field is a structured arena in which actors occupying

different positions struggle over resources and recognition; habitus refers to durable, socially acquired dispositions that shape perception and practice. The relationship between these concepts makes it possible to analyze the reproduction of inequality through apparently ordinary forms of conduct (as discussed by Ölçer, 2019, pp. 34–38). In *Kes*, this perspective informs the contrast between Billy’s experiences at school and at home; in *I, Daniel Blake*, it helps explain Daniel’s alienation from digital bureaucracy as a skilled manual worker.

Bodies of Resistance: An Analysis of the Films *Kes* and *I, Daniel Blake*

Kes (1969): A Sociological and Cinematographic Perspective

The importance of *Kes* (1969) lies partly in the director’s critical treatment of childhood. Through its narrative, the film examines how the institutions of family, school, and work constrain children’s development and aspirations. Divisions between those who possess resources and those who struggle to survive, characteristic of Loach’s wider cinema, are central to *Kes*. The film shows Billy’s estrangement from his family, peers, and school, as well as the institutional pressures that shape his experience (Hayward, 2005).

Although film narratives have often privileged male experience, *Kes* represents working-class life through relationships involving women, men, and, most

importantly, a child. Its account of alienation, exclusion, and limited opportunity follows Billy as he struggles with pressures exerted by family and educational institutions (Leggott, 2008, pp. 90–99).

Kes portrays Billy’s struggle for a measure of freedom as he approaches adolescence and confronts the prospect of losing the independence he associates with childhood. Through his character, Loach criticizes the family, school, and work relations that shape children’s socialization. Billy’s conflicts at home and school and his refusal to conform can be interpreted as forms of resistance. In the context of working-class Britain in the late 1960s, school tends to prepare children for predetermined social positions. Billy nevertheless seeks a sense of purpose through his relationship with the kestrel he names Kes. Living with his mother and older brother Jud, he rejects the prospect of becoming a miner like Jud and earns pocket money delivering newspapers.

Billy is rebellious and even meets his needs by committing petty thefts such as “stealing milk”. Billy’s private life, outside of school hours, consists of reading comic books, observing nature, and hiking in the open air. Natural areas, the kestrel bird he found by chance, and comic books preserve his imagination. “Mischief” or

“play”, as in the example of throwing a stone at a window, is a metaphorical way for Billy’s desire to break free from the dominance of adults, that is, authority. Waving a tree branch in his hand and wandering around with mud on his face and body, Billy gazes at nature for extended moments, almost as if he is presented as a part of it.

Scene Analysis 1: Nature Sequences and the Kestrel: A Formal Representation of Freedom

One of Kes’s most defining cinematographic choices is the way Billy’s relationship with the kestrel is made visible in the nature sequences (Figure 1). In these scenes, Loach uses framing and camera movement as an ideological tool: in contrast to the cramped interior frames, low ceilings, and gloomy lighting frequently employed in the factory and school sequences, wide-angle shots and outdoor settings dominate the kestrel scenes. Even when Billy releases the bird into free flight, the camera does not confine him to a narrow frame; on the contrary, it visually establishes the organic relationship between the child and nature through panoramic movement following the bird’s flight. This formal choice is not accidental: Loach shows Billy, a body constrained economically and culturally, as a body that is only “opened” in nature and only with the kestrel. The open space, to use Bourdieu’s terminology, is the only area where a child deprived of cultural and economic capital

can step outside their habitus.



Figure 1. Billy with the kestrel on a stone wall in the open countryside. Still from *Kes* (Loach, 1969).

Scene Analysis 2: School Discipline: Camera, Lighting, and Cinematography

Loach's camera choices in school scenes create a visual language of institutional oppression. In the disciplinary scene in the principal's office, the camera often frames Billy from a low angle; the principal's figure is positioned above the child's perspective. This classic geometry of power establishes a visual dominance that accompanies verbal oppression. The lighting design reinforces this relationship: the principal's office is presented with cold, flat lighting that evokes institutional authority, while the shadows on Billy's face indicate how he is rendered invisible in this space. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence finds a formal expression here:

power is exercised not only through words but also through light and camera angles. In classroom scenes, Loach often uses long shots; the children are framed not individually, but as a group (Figure 2). The ideological meaning of this choice is clear: the education system produces not individuals, but a controlled crowd.



Figure 2. The headmaster, holding a cane, addresses a group of pupils gathered in a school room. Still from *Kes* (Loach, 1969).

Scene Analysis 3: Lesson Sequence: Formal Representation of Human Contact

A particularly revealing paradox in *Kes* is that a moment of resistance emerges within the school itself. In the classroom, a teacher invites Billy to speak about his experience of training the kestrel. The encounter offers a rare opportunity for meaningful communication with an adult. Formally, the sequence differs from disciplinary scenes: the camera moves closer to Billy, the teacher and pupil are framed on a more equal level, and the lighting appears warmer. This contrast

suggests that Loach's cinematic language changes when communication becomes possible. Billy describes finding and training Kes with confidence and detailed knowledge, impressing both the teacher and his classmates. The scene exposes a contradiction: although the institution labels Billy a failure, his knowledge of nature, observation, patience, and practical skill constitute valuable resources. Yet such knowledge is not readily recognized within the school's hierarchy of cultural capital. The teacher's willingness to listen briefly challenges that hierarchy.

In the film, the home ceases to be a medium for face-to-face communication and becomes a refuge for "alienated" individuals who cannot tolerate each other. Nightclubs, alcohol, cigarettes, and popular music are associated with social rituals where suffering is alleviated. Widespread consumption of cigarettes, horse racing, and gambling symbolizes the despair of miners, as seen in Jud's case.

While the mother and Jud, complaining about their workload, struggle to communicate with Billy, the mother believes marriage will change his fate, and the older brother believes gambling will. For Billy, school is a medium where dominant relations are produced, "childhood" is lost, and he is educated, domesticated, and emasculated according to standardized role models. Billy's defiant attitude towards

authority is not indicative of his socialization problem. Billy's "resistance" is against the established logic of the social system and generally accepted ethics. All of Billy's unconventional attitudes and behaviors are directed towards questioning the logic that produces the dominant ideology. In the film, one of the key figures in producing a class that submits to the established system is the headteacher. The principal represents authority, tradition, and culture. He accuses children who break the rules and create their own game of immorality, punishes them, and uses physical and symbolic violence. Loach suggests that educational institutions should break free from their dependence on industry. According to the director, schools should be freed from their function as places where children, whose "behaviors and social statuses are standardized", acquire their identities.

Billy's unconventional and immoral behavior, exemplified by his "stealing milk and books", serves to highlight the irrationality of societal rules that are unquestioningly obeyed and accepted as the sole reality. Billy's actions represent a resolute defense of the desire for "liberation" and the belief in "struggle and resistance". The oppressed, exploited, and marginalized lower classes have forgotten the idea of organized struggle to improve their social status. A morality of individual

struggle and competition has taken root. Therefore, what has been “lost” is actually the hope of improving one’s life. In this context, Billy, by rejecting the role models offered to him, suggests that the rationality of society may actually be irrational. The film explores the possibility of a cultural foundation that will keep alive childhood, nature, the healing knowledge of the past, and the capacity for imagination.

Billy, like every child at school, is intended to be constructed as a subject deprived of privilege. While children are constrained within a standardized educational model without regard for their aptitudes and intrinsic motivations, they are transformed into “human waste” of the consumer society. It is not only Billy’s ability to dream that is lost. The killing and discarding of the kestrel, the bird Billy tried to communicate with and raised, by his older brother is also a metaphorical representation of the suppression of childhood. Humanity not only alienates other humans, that is, children, but also transforms nature into “waste”. Indeed, according to Bauman, the production of human waste is an inevitable consequence of modernization, hierarchy, and segregation (Bauman, 1998).

Scene Analysis 4: The Death of the Kestrel: Power, Editing, and Sound

This sequence constitutes an emotional and ideological climax in which Loach employs formal restraint. Jud’s killing of the kestrel is not shown directly; the

absence of the act becomes a narrative choice. When Billy discovers the bird's death, the framing emphasizes his stunned response rather than overt emotional display (Figure 3). This choice presents suffering not only as personal loss but also as the result of broader social pressures. The sparse soundscape reinforces the sequence's emotional force. In the closing scene, Billy buries the kestrel with little dialogue or musical accompaniment. Such restraint is characteristic of Loach's social realist aesthetic. Read through Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, the bird's death becomes an expression of the power Jud exercises over Billy and the future that seems available to him.



Figure 3. Billy holding the dead kestrel. Still from *Kes* (Loach, 1969).

Educational institutions can function as mechanisms that reproduce an established social order and its corresponding positions. The everyday practices of Billy's mother and brother also reveal the constraints of working-class life. The

limited alternatives available to the family, the unequal opportunities afforded to poor and wealthy people, and Billy's attempts to resist can be interpreted through Baudrillard's concept of simulation (Baudrillard, 1988, p. 146).

In *Kes*, the routines of working-class and mining life, the limited occupational choices offered to children, and the educational system's role in directing pupils toward predetermined work can be read as forms of symbolic violence. The film shows both the physical and symbolic pressures imposed on children within the school system.

I, Daniel Blake (2016): A Sociological and Cinematographic Perspective

Although globalization has partly facilitated travel, it has not eliminated inequality. The British economy is increasingly affected by global competition dominated by multinational corporations. Therefore, many companies have restructured their management and internal organizational structures. The most significant impact of this new structure on workers is that part-time or flexible positions do not offer job security. Of course, new production technologies also render workers redundant. Especially in the period after the 1980s, state intervention decreased, public services were reduced, and this negatively affected education, health, and pension security. Consequently, the life struggles of individuals left

exposed to the harsh forces of capitalist competition have become far more difficult (Abercrombie & Warde, 2007, pp. 6–9). *I, Daniel Blake* presents one such example of this harsh struggle through the portrayal of a 59-year-old joiner with a heart condition.

The film, which paints a panorama of a culture where there is no tolerance for the poor among the poor, the oppressed among the oppressed, or the victim among the victim, presents a central image of resistance: Daniel, who is reduced to the “other” of society as a worker whose illness prevents him from returning to employment. It is as if, faced with the fear of the victim becoming aware and revolting, the cultural system has become rigid enough to take the strictest measures (Freud, 1930, p. 74).

Neoliberal economic policies have reduced workers to the status of “temporary contract-flexible workers”, making them substitutes for one another. These policies are the main obstacle to organized struggle. In today’s global world, strong class affiliation has been replaced, as Bauman points out, by weak and mobilized identity representations (Bauman, 1999).

The film *I, Daniel Blake* (2016) offers a critique of culture through the life struggle of Daniel, a 59-year-old carpenter with a heart condition who is unfamiliar with digital technologies and does not even know how to use a computer. Daniel, a skilled worker who loves his craft and builds libraries, toys, and houses, is unable to work due to his illness. To receive employment-related support, Daniel must navigate a work-capability assessment that finds him fit for work despite his medical circumstances. However, lacking computer skills, Daniel struggles to complete the online procedures required by the welfare system and obtain the assistance he needs. In this respect, the film depicts a skilled man struggling within procedures for receiving state support, whose death follows a prolonged and distressing bureaucratic ordeal, while simultaneously raising questions about the irrationality and moral depravity of cultural blindness and discrimination.

Drawing on Bauman and May, the film may be read as a criticism of a rigid institutional culture that shows limited tolerance toward people who are ill, unemployed, or unfamiliar with its procedures. The promises of protection associated with the welfare state stand in marked contrast to Daniel's experience of being repeatedly categorized and denied meaningful recognition. These failures concern the administration of income and employment-related benefits, rather than

the privatization of medical treatment. The distinction matters: it is the gap between professed social care and the practical experience of exclusion that gives Loach's critique its force (Bauman & May, 2019).

Scene Analysis 1: Daniel's Relationship with Household Objects - The Non-Commodified Formal Representation of Labor

Loach places Daniel's identity as a carpenter not in an abstract past, but in the concrete spatial and visual language of the film. His apartment is filled with objects he made himself, not bought from the market: hand-crafted wooden shelves, repaired chairs, carefully arranged tools. These objects form a counter-narrative that breaks the neoliberal economic policy's "labor = wage = consumption" cycle: Daniel's labor is not a commodity, because it has been transformed not into a market value, but directly into use value. The camera frames these objects not as a random backdrop, but as a careful choice of *mise-en-scène*. the film foregrounds Daniel's practical skills in his interactions with neighbors and in the objects he makes and repairs. These actions, in Bourdieu's terms, are the only real form of Daniel's capital. However, this capital is completely invisible within the digital bureaucracy as a system. Read from a Marxist perspective on alienation, the objects produced through Daniel's manual labor emerge as the last remaining islands outside capitalist

commodity relations. By rendering these islands visible, Loach dismantles the cold abstraction of the welfare system, which reduces Daniel solely to the categories of “unemployed” and “ill”, through a powerful counter-image. Daniel, despite ill health and unemployment, is thus transformed into an image of a productive, knowledgeable, and skilled body.

In the film, digital technologies become tools through which institutional procedures are enforced. The film shows that technology doesn’t eliminate bureaucracy; on the contrary, it exacerbates it. Daniel dies of a heart attack after prolonged struggles with the welfare system; the film does not establish that bureaucratic delays medically caused his death. Daniel’s death reveals the tragic state of a society so blind and deaf that it cannot see his suffering, hear his voice, or share in his resistance. The film exposes the concrete and real face of a culture that treats sick and unemployed people as disposable, thereby revealing the “virtual culture”. The film thus questions the power of digital processes over those who cannot readily access them.

In the film *I, Daniel Blake*, the solidarity between Daniel and Katie, who represent two different generations, is a sociological proposition by director Loach.

Loach presents a form of solidarity between Daniel, a worker in later life, who signifies a written culture that attributes meaning to objects, and young Katie, who represents a consumer culture dominated by visuality. In doing so, he underscores the necessity of empathy and intergenerational solidarity across distinct age categories. Despite their differences in age and life experience, Katie and Daniel occupy a shared social position, bound by their common condition of poverty and unemployment. Loach emphasizes the necessity of solidarity and empathy across all age categories and generations. Both are economically insecure, although their circumstances differ. Katie, struggling to make ends meet with her two children, offers insights into the changing structure of the British family. The pressures facing single-parent households are evident in her circumstances. Katie's enforced move from London to Newcastle instead reveals the geographical constraints of the housing and benefits system. Katie and Daniel's shared problem is the bureaucratic obstacle to applying for unemployment benefits. Bureaucratic procedures and obstacles deprive Katie of her ideal of finding a job and going to university, while they compound Daniel's distress before his death. Loach's critique of culture is directed not only at those who set the rules but also at those who blindly obey them. In contemporary human relationships, initiative and tolerance have been forgotten,

and obedience has replaced solidarity (Kaplan, 2017, pp. 374–375).

Scene Analysis 2: Katie's Food-Bank Scene: The Visualization of Hunger

This scene is among the film's most powerful demonstrations of the ideological force of Loach's formal simplicity. At a food bank, Katie opens a can of food and begins eating because she has been denying herself food so that her children can eat. Loach's close framing directs attention to Katie's hands, the can, and her face (Figure 4), while the surrounding space remains secondary. The scene makes hunger visible in an institution created to respond to material deprivation. Read in relation to Baudrillard's account of consumer society, the contrast between the promise of welfare and the immediate reality of hunger becomes especially pointed. The actor's physical performance conveys a combination of shame, distress, and desperation through bodily gestures and the camera's proximity. Loach shows the audience a person experiencing hunger rather than an abstract statistic.



Figure 4. Katie at the food bank, with Daniel beside her. Still from *I, Daniel Blake* (Loach, 2016).

Daniel's situation reflects the vulnerability and isolation of workers facing illness and exclusion in contemporary society. A former carpenter, he lives among neighbors experiencing various forms of economic insecurity. One young neighbor attempts to earn money through the informal sale of imported goods, while Katie struggles to provide food for her children. These parallel stories place Daniel's predicament within a wider social environment marked by poverty and precarious work.

In the film *I, Daniel Blake*, it is essential for a worker who is unable to work to navigate online procedures to seek social assistance. Daniel, unfamiliar with technology, is, in Bauman's words, a stranger to the system, an outsider, and a figure not belonging to global culture – human waste.

Daniel does not readily fit the digital and bureaucratic expectations of this system. Daniel represents a resistance that exposes the violence of rigid bureaucracy in a globalized world dominated by technology and money. He fights not only for himself but also for the unemployed young woman with children. While institutions suspend income support with rigid procedures, Daniel resists to the end, even individually. Daniel's death is an indication that the inhumanity of the system has also permeated individuals. Remaining silent about Daniel's death is also complicity. As Baudrillard points out, hyperreality is a perfect revelation of reality. Daniel's death follows his struggle for recognition within an inflexible system, although the narrative cannot establish a single medical cause. Just as the economic pressures that lead Katie to sex work is not so much a choice as, as Baudrillard emphasizes, an action that takes place within the language of consumer culture.

Scene Analysis 3: The Manifesto Scene: Resistance and the Spatialization of Discourse

One of the most striking acts of resistance in *I, Daniel Blake* occurs when Daniel writes a public declaration on the wall outside the welfare office (Figure 5). The scene transforms his previously private and largely invisible struggle into a visible public statement. The action takes place outdoors, in contrast to the restrictive

interiors of bureaucratic institutions. The framing allows both Daniel's message and the reactions of passersby to be observed. Some onlookers applaud, while others laugh or continue walking. These different reactions suggest that solidarity has weakened but has not disappeared. The written protest also anticipates the letter Katie reads at Daniel's funeral. Together, the wall inscription and funeral letter preserve his voice across different spaces and moments, connecting resistance to remembrance and collective witness.



Figure 5. Daniel Blake before the wall on which he has written his public declaration. Still from *I, Daniel Blake* (Loach, 2016).

I, Daniel Blake depicts how contemporary forms of institutionalization can produce increasingly rigid bureaucratic procedures. Unemployed people, older adults, young people, and parents may all be treated as outsiders when they cannot comply with administrative requirements. The film therefore portrays not only an

economically divided society but also one fragmented by failures of recognition and empathy. Its critique is directed at the rules themselves and at the habits of unquestioning compliance that sustain them. In Bauman's terms, globalization can separate those who move freely from those whose mobility is restricted. As Katie's experience suggests, relocation alone does not necessarily overcome social exclusion (Bauman, 1998, pp. 5–10).

Daniel carries a letter that he intends to read to the welfare authorities, but he dies before he can do so. Katie reads it at his funeral. In the letter, Daniel rejects being treated as a customer, a claimant number, or a supplicant and asserts his dignity, citizenship, and right to respect. Its language offers a final expression of his resistance to a system that has denied him recognition.

Loach's characters, whether class-based or individual, but always representing resistance, remind the viewer: "Don't be ghosts of your time; you can intervene in time, you can improve your life" (Kaplan & Kaplan, 2011, p. 130).

Conclusion

Loach's films offer critical representations of social relations and are especially suited to sociological interpretation. They expose interlocking systems of domination and exploitation that affect labor, thought, the right to life, childhood,

and working-life vulnerability. His cinema also criticizes the routine obedience through which ordinary people participate in institutional power. By depicting the relationships between production, consumption, and social identity, Loach questions the cultural conditions that constrain solidarity and human dignity.

This study advances two related arguments through an examination of films made nearly five decades apart. First, childhood and later working life are represented as vulnerable to related forms of othering that cannot be explained by economic class alone. Age therefore intersects with class as a dimension of social marginalization in Loach's cinema. Second, this exclusion is constructed not only through narrative themes but also through cinematographic form: framing, lighting, camera distance, and sound design contribute to ideological meaning.

Considered together, these arguments suggest that Loach's films do more than represent social inequality: they make its effects perceptible through cinematic form and encourage the viewer to take a critical position. Billy's classroom account of his relationship with Kes and Daniel's public declaration are particularly revealing expressions of this process.

Loach's cinema, by examining the exploiter-exploited relationship within a

framework of mutual coordination, reveals the fluid structure of the given culture. This global world, where the exploited can themselves become exploiters, where even the oppressed are fragmented rather than united in solidarity, effectively confines the individual, childhood, and vulnerability during working life within conditions of entrapment and hopelessness. The new bureaucracy of the age of global communication operates through even more rigid and impersonal rules. In *I, Daniel Blake*, the obstacles Daniel encounters in his struggle for survival are not merely bureaucratic barriers; rather, they are the very gatekeepers of the system itself (Kaplan, 2017, pp. 376–377). Therefore, as Baudrillard puts it, the real problem lies with those who undoubtedly obey the virtual master called the rule. The problem for the worker, the unemployed, the young, and the old is the hopelessness born from being within the system. The reason for the forgetting of questioning, tolerance, and solidarity is the perception of the hyperreal as the only reality. This false reality stems from the internalization of hegemonic language. Ken Loach, with the power of his cinematic reality, attempts to shake and awaken his audience.

In *I, Daniel Blake*, the living spaces of the poor, who need public support due to unemployment or health problems, present a habitus that, in Bourdieu's words, responds to the demands of the space. The film also depicts moments when poverty,

exhaustion, and insecurity limit solidarity and empathy. The jobless poor possess the life practices, behaviors, and moral tendencies dictated by their own habitus. The determining influence of technology on the social network has become a new rule. In this reading, socially differentiated dispositions interact with institutional fields to reproduce unequal patterns of recognition and action. Daniel's death follows these frustrating procedures, but the film does not establish a direct medical cause; it also depicts individuals whose unquestioning compliance perpetuates institutional indifference. Therefore, to quote Bourdieu again, symbolic violence and relations of domination are everywhere in life, in the relationships between ordinary people.

The lack of understanding between generations, and the intolerance of the poor towards other poor people, are the deepest and most radical manifestations of separation. The film *Kes* offers the most concrete and sincere depiction of separation and lack of communication within the family institution. The film *I, Daniel Blake*, while depicting the marginalization of people who lack access to, or familiarity with, digital technology, makes a cinematic call for a society evolving not only into one without job security but also one without health security. Unemployed Katie's hunger and her desperate act of eating from a can at a food bank are indicative of a

new era of capitalism where the real cause of poverty is not questioned. Interestingly, this situation is essentially a cultural blindness, as Bauman points out, and as Baudrillard indicates, this new artificial-digital culture, by disguising itself as law and appearing natural and legitimate, causes the real problems to be obscured. Ken Loach offers his audience the opportunity to recognize their cultural blindness. Indeed, Giddens, while discussing the radicalization phase of modernity, also argues that communication tools, which produce information by emphasizing industrial production, the market economy, and mass democracy, are a control mechanism that maintains the order of the system. Here, Giddens, with an interpretation similar to Baudrillard, points to the power of the unreal. Therefore, the education system in the film *Kes*, which supposedly produces information and offers children no other options, as well as the digital communication tools and social welfare institutions that are the only means of communication with these institutions in the film *I, Daniel Blake*, are also tools of control and surveillance (Giddens, 1990, pp. 58–134). It is as if this new state of the modern world has created a system that destroys everything that is “incompatible, dissimilar”. In *Kes*, this system attempts to discipline the child into conformity, while in *I, Daniel Blake*, it restricts access to assistance for workers whose circumstances do not fit bureaucratic categories.

In the film *Kes*, the violence inflicted on children who do not conform to the school's existing rules and curriculum shows how educational institutions have become a simulacrum that teaches "obedience" rather than "learning, thinking, imagining, and knowledge". In a simulated universe where the master-slave relationship is circulated as a welfare society, schools are simulacra of domestication. Indeed, the fact that Billy's Kestrel is killed and thrown in the trash by his older brother demonstrates a new morality that legitimizes the death of the untamable. By killing the kestrel, the older brother shows that Billy's only option is to obey and prepare for life as a miner like himself. Thus, discipline is achieved not only through political economy and educational institutions, but also through a false reality operating within the individual. Billy's safety will be ensured not by obedience, but by a family and school environment that allows for free choice. Therefore, both family and school are simulacra of security. What is thrown into the trash is not only the kestrel, but also Billy, whose dreams are disregarded, and childhood itself. To recall Bauman's view, the representation of Daniel, a worker facing illness and unemployment, in *I, Daniel Blake* and the representation of the child in *Kes* are strangers in their world, the other who belong nowhere unless they conform. The film *Kes* draws attention to the danger of educational institutions

becoming ideological apparatuses that produce “collective identity”. At the end of the film, Billy’s act of burying the kestrel killed by his older brother points to the loss, the murder, of childhood. However, the act of burial also points to a metaphor that preserves “the knowledge of the past, imagination, resistance”. By burying the bird, which represents “childhood, nature, and freedom”, Billy leaves the viewer with a reference to “resistance” a trace “belonging to the past”. Ken Loach essentially presents the audience with dystopian narratives. The poor, the unemployed, children or working-age adults who challenge institutional authority are the source of threat in the modern world. By choosing a direct and apparently simple means of addressing the present, the director offers a sharp critique of culture through naturalistic storytelling. Future research could focus on the intersection of gender with class and age categories in Loach’s cinema, or on a comparative analysis of British social realism with other national cinematic traditions.

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