Stories we tell ourselves

The Cultural Impact of UK Film 1946–2006

A study for the UK Film Council

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1 Foreword

We all feel good when British films and talent triumph at the Oscars® and win prizes at Cannes, as they did this year. And we love to argue about what are the films that, for us, epitomise British cinema. Is it an Ealing comedy or Shakespearean tragedy? Is it James Bond or Colonel Blimp? Is it *My Beautiful Laundrette* or anything with Kate Winslet in it? But we pay less attention to a more profound debate – what impact has British cinema had on the way we see ourselves, and the way others see us?

Stories we tell ourselves begins to address that question. Taking 200 iconic films made over the last 60 years it traces how British cinema has both upheld certain traditional British values and mocked, challenged and undermined them. It shows how important film has been in sustaining and developing the identity of the UK's nations and regions, and in reflecting the changing face of Britain's different communities. And it charts the extraordinary power a successful British film can wield at home and abroad. In 1960, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* fundamentally and rapidly changed perceptions of class and regional identity in England. In 2002, *Bend it like Beckham* was the catalyst that launched all-women football in India.

The study also charts the way in which the economics of the film industry have shaped its evolution, from state quotas and subsidies to the impact of television, the DVD and the internet.

From its earliest beginnings, UK film has always been an international endeavour, but the digital revolution now makes British film a truly global art form. As screen-based images assume an ever greater significance in our lives, the power of film can only grow; as the mirror in which we see ourselves and the window through which others see us. This study highlights the cultural impact of British film, nationally and internationally. It calls on us to acknowledge and appreciate the strength, the diversity and the rude health of our film heritage and to acknowledge its vital role in contemporary culture.

John Woodward
Chief Executive Officer, UK Film Council

2 Executive summary

1. This study reflects a growing recognition of UK film as one of the most powerful cultural agents of the last 100 years. Drawing on a comprehensive dataset of UK films produced from 1946 to 2006, it provides a wide-ranging analysis of the cultural make-up of UK cinema over this period, and offers a preliminary set of tools for assessing its cultural impact as well as a set of core findings.

2. Two samples were drawn from the dataset for qualitative analysis: an intuitive sample of 200 films generally regarded by professional observers as significant and of lasting value, and a random sample of 200 films to act as a reality check. All films in both samples were analysed using a set of indicators which included period, location, genre, creative source and ethnic representation. Each of the films was marked according to whether it predominantly reinforced, challenged, modernised or satirised UK identities, traditions and values.

3. The results of this analysis challenge popular assumptions about the nature of British cinema and its dominant themes. For instance, it was found that while most UK films in the samples have a contemporary setting, of those set in the past most are set in the 'long 19th century' (1800-1914), and World War II is far less dominant than generally supposed.

4. Films in the random sample tended to exemplify or reinforce British values, whereas films in the intuitive sample tended to challenge or satirise those values.

5. The sample analysis was supplemented by 30 case studies of culturally significant UK films. Three indices were used to gauge the impact of these films, adapted from studies of the cultural impact of television:

• Original impact (box office, awards);

• Extended impact (DVD re-issues, restorations);

• Wider impact (citations in other media, evidence of esteem, impact on social/cultural behaviour, IMDb ratings and number of YouTube clips).

6. On each of the wider impact measures, a majority of the 30 case studies achieved high scores: 18 were cited in other media, 22 showed evidence of esteem, 20 showed evidence of impact on the behaviour of society, 26 had an IMDB user rating of seven or above and 22 had five or more clips on YouTube.

7. Additionally, the study identifies four key categories of cultural impact:

• Censorship and notoriety (eg *A Clockwork Orange* withdrawn by its director after a critical furore and alleged death threats, or *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* deemed a threat to morale by a wartime government);

• Quotations in other media such as songs, TV shows and music videos, (eg references to *Chariots of Fire* and its celebrated score in television shows including *LA Law, The Simpsons, The Office, Ugly Betty* and *Will and Grace*);

Henry V

- Zeitgeist moments, where films have captured the spirit and preoccupations of their times, influenced change and earned a place in popular culture (eg the release of *Bend it like Beckham* in India inspiring the creation of the first all-girls national football league);

- Cumulative impact, where films have defined shared cultural perceptions and contributed to long-term changes in social and cultural attitudes (eg the impact of the character played by Simon Callow in *Four Weddings and a Funeral* in changing attitudes towards the gay community).

8. The findings from the use of this methodology confirm that film has been a key arena in British cultural life, projecting and debating British values and identities, and remains potent despite the pervasive impact of television and US cinema.

9. In the early 1960s, the English regions inspired an unprecedented run of commercially successful, culturally high-profile British New Wave films which challenged the previously accepted regional stereotypes. The cultural shock value they achieved at the time came from their depiction of people from the regional working classes (predominantly those of the industrial north) as complex, shaded and non-compliant characters who often embodied youth culture and its push for social change (eg *A Taste of Honey* and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*) and had a lasting impact on UK society.

10. The depiction of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in film has evolved from being reflected only through popular entertainment films made under the control of London-based producers, to achieving a degree of autonomy over cinematic self-representation. For example, Scottish cinema achieved a spike of nationwide cultural impact in the early 1980s, largely through the phenomenal success of its first true indigenous popular film director, Bill Forsyth. *Gregory's Girl* and *Local Hero* reportedly did more to revive tourism in Scotland than any previous effort by local government. Again, in the mid-1990s Scottish cinema achieved a new wave of cultural impact beyond its own borders, through a spate of successful films: *Shallow Grave, Trainspotting,* and Hollywood high-budget productions including *Braveheart*. The challenge for film in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is to build on these peak moments to create a consistent output that achieves domestic and international impact.

11. The new, post-1970s model of feature film commissioning, based on partnership with television, played a key role in enabling and giving cultural visibility to a rising number of films by black and Asian British people. By common consensus, the Channel 4 film *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) represented a breakout from the confines of a black and Asian 'cinema of duty' and was one of the first successful UK films to associate ethnicity with youth culture.

12. From the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, films depicting Britain's ethnic mix became increasingly part of the cultural mainstay. This is evidenced by a wider range of genres, especially an expansion of comedies depicting life in British black and Asian communities now at ease with the diversity they have fostered. Cross-over successes in this canon include *East is East* and *Bend it like Beckham.*

Young Soul Rebels

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13. UK films form a large proportion of non-US imported films in Europe and of film imports into the US, and are particularly appreciated for their social realism and ability to show ordinary people undergoing profound changes in life with resilience and humour. The cultural appeal of this British formula is evidenced by the worldwide success of films like *The Full Monty* and *Brassed Off*.

14. At the same time, in some markets, particularly the non-English speaking markets where films are dubbed in local languages, the Britishness of some large UK/US films (eg Harry Potter or James Bond) is not always perceived. This presents a challenge for the maximisation of UK cultural impact internationally.

15. The cultural impact of British film can no longer be seen as the product of a single kind of consumption. In a fast-changing media landscape, theatrical exhibition no longer governs the extent of a film's potential cultural impact. This now depends on a cluster of modes of access, including DVD and other digital forms of delivery which make the availability of a wider range of films an economic proposition.

16. From the advent of the video to the development of internet, new modes of delivery have created a growing market for classic British film, with older films now capable of attracting new audiences through restoration and forms of digital publication. These new factors in the supply and demand chain are creating a new cultural 'long tail' which is multiplying pathways for films to reach an audience.

17. The internet has proved to be a fertile public space for information and conversation about films: in place of a top-down hierarchy of critical judgement, there are now highly democratic virtual communities of interlocutors, sharing information, recommendations and debate. Websites such as IMDb and Rotten Tomatoes, carrying users' comments as well as published criticism, and the blogosphere now supplement a wide range of consumer journalism about film, and can mitigate the lack of critical exposure for less commercially high profile films. Video uplinks make possible the posting of extracts and trailers so that critical writing, fan commentary and direct quotation have increasingly converged into a composite discourse. This approach is now integrated in rental and retail libraries such as Lovefilm, which are responsive to users' preferences and encourage the posting of user-feedback reviews as a marketing tool.

18. Since the 1920s, the British Government has been supportive of UK film, setting up the British Film Institute, the British Film Commission and more recently the UK Film Council, funding the film activities of the British Council and, using a variety of instruments from quotas to levies to subsidy to tax incentives, directly supporting the development of the UK's filming infrastructure, skills and talent. These initiatives have fostered the cultural impact of UK film.

19. In recent decades, European policy has enhanced the opportunities for distinctively British films to extend their cultural impact into Europe through co-production and distribution support; co-production opportunities have also been extended outside Europe through bilateral agreements. Many films by distinguished British filmmakers such as Mike Leigh and Ken Loach have benefited from these developments, which have helped them reach audiences abroad and build the cultural impact of British cinema internationally.

20. Significant new opportunities exist for public policy to enhance this cultural impact by taking advantage of the multi-platform dissemination of UK film in the digital age, through investment in education, training and new forms of distribution and exhibition, as well as support through the UK tax system for the production of distinctively British films.

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3 Introduction: what is UK cinema and what do we expect of it?

"Movies changed our world forever. Henceforth history would be screened: first in meeting houses known as movie theatres; then at home through television… through ear and eye, we are both defined and manipulated by fictions of such potency that they are able to replace our own experience, often becoming our sole experience of distant realities."

Gore Vidal, *Screening History* (1992)

There is an important distinction that is often forgotten when discussing UK or British cinema: do we mean films made in Britain, or those available to or consumed by British audiences? British audiences have never consumed mostly British-made films; at various times, between 5% and 35% of the films they have seen, or bought, have been UK films, with by far the majority of the rest being American-made or produced. We are not, of course, alone in this imbalance. Since around 1918, most of the world has consumed a majority of American films, meaning that domestic production nearly everywhere except the United States is a minority option. In the UK, the perception of what is British has often been confused and subject to both mixed messages and changing legal definitions. We may indeed wonder: if everything on the screen appears British, apart from the production company and two stars, is it a British film?

In spite of their minority status, UK films are among the most popular and affectionately remembered in Britain, and elsewhere in the world. UK films have won numerous Oscars®, and three UK films have been voted European Film of the Year since 1988. The French Institut Lumière launched its prestigious DVD collection in 2006 with two boxed sets of classic 1940s films by Powell and Pressburger, introduced by its president, the director Bertrand Tavernier. Martin Scorsese says that two of these, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* and *The Red Shoes,* are among his favourite films of all time, while Francis Ford Coppola has recently recorded a special commentary for the DVD of Alexander Korda's *The Thief of Bagdad.*

Such accolades may be reassuring, but tell us about only part of the cultural impact British cinema has had and continues to have. The study of film's cultural impact is complex and little developed, compared with the study of cinema's economics. And the notion of culture itself is notoriously elusive. In this study we refer to culture in its broad definition – the whole way a society behaves and expresses itself – not just the artistic definition of culture, important though this is.

Raymond Williams famously described culture as 'one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language',[1] before noting that the complexity lies in our attitudes towards what it describes, rather than the word or concept itself. Williams also usefully exposed a tradition of hostility towards the concept that is unique to Britain and America, 'connected with uses involving claims to superior knowledge'. Perhaps the best way to avoid this blockage is to look to social anthropologists, who routinely analyse 'cultures' without prejudice about 'high' or 'low' status.

The Red Shoes

1. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society,* Fontana, 1976, p76.

One of the most influential of all anthropologists was Clifford Geertz, whose 1973 book *The Interpretation of Cultures* was voted one of the 100 most important published since World War II.[2] Geertz described culture as 'a system of meanings embodied in symbols, which provides people with a frame of reference to understand reality and animate their behaviour'.[3] He also defined culture as 'stories we tell ourselves about ourselves', and this is the significance we believe film has for a society – British films are literally 'the stories we tell ourselves' and, of course, tell others about ourselves. They aren't necessarily true, and they may be how we want things to be, or to not be, but collectively they make up our culture; and for much of the last 100 years, film has been the most widely consumed and circulated medium of storytelling.

In keeping with the complexities involved, the approach to research and investigation adopted in this study is hybrid. We have consulted the literature of cinema – critical, consumer, trade and official – and we have interviewed a wide range of practitioners, including those who are nearest to the consumer. We have also created a new resource: a searchable database of all feature-length UK films known to have been made and released between 1946 and 2006. From this we have drawn an intuitive list of 200 culturally significant and representative films for closer analysis. Since this is likely to be biased in favour of well-known and admired films, we have randomly selected a second sample of 200 to serve as a control – a snapshot of the reality of British cinema. We have also produced case studies of films representing key moments of cultural impact.

Our basic hypothesis is that British cinema does have cultural impact, both within Britain and internationally. To what extent this is conditioned by access, availability, knowledge, or by regional, generational or ethnic bias remains to be explored. We know that it is constrained by the decisions of many 'gatekeepers', while what is produced is also conditioned by the values and preferences of 'enablers' – as well as by the intentions and achievements of filmmakers – all of which we have tried to register to some degree. Additional hypotheses that have structured this report are that:

- UK film has portrayed the changing face of Britain since the end of World War II, vividly and sometimes provocatively, and has fed this chronicle back to UK audiences and to others around the world, creating a celluloid image of the UK adjusting to the challenges of the post-war world (see section 5, p16 & section 8, p64);
- Film has helped to create distinct identities for the nations and regions of the United Kingdom, often portraying the tensions that have arisen from changing industrial patterns and the politics of devolution and autonomy in ways that make these comprehensible (see section 6, p29);
- Film has helped to articulate the voice and image of UK minority ethnic communities, especially black and Asian, creating some of the most eloquent accounts of the immigrant experience and of how conflict can be replaced by community (see section 7, p50);
- UK film policy originated from the desire to ensure that British audiences had access to British stories, alongside those from other countries, and this philosophy remains valid today in a very different media landscape (see section 9, p73).

Histories of cinema have usually been written from the point of view of critics and filmmakers, often dismissing audiences as unknowable, except in terms of box office behaviour. Yet cinema is above all the business of audiences – which are larger for film in all its forms than for any other cultural medium. We know that audience preferences can be more accurately deduced in cases where data is available, but such data is unavailable for much of UK cinema's history.[4] So we have had to use what evidence exists, supplemented by an enhanced awareness of what has been made in Britain and a corrective sense of how UK film is being reassessed in the globalised digital era.

2. *Times Literary Supplement.*
3. *New York Times obituary*, 1 November 2006.
4. John Sedgwick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A Choice of Pleasures,* Exeter University Press, 2000.

4 The cultural impact of UK film: unpacking the legacy

4.1 Core findings

In this section, we review the forces that have determined how British cinema has reached audiences. We look in particular at the assumptions about UK films held by the gatekeepers (distributors, exhibitors, broadcasters), the enablers (public policy and industry bodies) and the filmmakers themselves, all of whom have played a major role in determining the extent of British cinema's cultural impact.

• Despite the success of the film medium in Britain, there have been ongoing concerns about the identity of British cinema and its ability to serve as an effective medium to reflect and dramatise British culture. The study identifies four key aspects of this issue: the low proportion of British films within the total consumed (concern about Hollywood dominance was expressed as early as 1914); the mixed cultural identity of films produced in Britain with American finance; the debate about the quality of UK films, with film exhibitors complaining of their parochialism; and the underlying doubt about cinema's legitimacy as a cultural medium, which runs through British 'highbrow' culture.

• By 1916, US films accounted for most of the UK market, and by the early 1920s the US studios' distribution arms dominated the UK distribution market. Initial state intervention (1927) aimed to provide opportunities for UK films to be seen. The domination of the distribution and exhibition markets by films from the US studios has remained a constant factor ever since, leading to several official enquiries into alleged monopolisation and restrictive practices.[5]

• In the 1960s, television became an important alternative to cinemas for public access to UK films. Public service and commercial broadcasters played a largely constructive part in compensating for the shortcomings of cinema exhibition, making a wider range of films available. Since the 1980s, television has been an active partner of British cinema, creating opportunities for the work of indigenous talent to reach an audience.

• The arrival of cable and satellite platforms, and the success of video followed by DVD, have multiplied the pathways to a film-hungry audience. The DVD re-issue market, in particular, has led to a revival of interest in works by British film directors whose cultural impact had initially been limited due to having only small releases followed by occasional television screenings.

• The culture of filmmaking in Britain has been shaped by the layered experience of being closely affiliated to the American film industry, while also being geographically a part of Europe and adjusting to the loss of empire. It also inherited an underlying British mistrust of making special claims for cinema as art. The cause of challenging the assumption that cinema is mere craft and not art has been taken up by successive generations of independent filmmakers, and the primacy given to popular culture after the socio-cultural upheavals of the 1960s has gradually made the opposition less significant, although some bias still remains.

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5. The Monopolies Commission's 1966 report *Films: A Report on the Supply of Films for Exhibition in Cinemas,* was followed up by reports with the same title from the successor body, the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, in 1983 and 1994.

4.2 Film as popular culture in Britain

The cultural impact of film has been so vast and pervasive that it is often taken for granted, or ignored. 'Animated pictures' were just a novelty item on musical hall programmes in 1896, yet 15 years later special 'cinemas', seating over 2,000 people, were being built around Britain, as in many other countries. These catered for the millions who were already attending picture shows lasting up to three hours every week – a completely new leisure activity which attracted audiences of all classes and ages, especially children.[6]

Cinemas continued to be built and modernised in Britain until the 1950s, although the audience had peaked a decade earlier when the majority of the population went weekly and saw a roughly equal proportion of British and American films. From the late 1950s, cinemas began to close and television, now offering two channels, became an important alternative to cinema-going – as well as an alternative way of seeing films. By the end of the 1960s, the number of cinema sites and the overall attendance were in decline, although smaller auditoria were being widely created to cater for a more diverse cinema audience, and public funding was beginning to support screens which catered for a wider range of cultural tastes and interests than mainstream cinema.

After 1980, the VHS video recorder arrived and launched a third phase of film consumption in the UK, which became the most enthusiastic adopter of this new technology. Renting films from local shops for home viewing now joined a growing number of television outlets for film – including Channel 4 from 1982, with its distinctive commitment to producing films – as well as new, specialised cinemas and the diminishing stock of circuit cinemas. In 1984, cinema attendance in the UK reached the lowest level of any developed country, with just one visit per year per head of the population. However cinema-going remained the most popular cultural activity for the UK as a whole (at 31%, compared with 23% for theatre and 21% for visual arts[7]) while many people were accessing film in other ways.

Cinema-going started to revive after 1985, when new investment was attracted by a new exhibition model, the multiplex. Attendance rose steadily to reach over 176 million or 2.6 visits per year per head of population, in 2002. At the same time, other ways of watching films have multiplied, with the UK again taking a global lead in DVD consumption and having the highest proportion of households with digital television in the world (nearly 90%) and the largest range of channels (over 400), many offering films. Film-related consumption is one of the largest cultural activities for UK citizens after television.

4.3 But is it British?

Film may be immensely popular in the UK, but intense concerns have been voiced about its place in the nation's life for almost 100 years. One concern is over the low proportion of British production within the total number of films consumed by UK audiences. British producers had 15% of the domestic exhibition market in 1910, but by 1914 *The Times* noted with alarm that only 2% of the total film footage sold for exhibition in Britain was home produced. For over 50 years, legal quotas were used to try to increase this proportion, while there have been frequent complaints about cinema as an agent of 'Americanisation'.

My Way Home

6. Luke McKernan, *A Fury for Seeing*, London Project research paper.
7. *Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe: 8.2 Cultural consumption and participation* (BRMB International and Cinema Advertising Association).

This is linked to a long-term concern about cultural identity. Since the 1930s, when Hollywood studios began to produce films in Britain which traded on British stories, actors and locations, there has been anxiety and often sharp disagreement over what should be counted as a British film. Different legal and fiscal definitions have been used since the 1930s, for the purposes of quota fulfilment, and tax relief and subsidy eligibility, but the debate has, if anything, become more intense in the era of the globally successful *Harry Potter* adaptations. Made in the UK by predominantly British personnel, with their stories and settings clearly located in the UK, these are officially UK-US co-productions, financed and owned by a US studio. But they do not seem to be universally perceived as British.

Another concern has been with quality, understood in a number of different senses. The complaint that UK films are 'not good enough' or are too parochial, has been voiced recurrently by exhibitors, both in the UK and abroad, and by cultural critics. Even if they have clearly meant different things by these claims, the history of British cinema undeniably records much self-criticism, some of which has been driven by an underlying inferiority complex about Hollywood's capacity to dominate the public imagination.[8]

4.4 Gatekeepers: the apparatus of cinema in Britain

The business structure in Britain's cinema sector has remained quite similar to the form it assumed around 1914. Relatively few cinemas are stand-alone independents; the majority belong to groups or circuits, which can be divided into those with less than ten sites and those with substantially more. The main change, which started in the 1960s, was to have multiple auditoria (always known as screens) in a single building.

There have been frequent changes in ownership of British cinemas during the last ten years, all tending towards greater consolidation into fewer and larger groups.[9] But the basic number of sites has increased only slightly since the 1990s, when new multiplex construction slowed to a standstill. Before multiplexes started to be built in the mid-1980s, the UK had been considered under-screened in relation to population, by comparison with the US and most of continental Europe. Attendance rates, however, were also significantly lower. These rose in conjunction with new cinema building during the 1980s and 1990s, but the majority of new cinema buildings were large multiplexes, which have not proved particularly beneficial for the small-scale, independent films with low publicity budgets which make up the majority of UK films by volume (if not by level of investment).

Many of these films face a strong challenge in attracting a sufficient audience to cover the costs of a cinema release. They are struggling in an increasingly competitive exhibition marketplace, in which cinema operators are trying to adjust to the levelling off in the growth of UK cinema audiences alongside an increase in the number of new films released annually. In the past, UK films often benefited from being shown in smaller cinemas focused on more specialised releases, which had the capacity to keep the films running until word of mouth had a chance to build audience interest. Today, however, in common with most films other than the very successful mainstream releases, most small-scale UK films face very short periods of exhibition which offer little chance to recover launch costs, let alone return a profit. Their theatrical exhibition may serve to advertise a DVD release, after a suitable time window, which can justify the distributor's outlay, but such brief and limited theatrical releases do not help to diversify the range of films accessible to audiences. They also discriminate heavily against potential viewers outside London and a few large conurbations, which means that specialised cinema remains largely confined to the capital and main UK cities.

Distributors are often considered by historians and analysts to be the most powerful sector in the film business. They stand between producers and exhibitors, seeking to maximise returns through direct control of the entire value chain, from cinema to DVD, television and the internet. In practice, the largest distributors – known as studios – are effectively producers, since their direct financing, or agreements to buy films, often cover the cost of production.

8. For example, Sir Alan Parker's speech to BAFTA, November 2002: "We need to abandon forever the 'Little England' vision of a UK film industry comprised of small British film companies delivering parochial British films."
9. Summary of Cinven/WestLB/Terra Firma sequence, affecting Odeon, ABC, Vue and UCI cinemas. Also Picturehouse group and Curzon cinemas.

From the early 1920s onwards, most of the US-based studios have distributed their films in the UK through UK affiliates who are answerable to their parent companies and collectively control the most lucrative share of the market. In the 1920s, these distributors used their power to monopolise cinema programmes, giving British and other films little chance of being shown; and it was this abuse of power that led to the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act and a mandatory minimum proportion of UK films being offered.[10] During the 1930s and '40s, there was a general tendency towards vertical integration in the UK and elsewhere, which meant that production, distribution and exhibition were all handled by a single company or industrial group. Such patterns have been criticised and scrutinised on a number of occasions for their alleged monopolistic effects, which were said to be making it hard for any film not produced or handled by the larger studios to gain access to the exhibition sector.

From the 1960s until the late 1990s, television became an increasingly important alternative to cinema for public access to films. In recent years, audiences for films on television have declined significantly, dropping by 20% overall during the decade 1997–2007[11]: the spectacular success of DVD means that by the time films reach pay and free television platforms, they are likely to have been seen by large numbers of people. However, in 2007, television still accounted for over 70% of all film viewing occasions in the UK.[12] Given this dominance, television buyers and schedulers play as crucial a role as cinema programmers and distributors in controlling what is seen. During the greatest period of expanding television audiences in the UK, from the 1960s to the 1980s, film acquisitions by the public service broadcasters often played a highly constructive part in making good the shortcomings of UK cinema exhibition, by showing rare UK films and helping to rescue the reputation of neglected filmmakers, as well as by making 'plays' which were effectively TV films. Channel 4's policy in the early 1980s was to allow films it had funded to be shown in cinemas before transmission, a time window which was vital if these were to be booked into cinemas and gain cinema reviews, according to the prevailing industry conventions. Such notable films as *Angel*, *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Riff-Raff* all benefited from this policy, and would undoubtedly have had less cultural impact without a cinema release, however limited.

Since the 1990s, cable and satellite channels have proliferated in British television and a minority of these are dedicated to transmitting films, often in patterns of repeat which allow viewers to plan when they will catch up with a chosen film. However, the dominant pay-TV platform BSkyB has acquired relatively few films other than those included in its output deals with the Hollywood studios or a few larger independents. As a result, the overwhelming majority of British films have not secured access to this important pay-TV platform, denying them access to potentially significant audiences.

Since the launch of home video and DVD recorders, and now hard-disk recorders, it has been possible to time-shift viewing or build a substantial library of off-air recorded films, a practice tolerated by rights holders. The earliest phase of video publishing paid little attention to UK films as a specialist category, but when the British Film Institute (BFI) entered the field with Connoisseur Video in 1989, both vintage and recent British work was systematically promoted, including films by Terence Davies, Bill Douglas, Peter Greenaway, Mike Leigh and Michael Powell. The BFI has continued to prioritise British film in its DVD publishing, and major rights holders, such as Granada and Canal Plus (through their UK subsidiary Optimum), are active in publishing UK films. So, too, are specialist DVD publishers abroad: in the US, Criterion has produced deluxe contextualised editions of many classic UK films; and the Institut Lumiere in France has similarly produced handsome annotated editions of six Powell-Pressburger films. Such DVD publications now provide permanent access to a growing canon of UK film, often accompanied by commentaries, interviews and critical writing, which provides the most tangible evidence of acceptance and value.

10. See Section 9 of this report, p73.
11. *UK Film Council Statistical Yearbook 08*, p94: while there has been actual growth in film viewing on digital channels since 2002, this increase did not compensate for the sharp decline in terrestrial viewing (down to 1.827 billion in 2007 from 3.209 billion in 1997 [-43%]), and on subscription film channels (down to 490 million in 2007 from a peak of 820 million in 2003 [-40%]).
12. *UK Film Council Statistical Yearbook 08*, p118.

4.5 Enablers' culture: shaping what gets made

The dominance of American cinema, maintained through the studios' production and distribution machinery, has meant that keeping a British production industry alive, let alone thriving, has required state intervention.

Historically, the main economic instruments of policy – quota, levy, direct subsidy and tax incentive – have been flanked by a range of other support that has impinged to varying degrees on the national film culture. In the 1930s, John Grierson provided a focal point for attracting and training young filmmakers through his work as a producer at the Empire Marketing Board and later at the General Post Office Film Unit. During World War II, the Film Division of the Ministry of Information played a similar role, commissioning information and morale-boosting films, and quietly influencing others to achieve similar goals. Similarly (though not under state patronage), before it was disbanded Michael Balcon's Ealing Studios benefited from the demand of the war years for upbeat films, depicting Britons as united across the barriers of social class and local cultures.

The BFI, now 75 years old, was the first organisation of its kind in the world, with a strict brief not to interfere in 'trade' matters. However, it started the collection that became the National Film Archive (now the BFI National Archive), began collecting books and journals, and in the early 1950s launched the Experimental Film Fund to support new initiatives. The BFI's National Film Theatre effectively supported the Free Cinema movement, when Lindsay Anderson used his role as its programmer to bring the films and their makers together. In the 1970s and '80s, the BFI's Production Board not only offered support for innovative filmmakers, but was determined to ensure that their films were shown as widely as possible, using the BFI-supported regional cinemas and BFI Video.

Most recently, the creation of the UK Film Council to bring together functions and responsibilities that had previously been dispersed, has provided a springboard for a range of initiatives that have the potential to focus British film culture at a time of transition, when 'film' is being redefined by digital technology. Many other institutions could be identified as having played a part in enabling British film culture to emerge and flourish in the post-war world. These include the National Film Finance Corporation and its successor body British Screen, the National Film and Television School, the London Film School (originally London School of Film Technique), Scottish Screen, Film Agency for Wales (and its predecessor Sgrîn), Northern Ireland Screen (originally the Northern Ireland Film and Television Commission), the Regional Screen Agencies, British Film Year, the London Filmmakers' Co-operative, the Channel 4-supported workshop movement, the British Council, the film and broadcasting unions (ACTT and BECTU), and the producers' organisations (BFPA and PACT).

4.6 Filmmakers' culture: imagining an audience

Filmmaking in the UK has been strongly shaped by three key factors:

• Being closely affiliated to the American film industry, while also belonging geographically to Europe;
• Since World War II, living in – and with – the aftermath of empire;
• An ongoing tension inside British culture between populist instincts and leanings towards formal and thematic experimentation by auteurs, using local British culture and politics as their material.

It would be simplistic to characterise the post-war relationship of British and American cinema as one of domination by the latter. On some level, the complex relationship has fostered a culture of hybridity which is perhaps unique to post-war British cinema as compared to any other European one. Time and again, UK directors have used the tropes of American film genres, and fused them with peculiarly British atmospheres and themes. When brought over to Hollywood, those same filmmakers have sometimes helped to revitalise American film conventions with innovative takes on old studio genres. The distance travelled by Northumberland-born Mike Figgis from his low budget first film *Stormy Monday* (1988), set in Newcastle, to the Paramount-financed *Internal Affairs* (1990), set in California and starring Richard Gere, shows a contemporary British filmmaker comfortable with a two-way traffic of cultural influences. The same thing could be said of Stephen Frears's all-British-cast, Raymond Chandler tribute *Gumshoe* (1971), and his later virtuoso effort at an all-American film noir, the award-winning *The Grifters* (1990).

These innovators have, to a degree, embodied a British cultural 'third way' between those – like John Grierson or Lindsay Anderson – who attempted historically to define a national cinema set against the mainstream entertainment values of Hollywood, and those like Ridley and Tony Scott, who have unreservedly embraced the Hollywood paradigm.

Britain's final withdrawal from empire in the two decades following World War II also gave UK filmmakers a rich seam to exploit and, in doing so, helped establish the nation's retrospective cultural narrative of the experience, often with considerable impact on audiences. Along this axis too, American capital and expertise was a key component, though it was led by British creative vision. Where empire inspired epic filmmaking, the US studios matched the ambitions of British filmmakers with lavish budgets. David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) and Tony Richardson's *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1968) were financed by Columbia and United Artists respectively; and the studios were supportive of the different cultural perspectives of these two films, both highly critical of British imperial attitudes – although *Lawrence of Arabia* was more a traditional epic, whereas *The Charge of the Light Brigade* was a countercultural parody of imperial incompetence. Over the past 20 years, a more introspective and literary undercurrent has emerged in the films examining the British imperial and aristocratic past. This strand of the British heritage film has crossed cultural borders, with works such as *Howards End* (1992) and *The Wings of the Dove* (1997).

The tension between film as popular medium and film as art may no longer be at the centre of the British cultural conversation on cinema, but it was once a pervasive theme and remains relevant today, despite the increasing ease of the audience with a whole range of films from the blockbuster to the specialised title, enabled by the greater multiplicity of media outlets. The celebrated director Michael Powell, like many other British filmmakers past and present, believed passionately in film as the art of the century, but was also English enough to prefer talk of it as craft rather than as art, following the language of Kipling. British filmmakers have often seemed uncertain about the status of their art, and prone to fall back on commercial justification for its existence.

Such reticence about the status of film has possibly weakened the argument with successive governments for support for British cinema, because respected practitioners have been reluctant to champion a national cinema on cultural as well as commercial grounds. A salient feature of the advocacy for British film culture is that it has come from mixed constituencies made up of both independent filmmakers and producer-entrepreneurs with a vision and a body of work; together they have been the national and international standard-bearers for British film culture. The roll call includes people as diverse as Lindsay Anderson, Richard Attenborough, Michael Balcon, Tim Bevan, Cubby Broccoli, Gurinder Chadha, Richard Curtis, Terence Davies, Bill Douglas, Eric Fellner, Peter Greenaway, Derek Jarman, Mike Leigh, Ken Loach, Anthony Minghella, Alan Parker, Sally Potter, David Puttnam and Tony Richardson. Each of these (and the list is not conclusive) has, in one or more of their films, helped to conceive a distinctive vision of what the impact of British film can be, and who it can address.

Charge of the Light Brigade

5 State of the nation: 30 UK films and the culture they dramatise

5.1 Core findings

In this section, findings from the sample analysis of the database of 4,644 titles (all known UK films for the period 1946–2006) are presented, providing an overview of the actual cultural make-up of British cinema. The section also proposes a new methodology for detecting and measuring film's cultural impact, and applies it to a body of 30 case studies which are considered to be significant UK films of the period.

- Analysis of the samples challenges the received wisdom about the cultural make-up of British cinema. UK film has often been accused of being preoccupied with the past of country-house heritage or World War II, but our analysis shows that between 60-70% of films have contemporary settings, while only 5-6% have dealt with World War II. Equally, British films have often been accused of excessive dependence on literary adaptation, but these have in fact declined since the 1960s.

- Our qualitative analysis reveals that films which challenge conventional British values make up the largest proportion of culturally recognised titles, while those that exemplify traditional values predominate in the random sample. There is also a significant number of films that update such values, and films that satirise British values.

- Bearing in mind the important changes in the ways movies are made available and watched, the study makes use of three key indices of cultural impact: original impact (box office, awards); extended impact (DVD re-issues, restorations); and wider impact (citations in other media, social/cultural behaviour, colloquialisms and online in the blogosphere, fan sites, IMDb user comments).

- The study also identifies, and makes use of, four key categories of cultural impact: censorship and notoriety (eg *A Clockwork Orange* being withdrawn by its director after alleged death threats, or *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* being deemed a threat to wartime morale); quotations in other media such as songs, TV shows, music videos, (eg references to *Chariots of Fire* and its musical score, in television shows including *LA Law, The Simpsons, The Office* and *Ugly Betty*; zeitgeist moments, where films have captured the spirit and preoccupations of their times and earned a place in popular culture (eg the release of *Bend it like Beckham* in India inspiring the creation of the first all-girls national football league); and cumulative impact, where films have defined shared cultural perceptions and contributed to long-term change in social and political attitudes (eg Sir Ian McKellen quoted by Simon Callow, as saying that the latter's part in *Four Weddings and a Funeral* "had done a hundred times more for homosexuals than *Philadelphia*").

The Red Shoes

- The findings from the use of this methodology (database and case studies) confirm that film has been a key arena in British cultural life, projecting and questioning British values and identities. The cultural impact of UK films is present both incrementally and specifically through standout films.

- The sample analysis also shows that whereas the most critically acclaimed films have tended to challenge or satirise traditional British values, a wider range of UK films have had cultural impact over time. They include many films which plainly exemplified or reinforced British values, such as the 1950s–60s Doctor films starring Dirk Bogarde, which still attract audiences of well over 100,000 on UK film channels today.

5.2 In search of British cinema

What is British cinema? A dozen or so titles regularly feature in popular surveys and accounts: landmark films *such as Brief Encounter, The Red Shoes, The Third Man, Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, Lawrence of Arabia, Chariots of Fire and The Full Monty;* and series such as the Ealing comedies, the James Bond movies, Hammer horror, the Carry On films and the current Harry Potter series. Within the media, a small number of often-quoted works occupies the foreground, with a large backdrop of the unfamiliar and unknown.

Until the 1970s, this distinction was particularly sharp, with the bulk of films barely documented and impossible to see. Since then, thanks to the rise of encyclopaedias and now the internet, together with film restoration, video uploads and specialist TV channels, cinema's past has become highly accessible. A new culture of connoisseurship has developed, which allows lay enthusiasts as much as researchers and archivists to create personal collections. A once narrow, hierarchical group of professional film critics with claims to leadership in determining taste in film has been replaced by ever-widening circles of expertise and enthusiasm, and a dynamic culture of amateur film criticism spreading over broadband communities.

While it was common until recently to dismiss virtually all British film up to World War II as parochial and inferior to foreign cinema, such judgements have been challenged by restorations, discoveries and a new wave of empirical inquiry that is dramatically re-drawing the traditional map of British cinema. Similarly, post-war British film, once routinely denigrated by the young critics and filmmakers of the 1960s, has been extensively revalued. The more we know – about the Edwardian Mitchell and Kenyon collection, the rediscovered *Life Story of Lloyd George* (1919), 1920s silent films such as *Hindle Wakes* and *Piccadilly,* early Hitchcock films, 1930s British 'B movies', early David Lean, neglected Michael Powell pictures, or 1960s and '70s films made initially for television – the more there is to appreciate in over a century of British filmmaking. And thanks to video publication, which is likely to be supplemented by downloading in the near future, increasing numbers of these films are now available to the public.

Yet existing maps of what British cinema has been since World War II are still highly selective, shaped by critics' memories and by old prejudices and enthusiasms more than by any systematic new surveying. In this section, we therefore adopt two approaches to assessing the cultural impact of British film since the 1940s. First, we look at the totality of what has been produced to compare an intuitive sample of what has had impact with a randomly generated sample which offers a corrective to the critically informed canon. Secondly, we have selected 30 films which are frequently cited as typical of British cinema and assessed them in terms of indicators of cultural impact.[13] By combining large-scale statistical analysis with case study snapshots, we offer an overall assessment of cultural impact.

13. See Appendix I, II and IV for the list of films in the two samples and material on the 30 case study films.

5.2.1 Cultural impact of selected case study films

Our case study analyses show that British cinema is benefiting considerably from archival restoration, DVD publication and other 'long tail' opportunities. It is also attracting wider public attention and critical esteem than in the mid-20th century and is achieving high visibility in online media such as IMDb and YouTube. Within the scope of this study, we have identified four main categories of cultural impact (see pages 26-28): censorship/notoriety; quotations in other media; zeitgeist moments; and cumulative impact. Many of the case studies score high in one or more of these categories, and their initial cultural impact has been often rejuvenated through the cultural long tail.

5.2.2 British film themes and variations

Drawing on the 30 selected case studies (and with reference to the larger samples and international interviews), we can identify eight themes that are characteristic of British cinema.

• Small-time criminals: the protagonists of classic British crime films are typically small-scale operators, often shown over-reaching themselves as they face new challenges.

• Dreamers and eccentrics: British film comedy is traditionally centred on the ambitions of ordinary men who find themselves in extraordinary situations and continue to act normally. But it has also resurrected a vein of outright eccentricity and developed a more social dimension.

• Victory – perhaps: British accounts of heroic deeds are often about disasters (*The Charge of the Light Brigade, Zulu, A Bridge Too Far*), and even celebrations of great lives and achievements are tinged with irony or disenchantment.

• Shaken, stirred and undead: although British film is often assumed to be essentially realist, many of its most durable and popular products are fantastic, whether supernatural (Dracula, Frankenstein, Harry Potter) or heroic (James Bond).

• Youthful ambition: UK films played a leading part in the post-war youth revolt that began in the late 1950s, from the 'angry young men' to the Beatles, but British rebels tend to get their comeuppance or settle for a quiet life.

• Backlight on the present: period films are always about the time of their making as well as the time portrayed, and British portrayals of the past have specialised in drawing contemporary moral and political lessons from stories set in the past.

• Sex please – we're British! British cinema's longstanding reputation for prudishness in sexual matters has often been breached by strong passions, as far back as *Brief Encounter* and *Black Narcissus.* But the 1970s saw an explosion of films that dealt frankly with controversial sexual and gender issues, from the transexualism of *The Crying Game* and *Orlando* to the masculinity crisis of *The Full Monty.* British film has also made a large contribution to creating new images of women in many genres, from social realism and historical drama to romantic comedy.
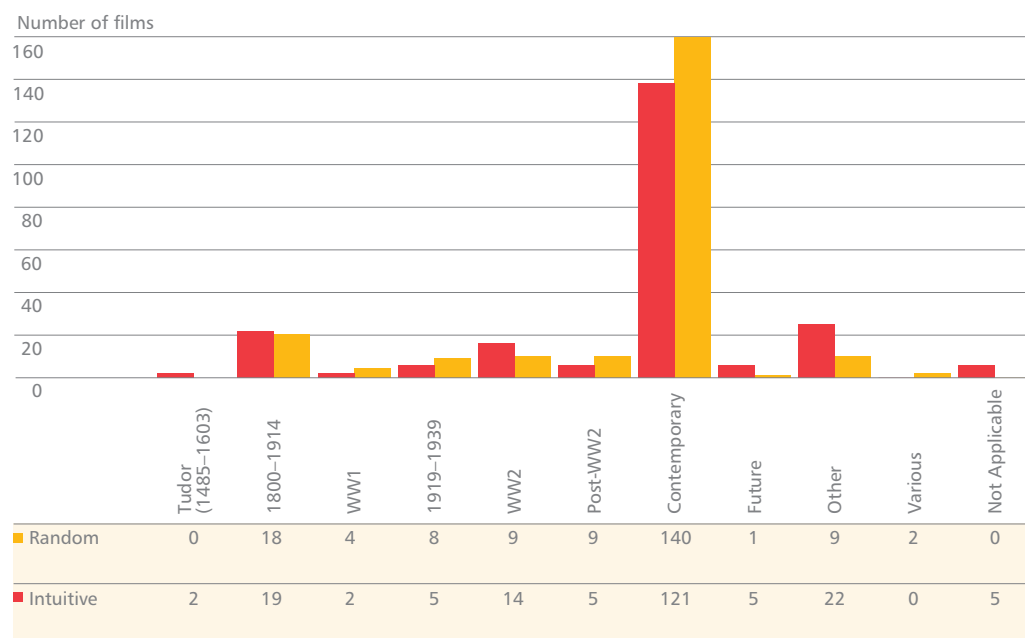

Whisky Galore!

• History from beneath: films about monarchs continue to be important in British cinema, and are prized internationally, but so also are films about the attitudes of their subjects, and a persistent challenge to arbitrary authority simmers from *A Man for All Seasons* to *Riff-Raff.*

5.3 Mapping post-war British film

We cannot assess the overall cultural impact of British film without surveying its full range, and considering how adequately selective perceptions fit with the empirical facts. We have therefore created a searchable database of all British feature films produced and released between 1946–2006.[14] From this listing of some 4,655 titles, we have created two samples, each of 200 titles. One we have termed 'intuitive' and reflects the critical consensus of what have been the best and the most influential UK films.[15] The other is a randomly generated selection of the same number of titles, intended to act as a control against which trends within the intuitive sample may be checked, to see if they reflect evaluative biases.[16] We use these two samples to explore some key aspects of how British film as a whole portrays the UK – what kind of picture of the nations and regions, their history and their people has been presented – and offer it as a resource for the further consideration of what impact UK film may have had in aggregate.

Among generalisations about British cinema since World War II, one widely-held belief is that it has been preoccupied with that conflict to the detriment of other themes and periods. This is not borne out by the samples.[17] From the intuitive sample (IS), we find that only 13 films were set during World War II, with the peak occurring in the 1950s, while the random sample (RS) reduces this further to ten, or 5% of the total. The vast majority of films have a contemporary setting (IS 120: RS 140), while the second most frequent setting in both samples is the 'long 19th century' (1800–1914), with 19 titles in both samples (20%); the intuitive sample also includes 23 titles with various or multiple period settings, indicating films that offer some comparative perspective on the events they portray.

Chart 5.1 Number of films portraying historical periods

	Tudor (1485–1603)	1800–1914	WW1	1919–1939	WW2	Post-WW2	Contemporary	Future	Other	Various	Not Applicable
■ Random	0	18	4	8	9	9	140	1	9	2	0
■ Intuitive	2	19	2	5	14	5	121	5	22	0	5

14. Based on Dennis Gifford, *The British Film Catalogue,* with checking and extension from other sources, including the annual British Council *UK films Catalogue*.
15. On the rationale for this intuitive selection, see Appendix I.
16. This methodology is adapted from that used in analysing Hollywood style in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristen Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema,* Routledge, 1985.
17. Note: the two sample groups have unequal numbers of films for each decade, and numbers in the comparisons that follow have not been modified to reflect these differences. See Appendices II and III for details of the two samples and the analyses which are reported briefly here.

Another claim made frequently is that British film has depended heavily on literary adaptation and has therefore been subordinated to a dominant national literary canon. The samples support this belief, showing approximately 50% of films as adaptations (IS 99: RS 107). The sources that UK films typically draw upon also have a bearing on the genres that dominate British filmmaking and the locations they portray. A common image of British cinema is that it offers dramas that deal predominantly with the past and that films are often set in London or in the countryside.

Chart 5.2 Number of literary adaptations by decade

Number of films

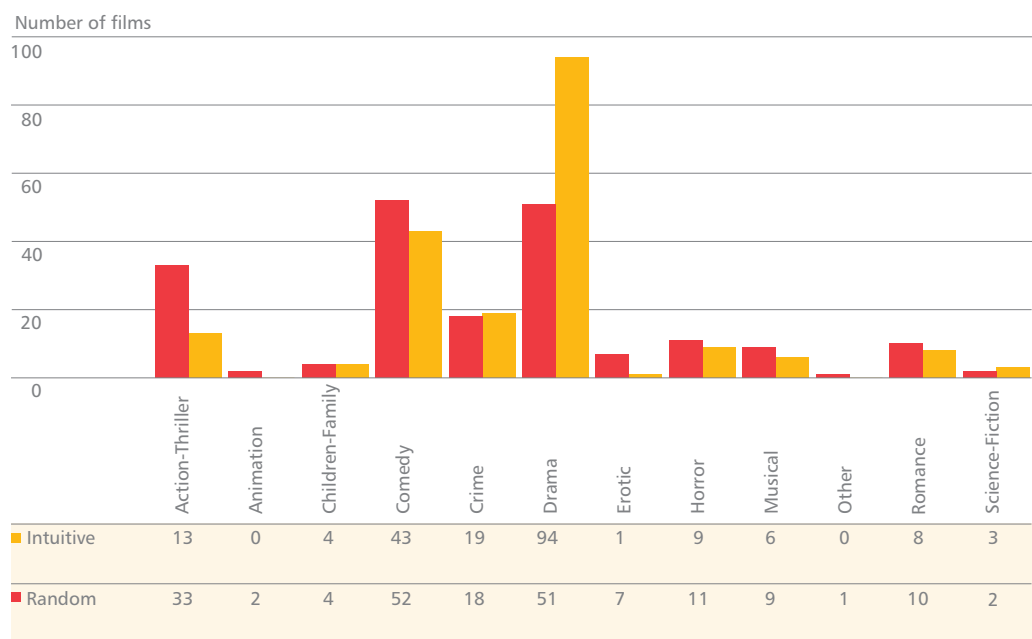|	40's	50's	60's	70's	80's	90's	00's
■ Yes – Intuitive	11	25	28	14	10	5	4
■ Yes – Random	6	31	23	18	7	12	10
■ No – Intuitive	5	10	12	15	32	14	15
■ No – Random	5	12	21	16	9	13	17
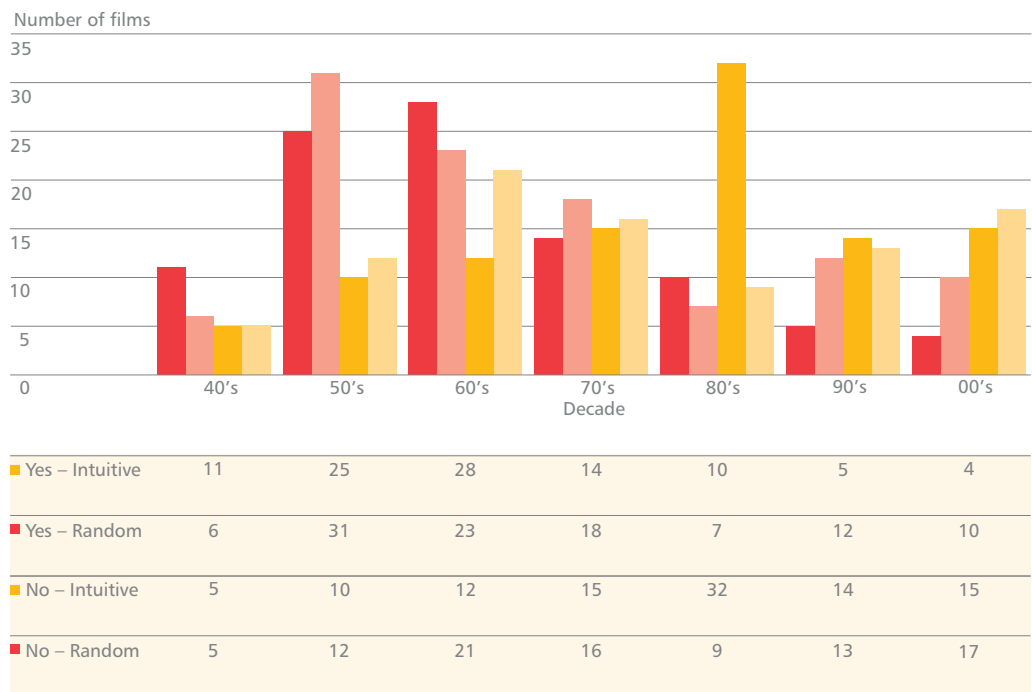
Analysis of our samples shows that drama scores highest in the intuitive sample (IS 96), indicating that this genre is the best known or most highly regarded, while the random sample records slightly fewer dramas than comedies; and although only 6.5% of the intuitive sample are action thrillers, this proportion rises to 16% in the random sample. Crime and horror films are present in both samples in roughly equal proportions, but two genres, the musical and the erotic, are significantly less represented in the intuitive sample than in the random sample. Although these can only be indicative, they suggest that the critical consensus on what British cinema is, or what it has done best, tends to play down more populist genres such as comedy, action thrillers, musicals and erotic films.

Chart 5.3 Number of films in genres by decade

Number of films

	Action-Thriller	Animation	Children-Family	Comedy	Crime	Drama	Erotic	Horror	Musical	Other	Romance	Science-Fiction
■ Intuitive	13	0	4	43	19	94	1	9	6	0	8	3
■ Random	33	2	4	52	18	51	7	11	9	1	10	2

The locations where films are set – meaning which parts of the UK they portray on screen, irrespective of whether they were actually filmed there – have a bearing on national self-image, and particularly on how the UK is perceived abroad. There has been a growing awareness of the importance of setting in relation to tourism in recent years, as increasing numbers of foreign and UK tourists have wanted to visit film locations, rather than literary or general history attractions.[18] But equally, and less dramatically, parts of the UK which are not shown on screen could be considered to suffer a lower status than those that do. In relation to the ongoing debate about the over-representation of London and the Home Counties in media portrayals of the UK, screen visibility remains a sensitive issue.[19] Our analysis confirms that London is the most frequent setting in both samples, while southern England is the setting for 10% in both samples and northern England is the setting for more of the intuitive sample (19 films) than the random sample (11 films), with a notable peak of films set in the north during the 1960s. The Midlands has a low screen visibility, while Scotland is the setting for only 3% of films in both samples. Wales is portrayed in three (different) films in both samples, and Northern Ireland is also the setting for three films in the intuitive sample, two of which were produced in the 1980s. Of course, not all UK films are set within the UK, and between a quarter and two-thirds of both samples have foreign locations.

Chart 5.4 Number of films portraying different UK nations and regions

|	England	London	South	Midlands	North	Wales	Scotland	N. Ireland	Outside UK	Not applicable	Various
■ Intuitive	17	70	20	3	19	3	7	3	54	3	1
■ Random	40	37	20	5	11	3	5	1	71	4	3
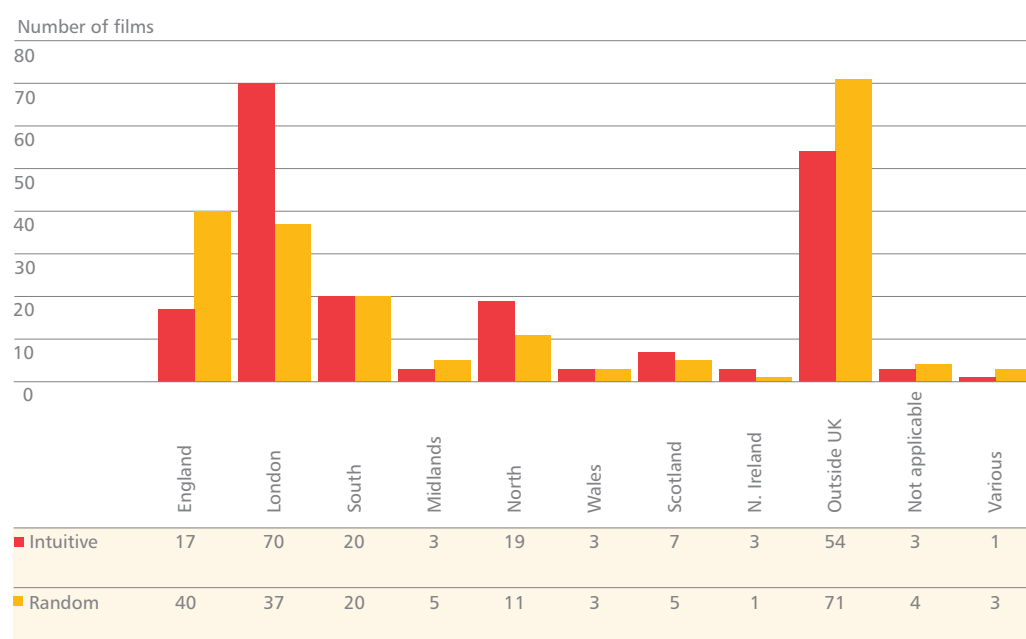
A further criterion for assessing British cinema's aggregate portrayal of the UK is the appearance of characters from ethnic backgrounds other than white British and European, as Britain has becoming increasingly a multi-ethnic society. Certainly this is a crude measure, which takes no account of characters who are first-generation immigrant or British born, but comparing results from the two samples can help inform our sense of whether British film has portrayed the multi-ethnic make-up of Britain with any degree of accuracy over time. Both samples include 25% of films that contain ethnic diversity.

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18. The impact of film and television settings for tourism was studied in the 2007 report *Stately Attraction – How Film and Television Programmes Promote Tourism in the UK,* commissioned by the UK Film Council, Scottish Screen, EM Media, East Midlands Tourism, Screen East, South West Screen, Film London and Visit London.
19. For example, BBC's London Regional Council, Minutes of 6 March 2000 meeting, item 7.
    Link: http://www.bbc.co.uk/foi/docs/bbc_trust/audience_councils/regional_audience_councils/Regional_Audience_Council_London_March_2007.htm
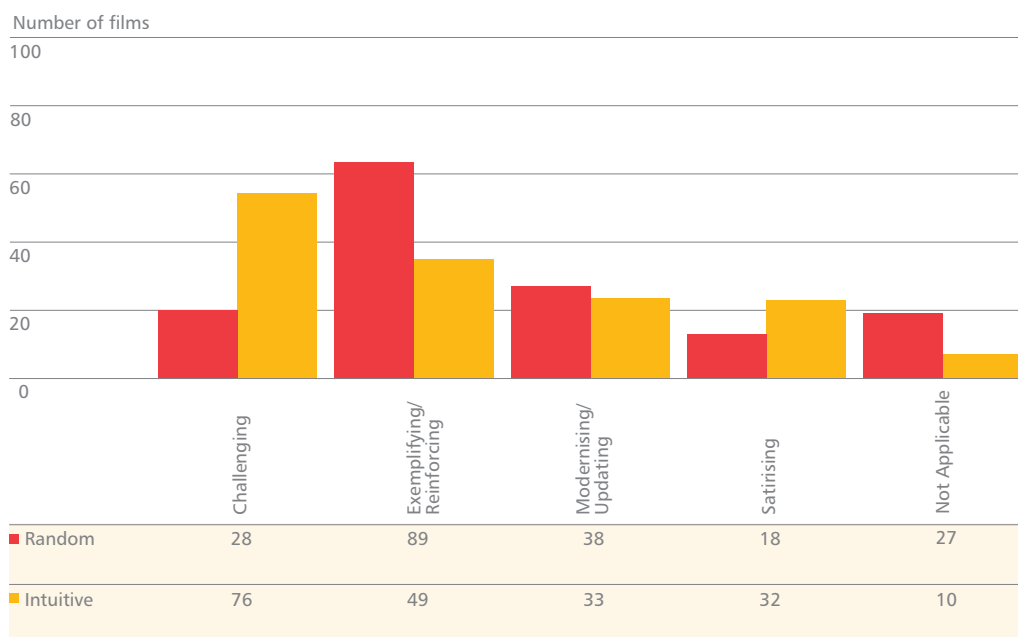

Chart 5.5 Total number of post-World War II films portraying ethnic diversity

Number of films

	No	Yes	Unclear
■ Random	152	44	4
■ Intuitive	147	51	2
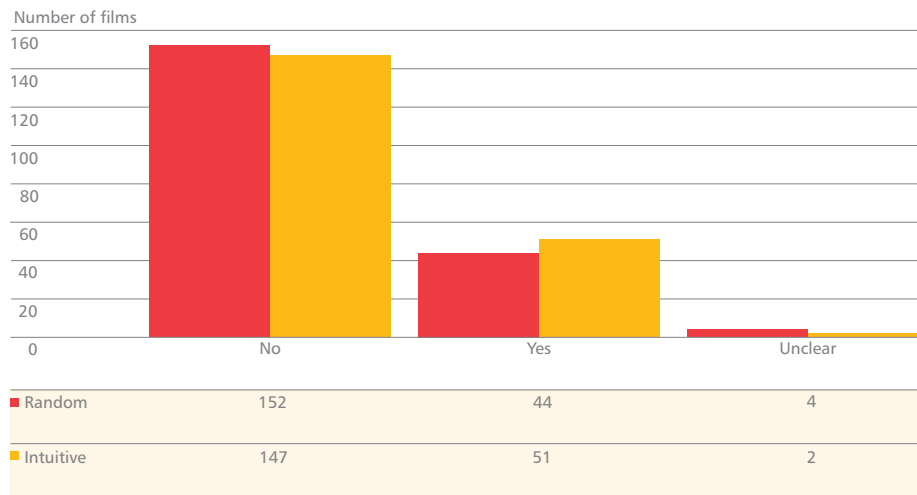
In the intuitive sample, we find the peak decades for portrayal of ethnic diversity were the 1960s and the 1980s, with comparatively low rates in the 1990s (4) and the 2000s (7). The random sample, however, shows relatively stable rates through the 1950s, '60s and '70s, followed by a decline in the 1980s and '90s, and a rise since 2000 (10). On the basis of these snapshots we could say that there has been an irregular presence of ethnic diversity in UK films, with a notable decrease during the 1990s.

Our last criterion is to assess what attitude UK films have taken towards 'British values', by which we mean that cluster of values recently identified by the Prime Minister and others as identifying what Britain stands for.[20] We have coded all the films in both samples according to four attitudes towards these values: challenging; exemplifying or reinforcing; modernising or updating; and satirising. Perhaps not surprisingly, there is a marked difference between the scores from the two samples. The highest proportion of the intuitive sample challenges British values, while a significant proportion satirises them. In the random sample, the largest group exemplifies these values.

Chart 5.6 Attitudes towards British values

Number of films

	Challenging	Exemplifying/ Reinforcing	Modernising/ Updating	Satirising	Not Applicable
■ Random	28	89	38	18	27
■ Intuitive	76	49	33	32	10

20. British values are considered to be: tolerance, fair play, decency, honesty, reticence (eg about contentious issues such as politics, religion, sexuality) to which might be added understated patriotism, and gallantry or self-sacrifice (in war and *in extremis*). Sources for this: Speech by the Prime Minister Rt. Hon Gordon Brown, 20 March 2008, accessible at http://www.number10.gov.uk/output/Page14624.asp; speech by Margaret Hodge, Minister of State for Culture, Creative Industries and Tourism, DCMS, on Britishness, Heritage and the Arts at an IPPR event at the National Gallery, 4 March 2008. See also report on the British values debate in the *New York Times*, 26 Jan 2008, at: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/26/world/europe/26motto.html?pagewanted=2&_r=1&ei=5087&em&en=a6529e552223de0d&ex=1201496400

This suggests that the UK films which have been most highly regarded by critics are those which have challenged and satirised traditional British values, while films that espouse more conventional values have found less critical favour. However, popularity with the UK audience has been more widely distributed between films which challenge or satirise and those which exemplify or reinforce traditional British values, as evidenced by the success of the 1950s–60s Doctor franchise starring Dirk Bogarde.

5.4 Cultural impact of UK films

Films are routinely reviewed and judged according to their commercial performance, and their impact is also assessed by the marketing sector intent on maximising awareness in order to increase revenues. The idea of identifying and measuring cultural impact is relatively new and less well established. To some extent it challenges commercial performance as the sole measure of a film's success, recognising that films may have many different kinds of impact beyond triggering the willingness to pay to see them. Films may create extraordinary characters, who live in the memories and conversations of people who have seen them on screen, and perhaps even in those of people who have not actually seen them. For example, many people who have not seen *The Full Monty* or *Bend it like Beckham* almost certainly know that these films deal with a specific behaviour by men and girls respectively – unemployed steelworkers stripping and young Asian girls playing football. Similarly, the ideas implicit in 'Carry On humour', 'Ealing comedy' and 'Hammer horror' are clearly meaningful to significant numbers of people outside a film context. All three genres appear as separate entries in the 2009 edition of the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, and a 2008 commemorative issue of UK postage stamps celebrated Hammer horror films and Carry On comedies.

But do films have wider impact on people and society at large? Censorship regulations are based on the assumption that they can have harmful effects by prompting inappropriate behaviour which might be imitated, especially by young people.[21] Film music often carries strong emotional, even ideological, associations, as in the case of *Genevieve, The Dam Busters* or *Chariots of Fire.* Film performances can live on in social memory, as with the recitation of WH Auden's poem *Funeral Blues* which memorably featured in *Four Weddings and a Funeral,* and with the Agincourt speech in Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V.* This phenomenon is now greatly helped by the posting of film clips on YouTube and other websites, as has happened with both of the above examples, ensuring that they remain part of contemporary attitudes towards war and patriotism.[22]

To develop a preliminary methodology for assessing such impact, we have drawn on several sources including the US Public Broadcasting Service measure, Points of Impact Beyond Broadcast (PIBB), which was invoked by the BBC in its recent Charter Review proposals; the concept of the 'long tail' of film products in the digital era; and measures that are specific to film. We propose three categories of impact indices:

• Original impact: box office performance (where known), festival awards, peer recognition by academies (BAFTA, Oscars®);
• Extended life: video/DVD publication (including special editions), restoration, listing in top tens and other published canons;
• Wider impact: citation in other media (COM), evidence of esteem (EE), evidence of impact on behaviour or society (EIBS), online impact such as IMDb rating, number of votes attracted, clips on YouTube.

Genevieve

21. British Board of Film Classification decisions are increasingly underpinned by the findings of psychologists, as well as reflecting widely-held values and assumptions.
22. A five-minute excerpt from Kenneth Branagh's version of the eve of Agincourt speech had had over 390,000 hits as at November 2008: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OAvmLDkAgAM

By means of these criteria we seek to demonstrate that films from right through the last 60 years have a continuing presence and impact, and will have into the future. We also hope to promote the extended gathering of such evidence in order to assemble a more robust case for film's pervasive cultural impact, which could be particularly important in a country where cinema has at times been accorded low status by the gatekeepers of public policy.[23] The wider evidence of impact is inevitably fragmentary, anecdotal and ultimately unmeasurable, although common sense tells us it is also pervasive. Such evidence would include the citation of films in other media, such as songs, novels, television and radio; occurrence in speeches, tributes and games (including quizzes); presence in the blogosphere and fan websites; and more generally in everyday social discourse.

The film case studies are drawn from the intuitive sample of significant UK films to represent the major commercial and cultural successes, as well as the main genres, of post-war British cinema. Many of these are not auteur films. In terms of their directors' careers, some are one-off successes; many are effectively producers' films or the product of an established team, more than of a single vision. See Appendix I and II on the rationale for selection of the samples and case studies.

Look Back in Anger

23. As regretted by Sir David Lean in his notes for the creation of a David Lean Foundation (cited by Anthony Reeves, secretary of the Foundation, in his opening speech to the David Lean Centenary conference, Queen Mary University of London, July 2008).

Table 5.1 Impact measures and ratings for the case study films

Impact	Original		Extended				Wider				
Film	**Adm/ BO**	**Fest**	**Acad**	**DVD/ SpEd**	**Rest**	**Lists**	**COM**	**EE**	**EIBS**	**IMDb**	**YT**
Life & Death of Col. Blimp	H	Y	–	YY	Y	YY	–	Y	Y	8.2/2,957	5+
Brief Encounter	M	Y	Y	YY	–	YY	–	Y	–	8.3/8,552	5+
Brighton Rock	H	–	–	Y	–	YY	–	Y	–	7.6/820	3
Kind Hearts & Coronets	H	YY	–	Y	–	YY	–	Y	–	8.4/8,616	5+
Trouble in Store	M	–	Y	Y	–	–	–	–	–	6.0/233	3+
The Dam Busters	H	–	YY	Y	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	7.4/1,198	5+
Dracula	H	–	–	Y	Y	–	Y	Y	Y	7.7/3,796	3
Look Back in Anger	M	–	Y	Y	–	–	Y	–	–	7.2/631	2
Lawrence of Arabia	H	–	YY	YY	Y	YY	Y	Y	Y	8.6/60,073	5+
Dr No	H	–	–	Y	–	Y	Y	–	Y	7.3/25,675	5+
A Hard Day's Night	H	–	YY	Y	–	Y	Y	–	Y	7.5/11,498	5+
A Man for All Seasons	M	Y	YY	Y	–	Y	Y	Y	–	8.1/9,469	5+
A Clockwork Orange	H	–	YY	YY	–	–	Y	Y	Y	8.5/139,303	5+
Bill Douglas Trilogy (1972-78) *My Childhood/My Ain Folk/ My Way Home*	M	Y	–	YY	–	Y	–	Y	–	7.9/108	1
Monty Pyth & Holy Grail	H	–	–	YY	Y	–	Y	Y	Y	8.9/119,430	5+
Jubilee	L	Y	–	YY	–	–	–	–	Y	5.9/636	5+
Porridge	M	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	6.9/496	0
The Long Good Friday	M	–	Y	YY	–	Y	–	Y	Y	7.8/4,844	5+
Chariots of Fire	H	Y	YY	Y	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	7.3/12,090	5+
Draughtsman's Contract	M	–	–	YY	Y	Y	–	–	Y	7.2/2,497	3
Gandhi	H	–	YY	YY	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	8.1/34,871	5+
My Beautiful Laundrette	M	Y	YY	Y	–	Y	–	Y	–	6.9/4,031	5+
Henry V	M	–	YY	Y	–	–	Y	Y	Y	7.9/12,140	5+
Riff-Raff	L	Y	–	Y	–	Y	–	Y	–	7.3/987	0
The Crying Game	H	–	YY	Y	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	7.3/16,663	5+
Four Weddings & Funeral	H	Y	YY	Y	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	7.1/30,505	5+
The Full Monty	H	Y	YY	Y	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	7.2/33,261	5+
Sexy Beast	M	–	YY	Y	–	Y	Y	Y	Y	7.1/15,459	5+
Bend it like Beckham	H	–	Y	Y	–	–	Y	Y	Y	7.1/33,430	5+
HP & Prisoner of Azkaban	H	–	YY	YY	–	–	Y	–	Y	7,7/77,535	5+

Key
Original impact indices
Admissions/box office: H = high; M = medium; L = low (relative to scale of release) – Festivals: Major competitive festivals only (Cannes, Berlin, Venice, Moscow)

Extended impact indices over time
Academy awards: BAFTA first; then AMPAS (Oscars®). Y = nominated; Y = won one or more award – DVD: Published on DVD in UK; Sp Ed = published in special edition, with commentary, extras etc – Rest: Film has been restored and reissued – Lists: Appears in one or more published '10/100 best' lists, eg Time Out, Sight and Sound, BBC

Wider impact indices
COM: Citation in other media, such as songs, advertisements, television show, etc. – EE: Evidence of Esteem: special commendation by cultural arbiters, prizes, exceptional awards, etc – EIBS: Evidence of Impact on behaviour or society: instances of film-influenced behaviour – IMDb: Internet Movie Database 'Adjusted user rating', followed by total of votes cast up to 30.07.08 – YT: Number of clips appearing on YouTube as at 31.08.08

5.5 Categories of impact indicators

5.5.1 Censorship and notoriety
Censorship, whether actual or threatened, has generated a huge amount of public attention for films. When the producers deliberately made it known that the government had tried to obstruct *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), believing it to be unpatriotic in wartime, the film attracted extra publicity and coverage. The story of its attempted suppression by Winston Churchill resurfaced in 1978 and again on its restoration in 1986,[24] securing additional media attention and public reflection about Britishness. Theatre censorship became an important arena for debating challenges to good taste and morality by the new angry playwrights and directors of the 1950s, which fuelled many of the new realist UK films of their work in the late 1950s and early '60s, including the film of John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* which gained an X certificate.[25] This may have damaged its box office performance in 1958, but it also gave the film longer-term status as the expression of a generation's revolt against traditional English middle-class values, reflected in its continuing presence in critical literature and retrospectives.

The onscreen portrayal of crime and violence has been a recurrent flashpoint, involving censorship, media comment, and reports or claims of imitative behaviour. *Brighton Rock* was highly controversial in the late 1940s for portraying gang warfare and violence against women, but its realism also attracted audiences, and it has since become emblematic of the seaside town's darker side. *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) caused widespread public debate about the ultraviolence of Alex and his 'droods', which was shown apparently uncondemned, and even with relish and style. Reports of similar attacks in real life followed and were heard in court, while the film's much-publicised withdrawal from distribution in the UK between 1973 and 1999 was attributed to fears for the writer's and/or filmmaker's own safety.[26]

The Long Good Friday (1980) and *Sexy Beast* (2000) both attracted censorship: the former through the intervention of its financier, Sir Lew Grade, who insisted on references to the IRA being edited out of the television premiere version of the film; the latter through receiving an 18 rating from the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC). Both films also attracted extensive comment on their intensified portrayal of criminal violence. *The Long Good Friday* showed London gangsters co-operating with American mafiosi and in conflict with Irish republicans, while *Sexy Beast* contained extreme verbal violence from Ben Kingsley's character when he visits an ex-comrade in Spain. Both films became benchmarks for understanding how criminal behaviour was changing to meet new social and economic conditions, and are frequently referenced in later films and television programmes, including a memorable 1988 Comic Relief parody, *The Wrong Good Friday*.

5.5.2 Quotation in other media
One way in which the long-term cultural impact of films becomes apparent is through their quotation in different media by later generations. Popular songs provide many examples of this process. For instance, Pink Floyd's 1982 album *The Wall* refers to Guy Gibson's dog in *The Dam Busters*. Morrissey's song *Now my Heart is Full*, from his 1994 album *Vauxhall and I*, refers to the members of Pinkie's gang in *Brighton Rock*. *Look Back in Anger* is referenced in songs by David Bowie (on his album *Lodger*), the post-punk band Television's *Personalities* (on the 1983 album *And Don't the Kids Just Love It*) and Oasis. *A Clockwork Orange* continues to be referenced in a wide variety of media: Led Zeppelin's drummer John Bonham appeared in Clockwork Orange costume during their 1975 tour; David Bowie's celebrated Ziggy Stardust (both the album and the film) refers to the book and the lyrics of *Suffragette City* directly address a 'droog'; Blur's Damon Albarn appeared dressed as the film's protagonist, Alex, in the video for the band's track *The Universal*; the cover for The Ramones' album *Too Tough to Die* features the band standing backlit and menacing at the end of an urban tunnel, in a direct visual reference to one of the film's most violent sequences; and The Beastie Boys' song *Looking Down the Barrel of a Gun*, from their 1989 album *Paul's Boutique*, includes a memorable direct reference: "[I am] ...like Clockwork Orange going off on the town, I've got posse bonanza to beat your ass down..."

24. On the *Blimp* controversy, see Ian Christie, ed., *Powell, Pressburger and Others*, BFI, 1978.
25. Anthony Aldgate, *Censorship and the Permissive Society: British Cinema and Theatre,* 1955-1965, Oxford University Press, 1955.
26. It was apparently withdrawn by Stanley Kubrick after threats to him and his family, and only re-released after his death.

Tribute and parodic references to earlier films have become a feature of TV programmes, indicating the expectation of shared knowledge by makers and audience. References to *The Crying Game* include an episode of *I'm Alan Partridge* entitled *To Kill a Mocking Alan*, where Partridge says the film is about "the woman with the old, er, tadger"; and an episode of *Seinfeld* refers to being sick as "his own personal Crying Game". An episode of *Father Ted* has two characters explicitly discussing the film. *Chariots of Fire* has been referenced, primarily through its musical score, in many television shows including *LA Law*, *The Simpsons*, *The Office*, *Ugly Betty* and *Will and Grace*. Similarly, *Four Weddings and a Funeral* is invoked in episode titles for many popular series, such as *Friends*, *CSI* and *Peep Show*. The confidence of the makers of such high rating shows that these references would be picked up by a mainstream audience, provides strong evidence of these films' impact on popular culture.

Music videos also frequently reference films, creating another arena for shared culture and also a driver for the transmission of knowledge of older films. Richard Lester's *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) and Derek Jarman's punk-inspired *Jubilee* (1978) were two seminal influences on the early music video industry: the former is frequently quoted by music video directors as a breakthrough, with its innovative cutting of the pictures to the rythmn of the songs; the latter, released a year after the punk albums *Never Mind the Bollocks* and *The Clash*, helped establish the visual stylistic codes for much of later punk-inspired video material. A leading contemporary music video company is named Colonel Blimp after the 1943 film.[27] Among many specific references to UK films, the R&B singer Usher appears in the style of Alex from A *Clockwork Orange* in his 1997 video for *My Way*. *The Full Monty* and its hit soundtrack have led to the music and storyline entering popular culture: one notable expression of a widening cultural impact was the adaptation of the film into a Broadway musical in 2000.

5.5.3 Zeitgeist moments
Films can become closely associated with public events and attitudes, so that a mention of the title, allusion to an image or hearing a fragment of music can be powerfully evocative. This process of association has been considerably extended and accelerated by the development of online resources such as blogging and YouTube.

Derek Jarman's *Jubilee* captured the punk movement in music and fashion during 1977, and cast a range of iconic characters in a loose dystopian vision of a ruined England. It caused a sensation at the Cannes Film Festival in 1978, with its provocatively dressed performers and a casual irreverence. What had begun as Jarman's attempt to capture punk style became a sour reaction against the pomp and sentiment of the Royal Jubilee of 1977. *Jubilee* showcased punk music for an international audience and was also one of a number of late 1970s UK films that challenged taboos on homosexuality and promoted gay rights, and helped put an end to the criminalisation of sex between men in private.[28]

Chariots of Fire was first released in March 1981 and then won four Academy Awards in March 1982, which triggered a re-release that coincided with the Falklands conflict. Set at the time of the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris, the film's evocation of a period when traditional British imperial values were coming into question, and class and other differences could be set aside in order to win, struck a popular chord. As a recent writer notes, the film provided a contemporary allegory, suggesting that "the enterprise culture encouraged by the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher rewarded the kind of dogged, individualistic enterprise exhibited by Abrahams and Liddell and supported the film's patriotic motifs, especially during the Falklands War".[29]

Four Weddings and a Funeral (1994) created a template for a new kind of romantic comedy, now familiarly described as 'rom-com', and boosted the international careers of many of its cast and creators when it became a box office sensation around the world. Because of its wide exposure, various aspects of the film had exceptional impact. The casting of Simon Callow as an ebullient gay character, Gareth, who does not die of AIDS is widely credited with continuing to improve and diversify the image of homosexuals in British society. The WH Auden poem *Funeral Blues*, which is read at Gareth's funeral, proved so popular that a special selection of Auden's poetry, *Tell me the Truth About Love*, was published in 1994 and made the poet a posthumous best-seller.

27. A division of the commercials company Blink, Colonel Blimp was launched in 2003 and explains its name as follows: "Colonel Blimp …was named in homage to the 1944 film *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* directed by Powell and Pressburger" http://www.colonelblimp.com/biography
28. The partial decriminalisation of homosexual acts introduced in England and Wales in 1967 did not include Scotland until the Criminal Justice Act of 1980.
29. Ellis Cashmore, Chariots of Fire: bigotry, manhood and moral certitude in an age of individualism, *Sport in Society*, Volume 11, Issue 2-3, March 2008, pp159–173.

Kenneth Branagh's film of Shakespeare's *Henry V* (1989) inevitably invited initial comparison with an earlier actor-director's version, Laurence Olivier's wartime morale-raising film of 1944. ASide from aesthetic comparisons, Branagh clearly succeeded in bringing the play alive for a contemporary audience, and a video of his film formed part of the entertainment available to SAS troops before the 2003 Iraq invasion. According to a story that has since been dramatised, Colonel Tim Collins was inspired by repeated viewings to echo Henry's Agincourt speech in his address to the troops before the invasion began.[30]

Bend it like Beckham (2002) was partly inspired by its director, Gurinder Chadha, observing the appeal of international football for women as well as men. Developing a story about a British Asian girl who is determined to learn how to bend a football like her hero enabled the film to transcend the narrow category of race relations and tap into a wider set of concerns: girls being stereotyped, female friendships and shared passion for football. Like *Gregory's Girl* two decades earlier, the film caught the national imagination and appealed to an exceptionally wide demographic. After breaking records at the UK box office, earning more than any previous British-financed and distributed film, it went on to set new records for a British film in both the US and India, and was released in over 40 countries. The film launched the international careers of two leading UK actresses, Kiera Knightley and Parminder Nagra. Its impact also reached far beyond the cinema. Jaswinder, or 'Jess', became a national heroine and role-model for Indian girls, encouraging many to take up football and leading to the formation of a national girls' league in 2003.[31]

5.5.4 Cumulative impact

A film with cumulative impact has the capacity to inspire wave after wave of cultural re-interpretation for years, sometimes decades, after its release; it acquires new contemporary relevance and/or becomes a memorable landmark in Britain's ongoing cultural history, with cherished lines or images quoted across generations. Examples of this process include the oft-quoted final line from *Brief Encounter*[32] or the influence of *Get Carter* (1971) on the style of recent UK thrillers, like *The Long Good Friday* (1980) and *Sexy Beast* (2000).

The zeitgeist cases detailed above all show evidence of cumulative impact. Despite its limited visibility on initial release, *Jubilee*, along with other films by Derek Jarman, has become culturally prestigious, providing evidence of the diversity and vitality of UK culture even during the Thatcher era's promotion of 'Victorian values'. In 2008, the *New York Times* reviewed the latest in a series of London exhibitions devoted to Jarman and an impending special DVD edition of his films by noting that, although his work remained hard to see, "with each passing year the British artist and iconoclast Derek Jarman seems… more important…".[33]

Four Weddings and a Funeral

Taxi-drivers in York, WH Auden's home city, were reported to be memorising passages of his poetry to quote to visitors in February 2007.

Henry V

Clips from both Kenneth Branagh's and Laurence Olivier's films are now widely available on YouTube, with a lively email debate in daily progress about the significance of the play and its relevance today. Posted YouTube comments for the clips of the Branagh version stretch to over 45 web pages and the most popular clip from Olivier's version (the St Crispin's Day speech) has garnered over 60,000 viewings after a year of availability. In a further extension of the scene's impact, Branagh (an Ulsterman, like Colonel Tim Collins) has since recreated Collins' Gulf War speech in a television dramatisation.

Bend it like Beckham

The Indian liberal press were swift to pick up on the film's groundbreaking sexual politics, asserting that the film's commercial success in India would foster a culture of greater tolerance of gay sexuality and a new freedom for women to explore choices other than early marriage.

30. YouTube clip of the excerpt from the Kenneth Branagh re-enactment (over 41,000 views): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UpdeNcH1H8A&feature=related
31. *Football Film Spurs on Indian Girls* – BBC News website, 17 January 2003 – http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/2668147.stm
32. "You've been a long way away... Thank you for coming back to me." – a line often now quoted as a parody, but also defining traditional English embarrassment in the face of emotion.
33. *New York Times,* 25 May 2008.

6 Sum of the parts: how the nations and regions have impacted on UK culture through film

6.1 Core findings

This section looks at how films of the nations and regions have influenced the broader UK culture through a constantly evolving trajectory of representation.

• During the period from the post-war years to the early 1960s, the nations and regions had little influence on how they were represented in mainstream feature films; the London metropolitan studios determined their depiction in popular films. Though they conveyed stereotypical images of regional characters, these films nevertheless became part of the canon of popular cinema within the cultures they portrayed: *Whisky Galore!* (1949) still regularly shows up in viewer polls of the top ten best Scottish films of all time, in Scotland itself.

• During this era, films that were shot in the nations and regions with local resources, rather than in the London studios or the Home Counties, tended to be confined to either social and industrial documentaries or very low budget art films. The confinement to these genres and the limited opportunities for wide distribution (the films accompanied the main commercial features in local cinemas) meant that these films had very limited impact on the wider popular culture of the nations and regions, or the UK at large.

• The first half of the 1960s saw an unprecedented run of commercially successful, culturally high-profile British New Wave films made in the English regions. These films reversed the old regional stereotypes, and the cultural shock value they achieved at the time resided precisely in the way they depicted regional working classes (predominantly those of the industrial north) as complex, shaded and non-compliant characters, often embodying youth culture and its push for social change. Arthur Seaton, the brawling, womanising character of the 1965 hit film *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning,* ushered in a new kind of anti-hero in British cinema, and one who has been a cultural staple ever since.

• The depiction of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in films evolved from being reflected only through popular entertainment films made under the control of the London-based producers, to achieving a degree of autonomy over cinematic self-representation. The resulting films have achieved some cultural impact at times, although the graph of that cultural impact has followed a pattern of peaks and troughs, rather than showing steady incremental growth. For example, Scottish cinema achieved a spike of nationwide cultural impact in the early 1980s, largely through the phenomenal success of its first true indigenous popular film director, Bill Forsyth. *Gregory's Girl* and *Local Hero* reportedly did more to revive tourism in Scotland than any previous effort by local government. However, it was not until the mid-1990s that Scottish cinema achieved a new wave of cultural impact beyond its own borders, through a spate of successful films: *Shallow Grave, Trainspotting,* and Hollywood high-budget productions including *Braveheart.* This chequered course is also a feature of the cultural impact story in Wales and Northern Ireland, and is due in part to the difficulties faced by the nations in retaining local talent and creating solid structures for a local film production industry to emerge.

6.2 Introduction

Some of the most memorable UK films released during the past 60 years have been steeped in the sub-cultures of the UK's nations and regions. They include works as varied as *Whisky Galore!, I Know Where I'm Going, A Taste of Honey, Get Carter, In the Name of the Father, The Crying Game, Brassed Off, The Full Monty, Shallow Grave, East is East* and *Trainspotting.* On its first transmission on Film 4, *This Is England*, a film by the East Midlands-born filmmaker Shane Meadows, attracted an audience of over one million, a score never before recorded by the movie channel for a British film.

What these films have in common, apart from contemporary commercial and critical success, is a lasting impact on a wider understanding of British culture. In particular, because they reached a market far wider than the social milieu that they captured (or stereotyped), these films and many others are recognised as works which have influenced the gradual refining of public perceptions of Britishness as a complex composite rather than a monolithic idea. The influence of these individual films in part compensates for the relatively low number of films located in the nations and regions (compared to those located in London or outside the UK) in the sample databases engineered for this study (see section 5.3, p21).

These stand-out films have been made using very disparate perspectives, genres and aesthetics, and with diverse modes of funding and distribution. There is not, therefore, a neat pattern of linear development in the post-war cinema of Britain's nations and regions.

In very broad terms, the trend has been a slow movement away from metropolitan London's economic power and determination of taste, towards a gradual devolution to the UK's nations and regions. This development has mirrored the broader evolution of local politics towards self-government.

This general direction, however, has not significantly attenuated the ongoing power dynamics between the metropolitan centre and the periphery, in the selection of production projects and their financing and distribution. In the mid-1970s, Scottish directors who aspired to free their national cinema from the austere shackles of the social/industrial documentary had their breakthrough films financed by the British Film Institute (BFI), a UK body based in central London. During the 1980s, the advent of Channel 4 also proved a boon for filmmakers from outside London, as it backed films with vivid and original perspectives on non-metropolitan lives and cultures. Conversely, devolved resources such as National Lottery funds, which have given new impetus to national and regionally-based cinema production since the mid 1990s, have sometimes served to support projects developed by metropolitan filmmakers, or enabled internationally mobile Hollywood productions to use local resources for the production of films which conveyed romanticised or stereotypical images of British national and regional cultures and their history – often very successfully, as in Mel Gibson's *Braveheart*.

An analysis of the cultural impact of Britain's national and regional films from 1946 to 2006 necessitates looking at the influence of film policy developments, as well as the impact of specific films or trends in filmmaking. While the direction of film policy, in and of itself, is not a predictor of cultural impact, the presence (or not) of devolved film funding affects the content of the resulting films, which precedes and directs eventual cultural impact. Another dimension to be considered in the examination of cultural impact in a nations and regions context, is wider politics. For example, factors such as political self-censorship in Northern Ireland, or the preservation of a minority language in Wales affect the cultural impact (potential or otherwise) of locally-produced features, at various stages in those cultures' post-war histories.

6.3 Representation of UK cultures in post-war popular UK films

6.3.1 London calling: metropolitan film power and the regions, from the studio era to the swinging sixties
British film emerged from World War II with a national cinema concentrated overwhelmingly in integrated film studios, based in and around London. The studio system held the regional representation agenda firmly within its own particular canon of taste and cultural vision of Britain. The result was an industry which portrayed local stereotypes, and which was all the more successful in that it paralleled Hollywood's Scottish and Welsh exotica films, some of which were worldwide hits.

Ealing Studios was the most influential force in determining cultural perceptions of English, Scottish and Welsh characters. Ealing's ensemble comedies depicted a fantasised version of British society as socially homogeneous and apolitical, with a shared sense of the primacy of collective wellbeing over self-interest, and a cheeky opposition to official authority. The films expressed an upbeat, consensual vision of the UK. Within this picture, the Scots and the Welsh had pride of place.

The year of 1949 marked Ealing Studio's peak in the popular representation of those largely cheerful British stereotypes, as this was the year in which *Passport to Pimlico, Whisky Galore!* and *A Run for your Money* were released in cinemas. *Whisky Galore!* and *A Run for your Money* did for the Scots and the Welsh respectively what *Passport to Pimlico* famously did for the London populace: where *Passport to Pimlico* created a soft urban utopia, the other two films presented Scotland and Wales as pre-industrial arcadia, obliterating the reality of industrial working class life in those areas.

In *Whisky Galore!,* an idealised community of wily Scots islanders displayed an unspoiled humanity which seems a direct expression of the pristine natural environment they inhabit. The two heroes of *A Run for your Money* travel to London, where the disarming innocence of their Welsh valley communal values ends up melting the insensitive core of a capital teeming with cold-hearted and cynical profiteers.

There's no doubt that films from the late 1940s and the '50s peddled safe metropolitan and Hollywood stereotypes of British Celts and provincial characters. However, in examining cultural impact, it is important to note that these stereotypes played remarkably well, not only with audiences in London and the suburbs, but in the very nations and regions which were depicted by those stereotypes. This was true at the time and remains true almost 60 years later. A few examples illustrate this important point:

• In a 2007 poll by the Odeon cinema chain of what Scottish filmgoers considered to be the best Scottish films of all time, *Whisky Galore!* came third.[34] It shared the position with *Greyfriars Bobby,* a 1961 Walt Disney production written and directed by English men and starring veteran British actor Donald Crisp.

• John Ford's idealised picture of a Welsh valley community in the 1941 film *How Green was my Valley,* shot in southern California with a bevy of Northern Irish, American and Scottish actors playing some of the local characters, was a considerable success with Welsh audiences, despite being criticised by many scholars as inauthentic.

• Also shot entirely in a studio in southern California, Vincente Minnelli's 1954 tartan musical *Brigadoon,* with its technicolor clichés of Scottish rural life, was as big a commercial success in Scotland as it was in the rest of the UK.

Thus, in the Scotland and Wales of the 1950s, the popular audience seemed comfortable with – or perhaps oblivious to – the lack of authentic cinematic voices from their own cultures; they absorbed metropolitan or American representations of themselves enthusiastically, embracing the films as positive fantasies. To this day, these manufactured images still have strong sentimental currency within those cultures.

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34. A 2002 poll by Scotland's *The List* magazine put *Whisky Galore* in fifth place.

6.3.2 The regions and the romance of working class life in 1960s cinema

From 1958 onwards, British cinema's representation of social and human realities changed beyond recognition. The films by the 1960s British New Wave which crossed over into the mainstream and became popular successes include *A Room at the Top* (1958), *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), *A Taste of Honey* (1961), *A Kind of Loving* (1962), *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962), *Billy Liar* (1963), *This Sporting Life* (1963) and *If…*(1968). Most of these cross-over successes came to embody not only 1960s counterculture, but also deeper undercurrents of social change which mainstream audiences instinctively recognised and identified with.

From the ruddy, wholesome stereotypes of 1950s cinema, regional characters suddenly became complex, three-dimensional people with inner lives and dramatic conflicts with the outside world. In particular, the industrial north of England had never been depicted in such a searchingly dramatic and dysfunctional light. Jo, the heroine of the 1961 hit *A Taste of Honey,* broke through British social taboos like no female character before her, conceiving a child with a black sailor and sharing her life with a gay man. The character became a prototype for the New Wave's angry exploration of Britain's new social realities. The films often provoked and angered the generation that had fought the war. However, by dramatising the new fracture lines in the British social edifice, they also garnered the enthusiastic following of much of the rising, post-war generation.

The British New Wave directors did not go out of their way to locate characters with specific regional identities. Instead, they went in search of the British working class and found it at its most vibrant and convincing in the industrial north, whose remoteness from rising southern affluence lent it a dramatic otherness.

This shift in the representation and perception of regional identities was fed by the radical playwrights and novelists of the era, whose work found popular amplification after it was adapted for the big screen. The new social realist genre emerging from British contemporary theatre and literary fiction was often penned by working class regional playwrights or novelists, such as Shelagh Delaney (*A Taste of Honey*) or Alan Sillitoe (*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning).*

The cultural impact of the short-lived New Wave is still felt today: the success of the films, especially with the younger audience, launched an enduring genre of social realist drama which has remained buoyant in British cinema ever since and which has continued to yield notable films, including Chris Bernard's *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985) and Alan Clarke's bitter-sweet Yorkshire comedy *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1986) and, more recently, the works of the Nottingham-born Shane Meadows. These films have in common the representation of often embattled, non-metropolitan working class heroes and – as in the 1960s – have often been the product of collaboration between regional writers and metropolitan film companies in search of social and regional authenticity and good drama.

Cumulative exposure to this kind of film has contributed to the fact that regional accents have become associated with street credibility and 'cool' within popular youth culture. Whereas upwardly mobile young people in 1950s Britain tended to want to eradicate their regional accents in favour of 'BBC English', the trend began to reverse after the mid-1960s. This was largely the result of the shift in cultural values and attitudes which first manifested itself in new contemporary theatre, and which was then amplified and popularised by the cinema.

CASE STUDY 1: *SATURDAY NIGHT AND SUNDAY MORNING*

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning was one of the most culturally resonant films of the 1960s New Wave. Its overnight success with the audience made it one of the year's top hit films. Its enduring visibility in other media (television repeats, video and DVD sales, etc), also suggests a lasting cultural impact as a film which heralded changing perceptions of both class and the English regional experience. The film was a roaring critical and commercial success in both Britain and America.

Shot entirely on location in and around Nottingham, the film has as its central character a young factory worker whose life oscillates between monotonous, low-waged work and a ferocious indulging of all appetites. Fights, binge drinking and sexual prowess all form a part of Arthur Seaton's unapologetic assertion of his right to have it all. As played by the 24-year-old Albert Finney, Arthur represents a complete departure from earlier working class heroes. Not only is he an unashamed anti-hero, but he is also the first film character of his class not to be in the least concerned with either pride in his social status or the consideration of upward mobility.

Extensive press coverage was not, as with some other social realist UK films of the era, confined to the broadsheet papers: the tabloid press exploited *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning's* scandalous flavour, homing in on the coarse language and the frank depiction of the main character's sexuality.

The press also reported on the filmmakers' struggles with censorship, a factor which increased its status in contemporary youth culture as a film with a subversive charge. While the British film censor, John Trevelyan,[35] adopted a lenient position on the final version of the film, Warwickshire Council banned it altogether after the filmmakers turned down their demand that 40 seconds be cut from the film. The film played to packed houses in neighbouring Birmingham. In an open letter to Warwickshire Council, *Saturday Night* financier and British Lion MD David Kingsley reflected, "It is fortunate for the world that Warwickshire's greatest and often bawdy son, William Shakespeare, was not subject in his day to the restrictions of prim and petty officialdom."

The film's impact on the culture of filmmaking in the UK was both immediate and enduring. After *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning,* filmmakers would no longer be credible if they chose to typecast regional actors as one-dimensional celluloid clichés (unless in deliberate, post-modernist humorous references). If social realism had found its roots in the documentaries of the Free Cinema movement and in television (the influence of the BBC's drama strand *Play For Today* was considerable), Arthur Seaton's rage and ferocious lust for life took the genre away from the more narrow, social realist concept in which regional working class people were seen as mere embodiments of social problems. There are echoes of this seminal character in many subsequent films depicting the British working class, such as Gary Oldman's *Nil By Mouth* or, in a comical vein, the brawling, narcissistic Begbie in *Trainspotting*.

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning is prominent on the Albert Finney fan site www.albertfinneyfans.net. It is also referenced on YouTube with various extracts. The most striking cultural cross-reference is a recent YouTube video which sets the song *My Mistakes were Made for You* by the popular UK indie band The Last Shadow Puppets, over shots from the film.

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning

35. John Trevelyan was director of the Censorship Board from 1958–1970.

Like all film movements before and since, the cinema of the British New Wave began to exhaust itself and lose its power over the imagination of an entire generation, as the initial cultural upheaval settled into the new standard values of youth culture. By about 1967, the Hollywood studios, who had been key players in the financing of the New Wave cinema, began to exert their influence to return to more traditional fare.

Britain was changing and, to quote a phrase of the time, 'the party was over'. By the early 1970s, high unemployment and social unrest had replaced the previous optimism in the boundless possibilities of change. The English regions made their way back into British cinema, but this time the regional setting was no longer one in which angry characters searched anxiously for a way out. An industrial north in seemingly terminal decline became instead the visual canvas for the expression of a new mood of despondency and pessimism. *Get Carter* (1971) epitomises this new relationship between British cinema and the regions.

CASE STUDY 2: *GET CARTER*

Get Carter is recognised today as one of the most culturally enduring UK films in any genre, and a defining moment in British film. It powerfully illustrates this study's concept of cumulative cultural impact. Although the film went through a period of being widely disowned for its perceived nihilism, perhaps the simplest explanation for its considerable impact at the time of its release and for its ongoing appeal is the way in which it seemed to capture a moment in British social and cultural history, expressing all of its pent-up rage, frustration and cynical despair inside an identifiable genre film.

Director Mike Hodges was quite deliberate in his search for a declining urban setting. Having found Hull and other locations in the north east insufficiently atmospheric, because developers had begun to reshape those areas, he finally settled for Newcastle's dilapidated Tyneside, where he found his ideal visual expression for a country in a state of economic stagnation and social standstill. In *Get Carter,* regional identity is subsumed in the dynamics of a revenge thriller. Though the film's depiction of a run-down and depressed working class Newcastle is extraordinarily vivid in its sheer bleakness, Carter as played by Michael Caine is no longer defined by his connection to Northumberland as a place and a culture. *Get Carter* made powerful use of grimy industrial decline in the north as metaphor for the broader state of the nation.

Subsequent cycles in British social and cultural history have regularly renewed and re-invented the film's cultural impact on new generations. *Get Carter* has its internet fan sites and the Get Carter Appreciation Society has worked actively at maintaining the mystique of the film. In 2000, it launched a press campaign to save the Gateshead car park, by common consensus a 1960s concrete eyesore, from demolition. The car park was featured in a key scene from the movie and the fans argued that this cultural significance alone should justify its preservation. The campaign's high point was an appeal by Hollywood star Sylvester Stallone to Gateshead Council – fortuitously, the star was at that time starring in the US remake. 2000 also saw the high profile re-release of *Get Carter* on DVD. Its resurrection coincided with a new wave of British gangster films (*Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* had sparked the trend in 1998), and caught Britain's lad-mag zeitgeist, resulting in widespread feature coverage. It held the number three spot in the DVD charts for several weeks. In his monograph on the film, Steve Chibnall concludes that *Get Carter's* rise to classic status in the space of two decades, "is evidence of a changed frame of reference in our evaluation of the past. The conception of nationhood and national character that the British cinema canon has always reflected seems to have swelled to encompass the sordid and sensational, as well as the saintly and sober".[36]

Get Carter

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36. *Get Carter,* Steve Chibnall, British Film Guide 2003, (p4).

6.4 Cinematic self-expression in Scotland

6.4.1 The long reign of the social and industrial documentary

For a very long period of time which stretches from well before the war years until the late 1970s, the documentary was almost the only original form of local, non-metropolitan filmmaking in the Celtic fringe.[37] In Scotland, such films were made in great numbers, primarily through the sponsorship of local government, industrial businesses or utilities companies. They were small in scale, educational in purpose and most of them played in Scotland's cinemas to relative public indifference.

From 1956 to 1980, the Films of Scotland Committee[38] acted as a facilitator of local industrial sponsorship of the documentary, helping to institutionalise Scotland's dominant film genre. Scotland is the birthplace of John Grierson, one of the fathers of the British documentary movement. Grierson set himself in direct opposition to the 'idea of Hollywood as irresponsible cinema of spectacle and escapism'[39] and his ideas had a strong hold over Scottish film culture well into the 1970s.

While the documentary filmmakers themselves were often very advanced in their cinematic concepts and strived for perfection (the shipyard documentary *Seaward the Great Ships,* whose treatment was written by Grierson himself, won an Oscar for Best Short Subject in 1962), the films most often played as supporting features in popular cinemas alongside commercial feature films from Hollywood and England. The theatrical exposure at least guaranteed that a large number of people would see the films, but it is perhaps significant that none of these works achieved iconic status with the local audience.

The legacy of Scotland's adherence to Griersonian principles was mixed. On the one hand, the stern anti-entertainment ethos held back Scotland's ambitions for a diverse, devolved cinema capable of reflecting Scottish culture back to local audiences and the rest of the UK. By discouraging the emergence of other, non-factual genres, it paradoxically reinforced the hold of Hollywood and English popular entertainment films over the Scottish popular imagination. On the other hand, it acted as a disciplined film school for the ambitious auteurs who began to emerge in the 1970s and gradually defined a Scottish national cinema.

6.4.2 Scotland's journey from maverick auteurs to national production

The first original Scottish auteur filmmaker to break the Griersonian mould and make an independent feature film was Bill Douglas, with a trilogy of low-budget films widely held as masterpieces of poetic realism. It is significant that *My Childhood*, the initial film in the trilogy, was first denied funding from the Films of Scotland Committee, which considered that it promoted a negative image of Scotland. Ironically, Douglas went on to successfully gain funding from the BFI in London. Although the first film won a major award at the Venice Film Festival on the year of its release, the trilogy has had no discernible impact on a wider popular culture, either inside or outside Scotland. Nevertheless, Douglas' work has an enduring currency in scholarly and cinephile circles where it is held in high regard, and its impact on the sub-culture of filmmakers, in Scotland and elsewhere is ongoing.[40] There are shades of his aesthetics and sensibility in the contemporary work of new Scottish filmmakers (eg Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher*), who freely acknowledge his influence. Most importantly, Douglas' work sent a signal to his contemporaries that the time had come for creative emancipation from a narrow, non-fiction approach to cinema.

37. Two notable exceptions were Enrico Cocozza and Margaret Tait, whose low budget, largely self-financed films explored poetic concepts and cadences and found a small audience at festivals and arts events.
38. A sub-committee of the Scottish Office.
39. Britain's Outstanding Contribution to the Film - The Documentary-Realist Tradition, Andrew Higson, in *All Our Yesterdays*, ed. Charles Barr, 1986, BFI Publishing (p72).
40. *Bill Douglas – A Lanternist's Account,* ed. Eddie Dick, Andrew Noble and Duncan Petrie (BFI in association with the Scottish Film Council, 1993).

Like most filmmakers of his generation, another pioneer, Bill Forsyth, had developed his technical skills making small, sponsored documentaries for Scottish industry and government services. His first breakthrough into feature length fiction was the 1980 film *That Sinking Feeling.* The film was a critical success, helping to launch Forsyth as a filmmaker of national stature. He followed it up a year later with *Gregory's Girl* which was a major independent hit in the UK and, like Douglas' trilogy, attracted metropolitan funding.

Forsyth's breakthrough arrived just in time for a clutch of other Scottish filmmakers who came of age with the creation of Channel 4 in 1982. In the early years, the channel's drama department commissioned several films from these Scottish independents. Their exposure was mixed because, unlike some of the most high profile Film on Four features, these commissioned films from Scotland were often not given a cinema release. Their performance on television, however, gave the films access to a significant UK-wide audience, which was also a first. Charles Gormley's *Living Apart Together* had two initial transmissions in 1983 and 1984. The film attracted a total audience of 4.8 million. This was unprecedented exposure for a film about Scottish culture by a Scottish director.

Aside from Forsyth, Gormley was the only one of this Channel 4 generation of Scottish filmmakers who managed to make a second film during the 1980s.[41] The compound cultural impact of Scottish cinema at that time was deadened by the fact that so few directors were able to develop a body of work, partly because there were no adequate sources of local film funding and instead there was a complete dependency on London patronage which was not consistent over time.[42] The difficulty in reaching any kind of critical mass and sustaining it is a perennial challenge of Scottish cinema, and one that has been addressed only in part by access to devolved public funding resources.

However, the 1980s also saw the first film by a Scottish director to become an international success: *Local Hero* by Bill Forsyth.

41. *Heavenly Pursuits* (1986).
42. Interview with Jonathan Murray, University of Glasgow, Scotland.

CASE STUDY 3: *LOCAL HERO*

Local Hero, the third film by Bill Forsyth, was released in 1983 and was a major independent success in Scotland, the UK at large and the rest of the world, grossing around $6 million in the US alone.

Superficially, it seemed that *Local Hero's* vision of contemporary Scotland was not markedly different from the whimsical Ealing and Hollywood stereotypes of the past: the story is populated by ruddy-cheeked local people with an unhurried take on life and seemingly unshakeable communal values. The young American executive dispatched to buy out the area is soon bewitched by the timeless beauty of the landscape and the allure of a local girl. Gradually, however, the picture-postcard world begins to crack as the villagers enthusiastically cooperate in the imminent eradication of their Eden, dreaming of six-figure pay offs.

Local Hero was the first non-documentary film made in and about Scotland, by a Scottish director, to become a national and international hit, crossing over into a vast mainstream audience in the UK, America and Europe. At £2.5 million, the film was ten times the budget of *Gregory's Girl.* By 1987, *Local Hero* had earned its financier, Goldcrest Films, revenues of nearly £3.3 million.[43] It was also a critical success across the board. For the first time since the post-war Hollywood blockbusters, a film was putting Scotland back in the public consciousness in Britain and abroad.

The film's cultural impact beyond its immediate contemporary success at the box office is found in an ongoing debate within Scotland itself about just what kind of representation of the nation it conveyed[44]: to some, Forsyth debunked Brigadoon-style clichés better to reinforce them in a happy ending which left no room for an authentic exploration of the conflict between capitalism and communal values; to others, the film was confidently subversive, presenting the Scots as three-dimensional human beings at ease with both tradition and modernity, and able to laugh at themselves.

Beyond the academic level, contemporary surveys, websites and the blogosphere attest to the film's enduring cultural shelf-life. The IMDb entry for *Local Hero* has 158 user comments (many from the US), making it the third most user-reviewed of what are generally regarded as Scotland's top 20 films, a score topped only by *Braveheart* (859 entries) and *Trainspotting* (399). The IMDb message board for the film, another useful measure of a film's enduring impact, runs into 11 pages and contains recent entries by people who have only just discovered the film, 20 years after it was made. Although it is said to be on the wane, the impact of the film on local tourism has been considerable, renewing international interest in the Scottish Highlands as a whole.

Local Hero

43. *My Indecision is Final – The Rise and Fall of Goldcrest Films,* Terry Ilott and Jake Eberts, Ed. Faber and Faber, 1990, (p657).
44. David Bruce, *Scotland, The Movie,* (Polygon, 1996); David Petrie, *Screening Scotland*, (BFI, 2000).

6.4.3 A cumulative cultural impact: Scottish films in the mid-1990s

Local Hero had a deep impact on the local film community's self-image because it demonstrated the potential of Scottish cinema to appeal to a UK-wide, or even global, audience. This shift in perception did not lead to significant changes for another decade. By single-handedly raising the profile of Scottish cinema at home, however, *Local Hero* launched a debate about the need for a coherent and sustained national film policy, designed both to capture the economic opportunities represented by Hollywood demand for location filming and to empower Scottish filmmakers. During this period of transition, the power shifted from the individual pioneer filmmakers to the producers, and new structures were gradually put in place to enable the development of an indigenous film culture and industry. Devolved Lottery funding, in particular, allowed Scotland to approach the funding of film production on a more ambitious scale.

This was a time when considerable discussion took place about the need to move Scottish cinema from the pattern of episodic, one-off breakthroughs, epitomised by Bill Forsyth's career, to a sustainable devolved film industry. A combination of factors, both incidental and deliberate, finally led to a unique moment in Scottish film history: the years 1995 to 1997 saw the release of films 'of Scotland' representing a range and breadth never before achieved. The leading films in this unprecedented wave were *Shallow Grave* (Danny Boyle, 1995), *Rob Roy* (Michael Caton Jones, 1995), *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, 1995), *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996), *Breaking The Waves* (Lars Von Trier, 1996), *Mrs Brown* (John Madden, 1997) and *Orphans* (Peter Mullan, 1997). For the first time in Scottish film history, a cluster of non-factual, critically acclaimed and commercially successful films projected a diverse set of images of the national culture.

These films are varied, not only in how they depict Scotland but also in their styles and genres: the social realism of *Orphans*, *Shallow Grave's* fresh take on the crime genre, *Trainspotting's* nihilistic black comedy, *Rob Roy's* period pathos, etc. The appeal of Scotland to foreign filmmakers, Gibson and Von Trier, was just as diverse, from *Braveheart's* interest in the epic potential of Scotland's history, to the use of the Scottish landscape for its dramatic, expressionist qualities in *Breaking The Waves.* There were also contrasts in the scale of the films and the multiplicity of their sources of finance which, for the first time, included significant devolved structures such as the Glasgow Film Fund and the Scottish Arts Council.

The two most commercially successful films in the pack, *Braveheart* and *Trainspotting,* presented to the world two diametrically opposed visions of Scottish culture, both of which achieved cultural impact in their own way.

CASE STUDY 4: *BRAVEHEART*

A big budget Hollywood medieval epic, *Braveheart* was a star vehicle for Mel Gibson with a raw imagery of primeval Scottish manhood as fearless, passionate and fiercely nationalistic.

An unforeseen cultural impact saw the Scottish National Party (SNP) claim *Braveheart* as a totemic film to promote its own agenda of nationalistic politics. SNP activists leafleted local filmgoers outside cinemas where the movie was playing, and the party's leader Alex Salmon, made frequent reference in interviews to the film's central idea, that Scotland had been a proud nation enslaved by the British crown. Many people in Scotland were outraged by the SNP's espousal of *Braveheart* as a propaganda tool, dismissing the film as historical fantasy and denouncing it for its inauthentic 'kailyard sentimentality'.[45]

The impact of the film on the Scottish imagination fuelled a passionate debate about the meaning of Scottish identity and the place of the SNP in national politics.[46]

At its most benign, the film's cultural impact also infected Scotland's football culture. International league games were now packed with Scotland fans harbouring the painted faces which were one of the visual trademarks of Gibson's film. Tourism also received a significant boost, with visits to the William Wallace monument in Stirling jumping from 40,000 to 200,000 and revenues topping £1 million.[47] This impact was felt acutely for the five years following *Braveheart's* global release, and location touring is still in demand to this day.

45. *The 20th Century tartan monster: the cultural politics of Scottish national identity,* Richard Cook, Miami University, 1 January 2000.
46. Internal Decolonisation? British Cinema and the Celtic Fringe, by Martin McLoone in *The British Cinema Book*, 2nd edition, edited by Robert Murphy (BFI, 2001).
47. *Stately Attraction – How Film and Television Programmes Promote Tourism in the UK.* A report by Olsberg/SPI for the UK Film Council, Scottish Screen, EM Media, East Midlands Tourism, Screen East, South West Screen, Film London and Visit London.

Released a year later in 1996, *Trainspotting* provided an extreme counterpoint to *Braveheart's* heroic and patriotic representation of Scotland.

CASE STUDY 5: *TRAINSPOTTING*

Trainspotting, made for under £3 million, was the biggest global independent film hit of the year and the most successful low-budget British film of the decade, grossing £12.5 million in the UK and $16.5 million in the US. The film was set in the squalid youth drug culture of Edinburgh.

Trainspotting was as extreme in its depiction of young people rejecting any notion of national identity, as *Braveheart* had been in exalting it. The only direct reference to Scotland in the film is a scathingly comical monologue by the lead character, shouting abuse at the inert countryside of his birth.

Much of *Trainspotting's* wide appeal in Britain as a whole has been attributed to the fact that it tapped into a drug culture which had become part of the definition of youth culture across the UK, from London to Glasgow. The best-selling Britpop soundtrack reinforced the sense of a youth culture which transcended an old-fashioned sense of regional distinctions and found a unifying statement in a hedonistic refusal to join in the post-war representations that had once put great value on national and regional pride. It is perhaps paradoxical that *Trainspotting* became a proud addition to the short-lived collective fantasy of 'Cool Britannia'.

The film's immediate cultural impact was measured in the intensity of the press debate it triggered across the UK, giving columnists and feature writers ample opportunities to use it in a war of words over the direction of Scottish and British culture and social values. London's *Prospect* magazine headlined its review 'Scotland The Sick' and interpreted the youth market's enthusiasm for the film and its fashionably self-destructive characters as a sign of moral decline. The *Glasgow Herald* echoed the moral outrage, denouncing the film as 'juvenile' and 'asinine'. Much was made by the film's detractors of its corrosive cynicism and nihilistic rejection of ordinary life. The filmmakers were steadfast in their defence, insisting that their approach was mostly reflective of British drug culture, not seeking to make it more appealing than it really was. Answering a question about the high incidence of drugs in 1980s Edinburgh, the film's writer, John Hodge also chose to underplay the film's affiliation to a specific Scottish sub-culture, framing the film in a far wider cultural canvas: "There's nothing wrong in Scotland that isn't wrong somewhere else in Britain or somewhere else in Europe... Post-industrial decline. Expectations in conflict with the practical realities of what's available in a shrinking, more competitive world".[48]

Perhaps unexpectedly in view of its style and subject matter, the film also triggered a wave of location tourism, as fans from all over the UK (and the world) flocked to the dilapidated Edinburgh district of Leith, the place where the film's protagonists indulged their heroin-fuelled lifestyle. Even the remote Highlands train station of Corrour, the location for one of the film's most memorable scenes, still sees a trickle of visiting fans, 12 years after the film's release.[49]

Trainspotting

48. *Trainspotting: Junk Culture, Washington Post* article by Alona Wartofsky, 21 July 1996.
49. *Stately Attraction – How Film and Television Programmes Promote Tourism in the UK, ibid.*

Scottish cinema's as yet unrivalled performance peak of the mid-1990s serves to illustrate how the mainstream international film industry, attracted by local incentives, can carry innovative local filmmaking in its economic slipstream, and how a cluster of films which project different facets of local culture and history to a national and international audience can build up to a cumulative cultural impact.

The co-existence of large 'inward investment' Hollywood productions and innovative low-budget independent pictures which occurred during this brief period is something that the emergent Scottish film industry has worked at recapturing and prolonging since, against the background of an ongoing debate about policy priorities.

6.5 Wales and cinematic devolution: a mixed cultural legacy

6.5.1 The road to cinematic self-representation
In the three decades following World War II, depictions of Wales in cinema were largely polarised between idealised visions of a bucolic, communal idyll and social realist films mostly in the documentary genre.
The bucolic sensitivity was conveyed historically in both the big British metropolitan films *(A Run for your Money)* and the Hollywood productions *(How Green was my Valley)* discussed at the beginning of this section. As cinema has been historically a popular medium in Wales, these big productions were generally well received by local audiences, who welcomed the positive stereotypes of Welsh life.

More than any other nation in the Celtic fringe, Wales responded to the metropolitan studio system's domination of its cinematic representation by contributing a bevy of outstanding actors who became regular marquee names in British cinema during the 1940s and '50s. Not only are their names inextricably linked with the zenith of British cinema's studio era, but also with the breakthrough films of the 1960s: Roger Livesey *(The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp, A Matter of Life and Death),* Stanley Baker *(The Cruel Sea, Zulu),* Richard Burton *(Look Back in Anger, The Spy who Came in from the Cold),* and Rachel Roberts *(Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, O Lucky Man!).* In the absence of economic power and without a devolved means of cinema production, assimilation into the British mainstream became a salient feature of the Welsh cultural contribution to film culture.

At the other end of the spectrum, the country's social realist documentary films were often bound up with the politics of the Welsh industrial and mining unions, who saw the documentary medium as a means of reinforcing communal cohesion or as teaching aids. The unions' comprehensive patronage of the workers extended to education and entertainment, which included the ownership and operation of film theatres. In this closed context, it is possible to suggest that these films may have had a significant influence on the cultural values and collective self-image of industrial communities.

It is not until the mid-1970s that Welsh cinema begins to emerge from this polarity between mainstream entertainment films controlled by production systems outside Wales on the one hand, and local low-budget social films on the other.[50]

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50. *Welsh Cinema: The First Hundred Years*, Dave Berry (University of Wales Press, 1994).

CASE STUDY 6: *ABOVE US THE EARTH*

Released in 1977, *Above us the Earth* is regarded as the first Welsh-authored drama film to capture the reality of industrial Wales.

Made by Karl Francis, the son of a coal miner who had grown up in the community, the film mixed professional actors with non actors selected from the mining town where the film was shot. Though Francis has admitted that he was in part influenced by the Italian neo-realist directors of the post-war period, *Above us the Earth* is also steeped in a Welsh and British social documentary tradition to which it lends a new vitality.

The film was made at a time when the Welsh Workshops movement was in full swing, as were the Film and Video Workshops. The latter saw themselves in part as the audiovisual arm of the coal miners' political and social struggle. The film dared to criticise the National Union of Mineworkers, which retaliated by banning *Above us the Earth* from the cinemas it owned and operated in south Wales.

However, the film secured a metropolitan release through The Other Cinema, a London-based distributor of radical social and political films.[51] The British release of an indigenous, feature-length film depicting Welsh culture in a social realist vein was a pivotal moment for Welsh cinematic self-representation, and the resulting exposure attracted the attention of the BBC which gave it a network premiere. The initial cultural impact of the film was limited, due to the restricted cinema release for this kind of low-budget film.

Above us the Earth

51. Interview with Karl Francis.

It is striking however, that this important symbolic breakthrough did not make any significant difference to the cultural visibility of Welsh cinema. This failure to consolidate an individual breakthrough into something which could be identified as a movement, is a recurrent feature of the nations' and regions' story during the first four post-war decades (see section 6.4.2. on Scotland). The lack of devolved resources to enable the development of a local talent base combined with a long history of London hegemony, meant that the few successful films of indigenous expression rarely led to a more sustained output. Cultural exposure and impact has been at best fitful.

6.5.2 Devolved cinema and the politics of the Welsh language
The 1980s represented a confused but ultimately fertile transition for indigenous Welsh cinema. S4C, the independent Welsh language channel was launched in 1982 after a protracted fight by local activists which culminated in a brief hunger strike.

Controversy stalked the new channel from its inception; some opponents warned that the Welsh broadcaster would create a ghetto of cultural irrelevance while others clamoured for a proportion of the commissioning funds to be set aside for English language films and programmes.

S4C's early programming reflected dominant historic Welsh film aesthetics by programming a large number of social realist drama-documentaries. The channel was also responsible for launching the landmark animation series *Super Ted,* which sparked the development of a small and successful local animation industry, one of Wales' most credible claims to cinematic excellence since the war.

Critics of S4C's drama policy initially berated the channel for commissioning too many programmes exalting Wales' idealised communal and rural past, at the expense of a more culturally relevant examination of its urban industrial realities.

The politics of the Welsh language also influenced the evolution of the Arts Council of Wales' policy as it began to deploy devolved resources to support film and cinema.

There are local commentators who believe that the focus of cultural support on maintaining a strong Welsh language platform has encouraged an inward-looking approach to culture and film culture in particular, discouraged wider cinematic ambitions and restricted wider cultural exposure and impact. Critics also point to the perverse effects of language-based devolved cinema support through S4C; their concern is that it encourages London gatekeepers to turn down more ambitious Welsh projects on grounds that sufficient resources are available in Wales.[52] Others point out that the Welsh vision of film as a medium for the Welsh language bypasses the equally strong English-speaking culture, especially the industrial south Wales working class, which is rich in cinematic tradition.

Even with the growth of devolved resources since the 1990s, it is still extremely difficult for Welsh filmmakers to consolidate one initial success into a career in film. Paul Turner, author of the Oscar®-winning Welsh-language film *Hedd Wyn* (1992) found it very difficult to continue to make films outside television, despite winning one of the world's most prestigious film awards. Cultural impact is hampered by the absence of known directors with a consistent body of work.

Films by Welsh filmmakers have also traditionally been shunned by the mainstream British distribution system, or confined to very limited release in specialised cinemas. This marginalisation has made it very difficult for Welsh cinema to achieve cultural impact in the broader UK context.

6.5.3 Contemporary shifts
In the mid 1990s, devolved Lottery funding for film became available in Wales; it helped boost film funds that were already availaible through government grant-in-aid. During this period film policy was variously overseen by the Arts Council of Wales and Sgrîn, superseded in 2006 by the Film Agency for Wales. The past 15 years have seen a greater variety of both Welsh and English language films emerge, some of which have achieved greater cultural exposure in the Celtic fringe and the UK as a whole. The greater diversity has fostered films which are a

52. Interview with Dave Berry.

little more at ease with contemporary themes, even if the trade-off for this growing trend is a discernible loss of specific Welsh identity as defined by the canons of the past.

Two such films were Justin Kerrigan's *Human Traffic* (1999) and Kevin Allen's *Twin Town* (1997).

What characterised both films was their aggressive rejection of the trappings of old-fashioned Welsh identity, in favour of unashamed identification with a more universal, urban youth sub-culture. *Twin Town* dealt with Welsh nationhood in the way that *Trainspotting* had done with Scottishness four years before: a ritual slaying of old values. The film positively relished its iconoclastic send-up of old Welsh cultural clichés, from male voice choirs to the old guard and institutional corruption.

6.6 Northern Ireland: the shadow of the Troubles

The cultural impact of films from (and about) Northern Ireland in the period since the end of World War II has to be examined in the context of a core challenge which sets it apart from other cultures in Britain's Celtic fringe: how was a mainstream popular entertainment medium to deal with the Troubles as the defining socio-political reality of Northern Ireland?[53] A serious factual treatment often precluded popular appeal, while a more symbolic, artistic approach laid the resulting films open to accusations of trivialising the Troubles or using them as mere backcloth. Those who attempted to deal with the issues through irreverence and black humour equally failed to find an audience, eg *Divorcing Jack* which was released in the same year as the Omagh bombing (1998).[54]

The general trend restricting the cultural impact of the films is the unpopularity of depictions of the Troubles among both Northern Irish and British audiences, and their unwillingness to choose to see films about a conflict which long seemed unresolvable. Whatever the genre, films which had the Troubles as their foreground rarely achieved high commercial visibility on their release, let alone longer-term cultural impact. The three most resounding exceptions across our reference period (apart from Hollywood's occasional forays, such as *Devils' Own),* were *Odd Man Out* (Carol Reed, 1949) and, much later, *In the Name of the Father* (Jim Sheridan, 1993) and *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, 1992), all of which were significant hits at the time, both in and outside Northern Ireland.

6.6.1 Official propaganda and indirect censorship
From the years immediately following World War II until the present day, the cinema of Northern Ireland has struggled with the scrutiny of officialdom and political forces. This complex and enduring pressure has been characterised by indirect forms of censorship and the force of official propaganda in television and in documentary film. This issue is relevant to an examination of cultural impact, because it has often been one of the root causes behind a problematic connection between filmmakers and their potential audience.

Official propaganda and indirect censorship constituted an important factor in the selection of projects and the subsequent course of films made during the period from 1946 to the end of the Unionist government.

Under the Unionist Government's 50 year rule, there was a deliberate policy of driving public attention away from social and inter-communal strife and towards an upbeat vision of Ulster as a harmonious, modern economy and society. During the period, films which challenged this fabricated image were actively discouraged, while official documentaries were selling a 'Go ahead Ulster' vision.[55] In its first decade, BBC Northern Ireland was largely a mouthpiece for this official discourse, before gradually asserting a degree of editorial autonomy.

The Stormont Government often augmented this proactive approach with passive non-cooperation. The most famous illustration of this was its refusal to have any involvement with Carol Reed's 1947 film *Odd Man Out,* which was the first commercial thriller made by a London metropolitan studio with an IRA man as its central character.

53. This question is central to John Hill's study *Cinema And Northern Ireland* (BFI, 2000).
54. Internal Decolonisation? British Cinema and the Celtic Fringe, by Martin McLoone in *The British Cinema Book,* 2nd edition, edited by Robert Murphy (BFI, 2001).
55. This was an official slogan of a government campaign to project an image of Ulster as the economic tiger in the Celtic fringe and attract inward investment.

CASE STUDY 7: *ODD MAN OUT*

Carol Reed's 1947 *Odd Man Out* is generally considered to be the prototype for mainstream cinema's aesthetic approach to the sectarian conflict, and its approach has been remarkably influential over time. The emphasis is on a redemptive romance between the flawed lead character and the female lead, while the political context is only elliptically referred to. Belfast is not presented as a real city with a real political past, but as a stylised urban milieu more typical of film noir than social realism. The dramatic opposition is between those heroes seeking to turn away from the violence and those who relish it, with the filmmakers inviting identification with the former.

The makers of *Odd Man Out* wanted to make a depoliticised film as much because of their own liberal sensitivity as out of a concern with a potential ban in Northern Ireland. In doing so, they set a trend which runs through this study's reference period, for films which set the Northern Ireland conflict more in romantic or metaphysical terms than in a political context.

Odd Man Out was a commercial success for the London metropolitan studio Rank. A plausible hypothesis for its success was that it was marketed to audiences in Ireland and Britain as a new version of the familiar tragic story of Irish gunmen, more or less omitting the context of sectarian violence.

In terms of conveying something of the true tragedy of Northern Ireland, the cultural impact of the film was limited by the very choice the filmmakers had made to obliterate most of the political context. However, in no small part because of its status as a classic in the representation of Northern Ireland, the film has had enduring cultural impact in British film scholarship (a frame from the film features on the cover of John Hill's seminal book *Cinema and Northern Ireland*) and among cinephiles to this day, even if it is regarded as a minor film in Carol Reed's body of work.[56]

Odd Man Out

56. Macmillan, 2006.

Another manifestation of tensions between filmmakers and the political power structure, was pervasive self-censorship, which affected films from and about Northern Ireland well into the 1970s. The 1975 film *Hennessy*, starring Rod Steiger as a Belfast man plotting to blow up the House of Commons, was denied a UK release when the two most powerful exhibitors (ABC and Rank) refused to book it into their cinemas. The rationale for subtle forms of indirect censorship was a fear of the social and cultural impact of the representation of sectarian violence, with a particular concern about the possibility of IRA characters being depicted in a sympathetic light. Government officials and exhibitors appeared often to make an equivalence between dramatisation and glamorisation, and feared that the films might incite violence. As a result, many films failed to achieve commercial exposure, the necessary premise to notable cultural impact.

Both the government's and film distributors' concerns appeared to be unallayed by the fact that most Northern Ireland films invited identification with characters who avoided violence and/or sought to escape the strictures of sectarianism.

Direct local censorship by Northern Irish town and city authorities often excited controversy and raised the pre-release profile of films. In the majority of cases, the hype effect of such censorship was more than offset by the fact that they were denied mainstream distribution, and by the general unpopularity of films which highlighted a seemingly hopeless conflict happening at home (or close to home, for British audiences in general).

While political censorship was less of a factor during the 1970s, the industry itself frequently chose to tone down the content of the films: having financed *The Long Good Friday,* Sir Lew Grade tried to oppose its theatrical release and demanded that ten minutes which made reference to the IRA be cut out of the film before its television release.

6.6.2 The Troubles loom large over Northern Ireland films

Northern Ireland's self-representation through cinema differs greatly from that of Scotland or Wales because of the exacerbated political conflict. In the past 40 years, the Troubles have dominated the region's identity as far as cinematic representation is concerned, at the expense of other themes.

One of the most interesting of the later films in this canon is Neil Jordan's directorial debut, *Angel*, released in 1982. Although it is significantly less elliptical about the reality and nature of IRA violence, it shares with Carol Reed's film a focus on character as the source of the violence, rather than the wider canvas of power politics.

CASE STUDY 8: *ANGEL*

Angel has saxophonist Stephen Rea witness the murder of a young Catholic girl, an incident that sets him on a course of revenge. Though a Protestant himself, he is helped in his quest by Marie, a Catholic woman. *Angel's* first-time director Neil Jordan saw the film as an opportunity to explore film noir aesthetics within a cultural context that he knew well, rather than as an exercise in dramatising the Troubles and their impact on Northern Irish society.

Like the James Mason character in *Odd Man Out,* Stephen Rea's character in *Angel* is a displaced loner trying to deal heroically with events that he didn't choose. Although the film alludes to the wider sectarian context and is broadly anti-imperialist, it is concerned more with individual redemption than with political resolution. In this sense, it is also firmly within a dominant tradition of British and Irish films about the Troubles which lean towards de-contextualising the violence.

Angel was one of the first films financed by the newly-launched Channel 4 to be released in cinemas (1982) before being transmitted on television (1983). This factor, combined with very positive reviews, gave *Angel* a profile on the British mainland that no film about Northern Ireland had achieved since *Odd Man Out* was released 35 years earlier.

On its first Channel 4 transmission (December 1982), *Angel* achieved a respectable 2.84 million viewers. A further 1.75 million watched the film on its second showing in November 1984. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the film has had a very modest cultural impact beyond its contemporary release. The film has attracted only five IMDb user comments and 252 votes, compared with 102 user comments and a staggering 20,215 votes for the hit film *In The Name of the Father* (1993). But the comparison need not taint the analysis of the film's cultural impact, which lies mainly in its inspirational value for other filmmakers at the time it was made. *Angel* opened a new door for films about Northern Ireland, films which put a human face to the troubles and were honest about the corrupting effect of the conflict on an entire society.

Another strand of filmmaking depicted the Troubles predominantly as political drama, emphasising the collective forces at play and the effect of their collision on the protagonists' lives. Ken Loach's *Hidden Agenda* (1990) and Paul Greengrass's *Bloody Sunday* (2002), though markedly different in context and aesthetics, share a desire to shed light on the political context specific to the Troubles, rather than using it merely as a backcloth for character development. By suggesting the existence of a mid-1970s conspiracy to covertly sanction murder as a means of defeating Northern Ireland's nationalists, *Hidden Agenda* kicked up a political storm in Britain, whose government's record was directly incriminated by the allegations it contained. *Bloody Sunday* was made and released while the UK government was conducting an official enquiry into the killing by the British army of 13 Northern Irish civilians in Derry during a demonstration in 1972. While neither film achieved widespread popularity, they influenced the debate about the politics of the Northern Irish conflict and its resolution in a way that was out of all proportion to their commercial performance. *Hidden Agenda* attracted hostile comments on the record from Conservative MPs, who berated the film for allegedly supporting the IRA. *Bloody Sunday* drew for veracity on the direct co-operation of many eyewitnesses and participants in that fateful day, from the families of the bereaved to British soldiers. This approach prompted co-producer Don Mullan to describe the film as "a mini peace process".[57]

Jim Sheridan's 1993 film *In the Name of the Father* was also concerned with setting the record straight. It was an angry film about the miscarriage of British justice which had sent five Northern Irish innocents to prison, after the bombing of a pub in Guildford had been hastily attributed to them by a law enforcement apparatus obsessed with finding the perpetrators at any cost. Financed by a US studio, with high profile stars and a budget to match, it became the most successful film about the Troubles ever to come out of Northern Ireland, grossing just short of $66 million worldwide on its initial release and going on to enjoy enduring appeal on television and in the video/DVD market. Its impact was also primarily political, rejuvenating interest in the issues and influencing international opinion on the nature and human cost of the British presence in Northern Ireland.

As the trauma of the Troubles, and their hold on the cultural discourse begin to recede, Northern Ireland may now look forward to a re-invention of its place in UK film. Under the stewardship of Northern Ireland Screen (formerly the Northern Ireland Film and Television Commission), it has more devolved means at its disposal than ever before, to support an indigenous production sector and empower original new voices.

Bloody Sunday

57. Don Mullan on Irish US expat website www.thewildgeese.com, 2002.

7 Rainbow: the cultural impact of UK films involving black and Asian talent

7.1 Core findings

- Between the mid-1940s and mid-1970s, films addressing race issues in Britain were rare, while television manifested an incremental interest in them, largely through investigative programmes. In mainstream cinema, the few films concerned with those themes tended to mix their concern with social problems with thriller story dynamics, and their limited cultural impact is mostly linked to the fact that they were marketed as good yarns rather than as issue-based films. Basil Dearden's *Sapphire*, one of the hits of 1959, typifies this conventional approach.

- Between 1975 and 1981, the first films made by black directors signalled the possibility of a new type of 'relation of representation' between the black minority and the dominant white society. The films had limited cultural impact in isolation, largely due to struggles with censorship and low-profile theatrical releases, but they were part of a larger movement which led to black directors entering television, where their work could be seen by millions (see *Pressure* and *Burning an Illusion,* below).

- 1980s films by the film and video workshop movement widened the spectrum of opportunities for British Black and Asian talent. The debate about the cultural impact of the workshop films is ongoing. Although films such as *Handsworth Songs* were confined to discrete cinema releases and late night slots on Channel 4, their influence on the culture of filmmaking has been noted: prominent filmmakers such as Spike Lee have acknowledged an aesthetic debt to the British workshop films.

- In the 1990s, ethnic minority films found their way to a more popular, traditional narrative cinema that managed to reach a wider audience. This trend was anticipated by the Channel 4 film *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), widely regarded as a milestone in the representation of race issues and as the first genuine cross-over film of its kind.

- The past 15 years have seen a growing number of British-Asian films achieving significant cross-over success *(Bhaji on the Beach, East is East* and *Bend it like Beckham).* The films were made by British Asian directors and writers, and dramatised multi-cultural Britain, helping assimilate it with the wider mix of British youth culture.

- By contrast, the experiences of Afro-Caribbean youth have continued to be cast in a social realist mould which has affiliations with the social problem movies of the 1950s. The success of *Kidulthood* and its sequel, *Adulthood,* and the gun-crime film *Bullet Boy* demonstrated the ability of such films to connect with an audience of black and white youth.

- British cinema has had some cultural impact on the national conversation about immigration issues, an area which remains highly sensitive in UK politics and which has been made more complex by an influx of new economic and political migrants during the Blair years. Stephen Frears' *Dirty Pretty Things* and Michael Winterbottom's *In this World* both had an impact on the national debate on a scale which far exceeded their modest box office performance.

7.2 Introduction

There is an irregular, though not insignificant, representation of black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups in UK films between 1946 and 2006. On average, some 23% of feature films during that period have some representation of minority ethnic groups (see Section 5.3). A large proportion of this representation, however, can be described as tokenistic. Whether it relates to period drama set in the imperial past or conveys a sense of urban milieu in contemporary genre films, it is unlikely to have any serious cultural impact on the changing ethnic and cultural realities of post-war the Britain.

This section looks at films that went well beyond background representation or tokenism, that put minority ethnic groups at their thematic centre and in the context of contemporary stories, reflecting aspects of British culture and society back at itself. Our selected case studies make it possible to follow changes in representation over time. In different ways, these films showed a potential for, or even achieved, a cultural impact, in the sense that they contributed to the way in which British people – black and white – came to see themselves differently in relation to the complex and emotive issues surrounding immigration, race, integration and cultural hybridity.

Three categories of films featuring black and Asian talent and themes are represented in this section:

- Films initiated by white writers/directors/producers which featured prominent parts for black characters and attempted to grapple with emergent race issues in post-war Britain *(Sapphire, Leo the Last);*

- Films initiated by black and Asian writers/directors/producers which either reflected the socio-economic and cultural predicament of their own communities or addressed Britain's developing cultural hybridities *(Pressure, Burning an Illusion,Young Soul Rebels);*

- Recent films of mixed initiation tackling the human and social realities of immigration into Britain and the experience of indigenous black and Asian Britons *(My Beautiful Laundrette, East is East, Dirty Pretty Things, In this World, Bhaji on the Beach, Bullet Boy).*

7.3 The 'social-problem' film: the mid-1940s to late 1950s

In spite of a conservative studio system, several films were produced in this period which presented the race agenda to the British public. The cultural impact of these films cannot be assessed without taking into account the form in which they were presented. Racial issues were invariably packaged inside a formula which became identified as the 'social problem' genre, using the conventions of the thriller and the police-procedural. While this approach ensured that the issues were accepted by the audience, the potential cultural impact was not so much as to foster understanding of immigrant communities' cultures as to dramatise the white majority's fear of the alien, along with a generic plea for tolerance. Unsurprisingly, none of the films of the era – *Pool of London, Sapphire, Flame in the Streets* – genuinely questioned the social/racial hierarchies in place in 1950s Britain, and some film and social historians have argued that they merely reinforced them.

CASE STUDY 9: *SAPPHIRE*

Sapphire (1959, directed by Basil Dearden, produced by the Rank Organisation) was the first British feature film to put the issue of race in post-war Britain at the centre of its story. The plot is structured as a police investigation, starting from the discovery of a dead young woman, pregnant and 'half-coloured'. The film takes the viewer on a journey through the spectrum of racial tension and prejudice at the heart of 1950s London. *Sapphire* contains a number of cultural tropes on race, race relations and sexuality which are characteristic of the British culture of its era:

- As a young woman living on her own in the London of the times, Sapphire is automatically associated with promiscuity and immorality;
- Overt racism is chiefly associated with the white, working class characters;
- The men conducting the investigation embody very British values of confidence, fair play and rationality;
- The black characters are seen chiefly through the detective's eyes.

Sapphire is quintessentially about Britain's white majority encountering the reality of black immigration and exploring its own fears, and is emphatically not a film about the black immigrant experience. The characterisation of the main roles (the detective, Sapphire's brother) as well as of the society that surrounds them, embedded in a popular genre, allowed the film to perform well on different levels:

- *Sapphire* proved a popular success at home,[58] indicating the contemporary audience's appetite for the genre as well as a curiosity about the first dramatisation of the black immigrant milieu, when the shock of the 1958 Notting Hill riots was still fresh in people's minds;[59]
- Contemporary British critics greeted the film on its initial release with ambiguous reviews: although they recognised it as an important thematic development because of the centrality of race in the film, they were also quick to point out its weaknesses. Reviewers broadly fell into two camps: for some, the thriller narrative was stifled by the over-cautious handling of the sensitive issues, an approach which they thought eroded the efficiency of the film as popular entertainment. For others, the filmmakers' weaving of serious issues into a conventional 'whodunit' had the effect of trivialising those very issues they purported to underline and minimising their prominence in contemporary British society.

Abroad, the record of newspaper reviews on *Sapphire's* US release also suggests the film was both noticed and applauded as a bold new social realist movie from Britain which combined thriller dynamics with a serious attempt at examining the intricacies of the country's colour prejudice.

The British film industry was keen to recognise *Sapphire* as a new landmark in the depiction of a changing society. This may explain why, despite mixed reviews, it won the 1959 BAFTA award for Best Film.

Sapphire

58. Although *Sapphire's* UK box office revenue figures are not known, Rank eventually reported a profit of £100,000 on the film. It is however difficult to derive cultural impact conclusions from this figure in a context where neither the film's budget, nor the Rank Organisation's expenditure related to its cinema release are known. It is the comparison with other films of the era that suggests this film was a significant popular success.
59. The studio marketed the film primarily as a genre piece.

It is possible to assume that such a popular film, flanked by *Pool of London* and *Flame in the Streets,* and surrounded by 'social problem' films on other themes (such as *Victim* about homophobia), may have influenced subjective attitudes about the conduct and direction of Britain's race relations. But little can be proved. Today, it has a status as the first feature film to be made with Britain's race issues at its core, which has secured the film pride of place in subsequent scholarship.

7.4 A period of transition: the 1960s to 1975

A small number of films were released during the 1960s whose aesthetics and themes were framed and controlled by white filmmakers, and constitute their attempt at reflecting the changes in Britain's ethnic make-up and the attendant socio-political issues which arose. Swinging sixties film culture acknowledged the race relations agenda and moved it away from the strictures of the social problem sub-genre (as in *A Taste of Honey),* albeit through films still controlled creatively and economically by white, middle class filmmakers and gatekeepers.

CASE STUDY 10: *LEO THE LAST*

Leo the Last (1970), directed by John Boorman, represented a sharp break from the social problem tradition. Set in the bohemian, multi-racial Notting Hill area of London, the film is both steeped in the critical spirit of 1960s counterculture and fiercely satirical of its affectations. This story of a rich European aristocrat (Marcello Mastroianni) living in decadent splendour in the midst of urban squalor, shows the main character as a timorous voyeur of the teeming black and poor working class life around his palatial surroundings. Leo is animated by grandiose fantasies of rescuing the poor and victims of racism from the misery of their lives, but never does anything about it, literally observing this sentimentalised underworld with a telescope.

With its bitter satire and sense of social dislocation, *Leo the Last* certainly reflected a non-revolutionary utopian strand of the '60s zeitgeist in Britain and Europe. A clear indicator of the films cultural impact is that it won Boorman the prestigious Best Director award at the 1970 Cannes Film Festival. It was subsequently released throughout much of Europe and in America to generally supportive reviews. In contrast to several of the other films analysed in this section, however, the film appears to have achieved no lasting cultural impact beyond the years in which it was set.

British scholarship on *Leo the Last* is relatively meagre and the film is conspicuously missing from revisionist literature about films of the period. Its British box office performance is unknown. British broadsheet critical response ranged generally from the lukewarm to the hostile, with critics unsettled by the film's complete disregard for the social realism regularly purveyed by the BBC and such cinema spin-offs as *Up the Junction* (1968), and by its gallery of satirical grotesques. Although the film has not undergone any noticeable revival, it is a very popular title at the BFI Mediatheque.

7.5 Minority ethnic groups access to self-expression: 1976–1981

The first three films by independent black filmmakers from the Afro-Caribbean community – *Pressure, Burning an Illusion* and *Babylon* – were made and released between 1975 and 1981. Their immediate cultural impact was strong within the filmmaking community itself and among educated segments of the black population, which were challenged and excited by the films' authenticity as records of life in contemporary Britain from a black British perspective.

These films signalled the possibility of a new type of 'relation of representation' between blacks and Asians and the dominant white society.[60] The films were made possible by a grant-aided sector independent of the mainstream industry (primarily created by the British Film Institute Production Board). The energy, militancy and rawness that pervade both *Pressure* and *Burning an Illusion,* as well as their formal freedom, would arguably not have survived a commissioning process by the established gatekeepers of the mainstream film industry. Unfortunately, the grant-aided sector did not have the resources to give the films anything but a limited release (limited still further to outlets that could show 16mm rather than standard 35mm films), so their potential cultural impact was severely hampered. The few breakthrough movies depicting racial tensions and the black community authentically did not become anything like a cultural movement in British cinema. There are a handful of films which can compare with the aesthetics and themes of *Pressure* in 1970s Britain. They include *Black Joy*, a US-financed film set in the black community in London's Brixton and *Babylon*, by the Italian director Franco Rosso, also set in London, which tells the story of a young reggae band and their struggles to keep harmony between themselves in the face of mounting violence by local racist youth. Both films were critically successful and are often discussed in film history scholarship. However, they were released on the margins of the distribution system and their initial cultural impact was limited.

CASE STUDY 11: *PRESSURE*

Pressure, directed by the Trinidadian Horace Ové, was made possible by the combination of a small grant (£19,000) from the BFI and the director's London Film School colleagues and friends, who contributed their time and expertise for free. Stylistically influenced by the director's acknowledged admiration for post-war Italian neo-realist filmmakers, *Pressure* also bears the hallmarks of the formative British black politics of the era in the tense racial melting pot of Ladbroke Grove.

The teenage protagonist, Tony, has an older brother who has become active in the Black Power movement. His militancy is in marked contrast to the two boys' parents, who seem ready to go to any lengths to anglicise their lives: the film's opening scene shows Bopsie, their Trinidad-born mother cooking an old-fashioned English fry-up on the stove, which reviewers and scholars alike have interpreted as the culinary expression of her desperation to integrate into mainstream white British society. The pressure of the title is what Tony experiences acutely throughout the film as he struggles for his own identity, torn between his brother's radical politics and his parents' shame-driven desire for assimilation.

Pressure

60. The concept 'relations of representation' was articulated by Professor Stuart Hall in his 1992 essay on New Ethnicities, a work considered pivotal in the theoretical development of black British politics.

To understand the film's cultural impact, some contextual elements related to its release must be taken into consideration. The film was made outside the mainstream film industry – the grant from the BFI was meant to finance a short film. At this time, the BFI had no specific strategy and resources in place to ensure the cinema release of feature-length films; completed in mid-1975, the film did not receive a cinema release until January 1978. The delay was also due to the nervousness of the police about the content of the film, especially a scene featuring a police raid on a Black Power meeting.[61] The filmmakers were told at the time that the film might incite racial unrest;[62] *Pressure* opened at the Coronet Cinema in Notting Hill Gate and attracted a large audience in a venue which was then identified with courageous alternative programming. It went on to have a small theatrical career in selected cinemas of the Odeon chain which was then still under Rank ownership.

There is also evidence that the film was shown in the US, through the dynamic and very politicised university and film societies network of the times.[63] The film was reviewed in most of the British broadsheet papers. Most critics were positive, stressing its courage in handling race relations issues from the perspective of black youth.

This evidence shows that, whereas *Pressure* now features in almost every retrospective of black British cinema (the 2005 Africa at the Pictures festival featured the film prominently as part of a retrospective of Ové's work) and is regarded as pivotal in academic literature on black British cinema, at the time the film was released, its limited theatrical career could not assure any immediate impact on a broad audience. Nevertheless, an indirect indicator of its pivotal role is the fact that the film launched the career of its director, acting as a persuasive calling card. It led to Ové being invited to direct his first television drama based on his own script, a BBC *Play For Today* titled *Hole in Babylon* (1979). Based on a true story, the film depicts the efforts of two characters to finance an African studies programme for black British children. Broadcast during prime time, this drama-documentary almost certainly had more immediate impact than *Pressure*, simply because millions saw it rather than the few thousands who had paid to see the film. *Pressure's* cumulative impact, however, has been more long lasting: the film is universally cited in cultural scholarship as a breakthrough for black British cinema, and has been an important reference for a subsequent generation of black filmmakers.

Unlike Ové, the first-time director of *Burning an Illusion* – the next significant breakthrough in black British filmmaking – came to film after a brief, disappointing experience in television, for Lew Grade's ATV where he had been hired to produce a documentary on the infamous 'Sus' laws.[64]

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61. According to Lola Young: "BFI ineptitude was cited as being one of the major reasons for the delay, but it was also reported that both Scotland Yard and what was then the Race Relations Board had requested to see the film before its release". L.Young, *Fear of the Dark, Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema,* (Routledge, 1996) p142.
62. According to Horace Ové, the film owed its eventual release only to the intervention of journalists who had seen the film in private screenings and interceded in its favour (from interview with the filmmaker).
63. Films Inc. a Chicago company, held North-American non-theatrical rights for *Pressure*.
64. Based on old common law statute, 'Sus' laws enabled police to carry out stop-and-search action on individuals, based on mere suspicion (hence 'sus').

Burning an Illusion

7.6 Channel 4 and the workshop years: 1982–1991

Two main events characterise the early 1980s: the launch of Channel 4 in 1982 and the linked creation of the black independent film and video workshops.

7.6.1 Channel 4

With its mandate as a publisher-broadcaster, Channel 4 has been a pivotal force in British cinema since the early 1980s, making possible a substantial number of black and Asian films about every aspect of life in a Britain which has gradually been re-defined by cultural and ethnic hybridity. A deliberate policy of looking to reflect a broad spectrum of cultural experience, combined with founder Jeremy Isaacs' belief in the role of the channel as a new cradle for British authored cinema, resulted in the first black and Asian films to cross over and achieve a measure of popular success.

Channel 4 was behind *My Beautiful Laundrette,* the film which was to prove a turning point for the representation of race, sexuality and identity in contemporary Britain.

CASE STUDY 13: *MY BEAUTIFUL LAUNDRETTE*

My Beautiful Laundrette was produced by fledgling independent production company Working Title and directed by Stephen Frears, who had been working in television for 13 years since his cinema debut in 1971. It became an unexpected hit at the UK box office after being screened in 16mm at the Edinburgh Film Festival, and went on to a highly successful critical and commercial career overseas. The script was commissioned by Karin Bamborough and David Rose at Channel 4, from the young British Asian playwright Hanif Kureishi.

In terms of social and racial symbolism, the manner of the film's making and its story and style amounted to a boisterous celebration of Britain's rapidly emerging culture of hybridity. Written by a black Asian playwright, it was directed by a white filmmaker, starred a mixed cast of Asians and whites, and depicted a homosexual relationship across the racial divide as well as affluent middle-class Asians. More importantly perhaps, *My Beautiful Laundrette* represented a wilful discarding of the 'cinema of duty' which had been seen as both a responsibility and a creative constraint by the pioneering black filmmakers of the late 1970s and early 1980s.[65] When challenged by the Asian Labour politician Keith Vaz, about the fact that there were no poor Asians in the film, Kureishi countered that underlying Vaz's critique was an expectation that would require the generic black British writer to act "as a public relations officer, as hired liar".

My Beautiful Laundrette has enjoyed an enduring cultural impact over the years. Like many others of his generation, Asian writer Khan Din acknowledged its influence when writing the script for the later cross-over Asian-Brit hit *East Is East,* even approaching Stephen Frears to direct initially. Its academic appeal has also been lasting, both at home and abroad: in 2008, the film was the only video to be listed by the British Council's Ethnicity Bibliography, next to books on race relations and post-colonial studies. Entries for the film on Google extend into hundreds of pages, from formal review sites to fan blogs and even compilations of the 'Best Gay Kisses'.

My Beautiful Laundrette

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65. Cinema of duty, also referred to by its harsher critics as 'behalfist cinema', describes a type of black cinema which takes it upon itself to be representative of the political and social agenda of their community. Critics of the cinema of duty have underlined its tendency to subdue the aesthetic and kinetic impact of film in favour of earnest political discourse. More moderate commentators have pointed out the evolutionary necessity for emergent black filmmakers to have shouldered the burden of representation.

7.6.2 The black film and video workshops

During the 1980s, another important development was the creation of the black and independent film and video workshops. The rationale behind these workshops was to empower emergent filmmakers by providing them with the means of establishing autonomous production structures and enabling them to explore original filmmaking aesthetics and discourse away from the standardising pressures of the commercial marketplace. A critical and historical consensus exists that the workshop decade produced some of the most original black and Asian filmmakers and was a turning point in British black and Asian self-expression through the film and television medium.[66]

However, the impact of these workshops is also a subject of ongoing controversy. For some, the workshops institutionalised black creativity and encouraged their participation in a sterile race relations industry devoid of real cultural impact. According to this view, the films were elitist and impenetrable, which prevented them from achieving any kind of significant cultural impact outside a rarefied and self-congratulatory circle already converted.

According to other scholars and former protagonists of the workshop era, the films marked an essential stage in the evolution of black and Asian British filmmakers towards self-definition and self-expression. John Akomfrah, co-founder of the Black Audio Film Workshop and director of *Handsworth Songs,* points out that in order to measure black workshop films' cultural impact it is first necessary to understand their political economy. "We were expected to experiment, not turn out commercial hits. We were a part of a cultural policy which believed in empowering minority voices and allowing them to find their own style and discourse. This was cultural R&D."[67]

Akomfrah also points to the 'long tail' shelf life of many of the workshops' most controversial films, such as *Handsworth Songs* which, since its unsuccessful release in 1986, has had an uninterrupted career in the non-theatrical market both at home and the US. Kobena Mercer has observed that the rich debates which the films triggered showed "the way image-making has become an important arena of cultural contestation – contestation over what it means to be British today; contestation over what Britishness itself means as a national or cultural identity; and contestation over the values that underpin the Britishness of British cinema as a national film culture".[68]

In 1991, Isaac Julien's *Young Soul Rebels* marked an end point in the evolution of the black workshop movement from formal and discursive exploration within experimental films, towards a more popular, traditional narrative cinema intended to reach a wider audience. Well-received at the Cannes Film Festival, where it garnered a Best Film award from the French Society of Authors,[69] the film was not commercially successful in the UK because it failed to cross over into the black youth market or the youth market in general. Starved of funding as a result of changes in the cultural policies of local authorities, including the Greater London Authority, and discarded by a more commercially-orientated Channel 4, many workshops were dissolved during the 1990s, leaving a temporary cultural vacuum in black self-representation through film.

7.7 Contemporary trends: 1991–2000s

The last two decades have seen the affirmation of different trends in the representation of black and Asian people. There is no linear evolution from one trend to the other, but rather a co-existence of these different forms.

7.7.1 Cultural diversity as a source of humour

This trend is well represented by two films, both set in the Asian community: *Bhaji on the Beach* (Gurinder Chadha, 1993) and *East is East* (Damien O' Donnell, 1999).

These two films share a sense of joyous ease with the hybridity of a contemporary British identity in which race relations have become both more complex and more fluid. Both films share a tender, comedic tone in their presentation of the gallery of characters from the full rainbow of British contemporary cultures. Cultural diversity is treated as both a fact of life and an inexhaustible source of gentle humour. Bigotry is no longer confronted angrily but laughed off by characters comfortable with their composite identities. *East is East's* British Asian scriptwriter Ayub Khan-Din was as vociferous in asserting his freedom not to act as a representative of British Asians as Hanif Kureishi had been during the debate which followed the release of *My Beautiful Laundrette.*

66. Among the totemic films from those years are: *Territories* by Isaac Julien, 1985; *The Passion of Remembrance* by Maureen Blackwood and Isaac Julien, 1986 and *Handsworth Songs* by John Akomfrah, 1986.
67. Interview with John Akomfrah.
68. Kobena Mercer, '*Recording Narratives of Race and Nation*' in Mercer (ed,), Black Film, British Cinema, 1988, p5.
69. Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques.

What the two films also have in common is that they both crossed over to a mainstream, non-black and Asian audience, although their commercial performances hardly compare: whereas *Bhaji on the Beach* was just a modest success in the cinemas, *East is East* was one of the biggest British hits of 1999.

The distribution breakthrough achieved by *East is East* opened the door for other cross-over successes by films within the British cultural rainbow. The most spectacular of those was Gurinder Chadha's *Bend it like Beckham* (2002). Released on an unprecedented 450 prints, the film collected £2 million on its opening weekend in the UK and went on to become that year's most successful non-US movie. In interviews at the time of the film's release, Chadha – who had had to wait nine years after *Bhaji* before making another film – was at pains to present *Bend it like Beckham* as a universal film rather than Asian-specific. Her words encapsulated the road travelled since the race riots of the mid-1970s and 1980s. While all was certainly not quiet on the racial front in early 21st century Britain, films like *East is East* and *Bend it like Beckham* both promoted and reflected the growing reality of larger sections of Britain's population becoming increasingly content with cultural hybridity.

7.7.2 Social realist films

In the 2000s, the social realist genre was significantly used to dramatise emergent debates about new forms of legal and illegal immigration, and the questions of integration and assimilation thrown up by these demographic trends. Two films of the period, *Dirty Pretty Things* and *In this World,* crystallised the national debate about ways in which the new wave of economic migration into Britain was transforming national identity. Their release triggered numerous opinion columns in the press, which posed questions about political and moral responsibility for both the causes of illegal immigration and its impact on Britain's sense of its own culture.

CASE STUDY 14: *DIRTY PRETTY THINGS*

Dirty Pretty Things was a BBC Films production directed by Stephen Frears and based on a script by Steven Knight, a successful novelist and television writer. Knight, Frears and BBC Films' David Thompson are all white, middle class men and the project stemmed from a fascination with how the vast under-class of economic migrants, which runs much of London's service industries, is simply ignored by the affluent urban society that depends on their low-paid labour.[70] In an approach which has a long tradition in British cinema, the filmmakers were eager to lift the veil of hypocrisy and show contemporary London as it really is, while ensuring the film's appeal as an intriguing story with many plot twists and an attractive international cast.

Reporting from the 2002 Venice Film Festival, where *Dirty Pretty Things* premiered, the influential *Evening Standard* film critic Alexander Walker set the tone for subsequent British press reviews: "Like *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Sammy and Rosie get Laid,* which explored Anglo-Indian communities in Britain, it seems to me the kind of film that people in the future will look to in order to understand the new society pushing its way up with desperate tenacity out of the immigrant underclass."[71]

Dirty Pretty Things went on to garner numerous nominations and prizes at international film festivals, including four BIFAs (British Independent Film Awards). It is perhaps no coincidence that it won the Mystery Writers of America's Edgar Allan Poe Award for that year, a prize also bestowed on Basil Dearden's *Sapphire* 43 years earlier. Both films showed the capacity to become part of the social conversation and to nourish cultural discourse on illegal immigration. There are over 25 pages of current Google entries which directly or indirectly reference the film, many by non-professional reviewers who refer to the film as part of postings on immigration issues. MurthyDotCom, an international website on immigration and social issues, lists the film as part of a compilation of movies to see in order to deepen one's understanding of the issues.

Dirty Pretty Things

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70. Interview with David Thompson.
71. *Evening Standard*, 6 September 2002.

Released in the same year as *Dirty Pretty Things,* Michael Winterbottom's *In this World* made no concessions to the thriller format or to a recognisable international cast.

CASE STUDY 15: *IN THIS WORLD*

In this World was shot using digital cameras and starred non-professional actors. The film takes the viewer across continents, on the gritty journey of two Afghan men fleeing the squalor, chaos and poverty of their country after the post-9/11 US intervention there.

The film had its world premiere at the London International Film Festival 2002, and according to its filmmakers was greeted with near-indifference. Playing to an enthusiastic audience at the Berlin International Film Festival barely three months later, it won the festival's prestigious Golden Bear award for best film. Berlin was perhaps more receptive to the film because of its clear emphasis on independent cinema, with a focus on the developing world and its relationship with the affluent West. From that point on, the film went on to achieve significant exposure in Europe, where it was released successfully in six countries, including Italy, Spain and Germany. By contrast, the film's release in the UK was on a very small scale, starting with five prints and building up to ten. Its television premiere on BBC2 attracted a small audience (781,000 viewers).

Despite this small-scale release and modest TV figures, *In this World* impacted on British culture in ways that were complex and far-reaching. The film's win in Berlin gave it a critical profile it would not otherwise have achieved, and the immigration issues at the core of the film meant that it was frequently quoted and used in social work and educational contexts. Producer Andrew Eaton remembers, "the kids I spoke to when we showed the film in schools and other public venues were very interested in understanding the ordeal of our two characters. I think the film changed their views of immigration forever." The film is also referenced, alongside *Dirty Pretty Things,* on the homepage of the Conflict Resolution Network UK website, a resource for anti-racism and conflict resolution.

In this World

7.7.3 Black youth culture films

Another contemporary trend consists of films that continue to explore, in stark social realist cinematic language, the ongoing disconnection between segments of the black British community and society at large, in a context of failed (or failing) integration leading to violence and social dislocation. A striking representative of this genre is the 2005 film *Bullet Boy*.

CASE STUDY 16: *BULLET BOY*

Bullet Boy tells the story of a young urban black boy's descent into personal hell, in a downward spiral leading to gun violence.

Developed and financed through the BBC's drama department with a contribution from the UK Film Council's New Cinema Fund, the film was directed by a young, white, middle class filmmaker, Saul Dibb. It starred Ashley Walters, a young black musician who had risen to fame as lead singer Asher D with the rap group *So Solid Crew,* before serving a prison sentence for gun possession in 2002. True to Dibb's roots in the documentary genre, the film is a social realist treatment of the milieu of disenfranchised black British urban youth. It also looked to achieve a poetic edge: in a magazine interview, Dibb described it as "Kes with guns".[72]

Under the supervision of the BBC's Ruth Caleb, who has a high reputation for backing gritty, improvisational television drama, the film was made using a workshop technique. This strategy was essential to the filmmakers who knew that the only way to achieve cultural impact among young viewers, black and white, was by credibly rendering their lifestyles, mannerisms and vocabulary.

The production had to face the challenge of filming where the gangs depicted in the film were active. The schedule had to be re-worked to avoid certain areas.[73] The film's difficult subject matter often raised hostile reactions during the test screenings for black opinion formers, which preceded its general release. After the submission to a testing panel, the distributor, Verve Pictures, marketed it not as a title for the middle class cinephile market, but as a thriller aimed squarely at the youth market. The poster accentuated the thriller dynamics, playing down the 'British social realist' roots of the project.

The cultural impact of the film seems to be significant: as well as its respectable box office gross of £450,000 and overwhelmingly positive reviews, it prompted a constant stream of requests by schools and art house venues across the UK for educational film screenings. In 2005, *Bullet Boy* was included in the National Schools Film Week with screenings in ten cities. The film also achieved good visibility abroad, being selected for the Toronto International Film Festival and winning a Hitchcock d'Or at the Dinard Festival of British Film. It appears to have sparked the development of a new contemporary sub-genre – the social realist, black youth-orientated film – which portrays a dystopian inner city and a youth culture in which drugs, alcohol and crime are a daily staple. The 2006 film *Kidulthood*, directed by Menhaj Huda from a script by Noel Clarke, was successful in attracting a youth audience and spawned the first sequel in this genre with the follow-up film *Adulthood*, written and directed by (and starring) Noel Clarke, which was released in June 2008.

72. *Sight and Sound*, April 2005.
73. Interview with Marc Boothe, producer of *Bullet Boy.*.   *Bullet Boy*

After decades of prototypes and pioneering works, the social realist developments of recent years suggest that a relationship has become established between filmmakers and audiences, which has enabled the concerns of black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups to became a staple part of the UK fictional diet.

7.7.4 The distribution of black and Asian Films

Distribution has always been one of the greatest obstacles for British black and Asian cinema to overcome. To some extent, the built-in reluctance of traditional theatrical distribution to take any kind of risk is indiscriminate. Because of the scarcity of screen space, the increasing number of films chasing bookings and the high cost of market entry (releasing a low-budget film requires substantial prints and advertising expenditure), all lower budget films without stars are a tough sell. However, it would be fair to say that black and Asian cinema in Britain has found it even harder to access distribution, because distributors and exhibitors have expected that these films would not easily cross over and appeal to a white mainstream audience.

As a result, the growing number of black and Asian films over the past two decades has not been accompanied by a commensurate growth in distribution opportunities. Over time, various experiments have been undertaken to address the issue of distribution of black and Asian films. Some of the films examined in this section owed their distribution to a time when independent cinemas were still relatively buoyant (1970–1980s). They relied in many cases on BFI-supported regional film theatres which could help word of mouth to build up on low-budget independent films by giving them extended bookings. The regional film theatres no longer have the financial flexibility to assist slow-burn releases for lower-budget films. Access to the screens, once the obligatory precursor to cultural impact, has become more difficult as the theatrical business has consolidated and grown more competitive, and as public policy has been less targeted at these venues.

The early 1990s were years of unprecedented creative advancement for black American filmmakers, but traditional distributors did not know quite how to approach the marketing and distribution of their films in the UK. In response, the London-based Black Triangle Film Festival developed a 'cultural space' to meet the demand for these films. The Prince Charles cinema, in the heart of London's West End, gave the films the screen time and Black Triangle negotiated second run theatrical deals with commercial distributors. Black Triangle's main marketing tool was a large database of people interested in seeing a wider range of black films. The combination of cheap admission prices, central venues (which latterly included the Metro and the Ritzy) and targeted direct marketing produced strong results: a loyal theatrical audience began to develop around an ongoing programme of black films in those venues. Longer runs also ensured time for word of mouth to develop. The gradual development of this cultural space was strengthened as Black Triangle organised question and answer sessions with people who had worked on the films. The programming included black UK films, as well as African cinema classics.

Bullet Boy producer Marc Boothe, who conceived and managed this original approach to black cinema's theatrical access, is among those who are working at adapting the Black Triangle cultural concept to the new technology paradigm. For a whole range of films, including low-budget black and Asian British cinema, future success in meeting an audience and generating cultural impact may no longer depend exclusively on the limited opportunities of theatrical exposure or a television premiere. The online space is where audiences may be aggregated nationally and internationally, and communities created even before a film's completion. This kind of virtual community-building may also be used to create anticipation in advance of a cinema release.

In the developing market for legal downloading, economies of scale and scope in advertising and releasing a film will become considerable advantages for low budget black and Asian films. The gradual switch of the theatrical infrastructure to digital screening technology may also result in lower exhibition costs and more flexible programming, which in turn may begin to accommodate a broader range of films. These developments may allow a partial resolution of the issues that have hampered British black and Asian cinema's access to audiences under the old technology paradigm.

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8 What do they make of us? The perception and impact of 'Britishness' abroad through UK films

"The American distributors put our films on their shelves, saying they were too British: a calculated insult, difficult to refute, because they were British."

Michael Powell, *A Life in the Movies – An Autobiography* **(1986)**

8.1 Core findings

This section examines the perception of films as 'British' and the cultural impact of these films, in key countries where British cultural artefacts have traditionally been well received.

• In European countries, British cinema is generally the third most commercially successful, after Hollywood films and locally-made ones. UK films also command the highest market share of all European national films in the US. Although this performance indicates a degree of cultural impact, the story is made more complex by ambiguities in the way foreign audiences culturally interpret films from Britain.

• The majority of the films accounting for the strong commercial performance of British cinema in those key countries are not seen by audiences as specifically British artefacts – this is the case with many US-financed blockbusters made in UK studios. While the Harry Potter films may be effortlessly experienced as British by Anglo-Saxon audiences attuned to their cultural signals and the cadences of British English, non-Anglo audiences focus instead on the scale and production values and identify them more readily as American. The trend is compounded in countries where these films are dubbed in the national language.

• Cinephile audiences in Europe and, to a lesser extent, the Middle East tend to identify British cinema with small-scale, social realist films. This is exemplified in the enduring success of marquee name British filmmakers including Ken Loach, Mike Leigh and Michael Winterbottom. Though not made by these known directors, some of the most commercially successful UK films in this canon (*The Full Monty, East is East*) are associated with this notion of Britishness – a unique blend of social stoicism in the face of adversity, self-deprecating humour and a multi-ethnic society.

• The cultural impact of films perceived as British in the US market is both enhanced and impaired by the shared language. While language has been an advantage for leading British actors in US blockbusters, it has often been a hindrance for smaller films with English regional accents which distributors have had to subtitle, so lowering the potential cross-over appeal of these films.

8.2 Introduction

When non-US films are seen outside their country of origin, they become 'foreign films'. As such, they usually constitute a minority part of the exhibition market, likely to be seen only by relatively committed filmgoers or those with specialist interests. However, an important strand of British cinema, often closely linked with the American studios, produces films aimed at the mass audience, which has resulted in it reaching significantly larger and broader audiences than most other 'import cinemas' around the world. From Alexander Korda's *Private Life of Henry VIII* in the 1930s to James Bond, Harry Potter and Mr Bean today, some UK films have had major box office success on a par with the Hollywood mainstream, and so have entered the consciousness of mass international audiences.

In doing so, they have inescapably conveyed images and ideas of Britain, as other media have done in past centuries. This may not have been their main aim – though it certainly was with World War II propaganda films such as *49th Parallel* and Olivier's *Henry V* – but it is a kind of automatic by-product. The actors, behaviour, settings and themes are often noted as 'typically British'. In some cases, this typicality is firmly in the foreground – an extreme example being *Johnny English* (2003), developed from the popular Barclaycard advertisements parodying Bond-style spy antics, which offered a cornucopia of ultra-English gags, characters and locations. But in genres ranging from slapstick (*Mr Bean*) to romantic comedy *(Notting Hill)* and spoof horror *(Shaun of the Dead),* this typicality is perhaps better described as 'ambient'.

Two key questions arise. Does such 'ambient Britishness' also signify that international audiences see these films as British-made films? And does this Britishness have any cultural impact, reinforcing or changing the perception of what Britishness is? These are difficult questions to frame and research, since they rest on distinctions that either are not widely made or are deeply confused – and as this report has stressed, cultural impact is an emerging field of research. Yet they are the most important questions for our study, addressing as they do the basic issue of UK cinema's overall cultural impact.

The question of whether audiences perceive – or care to any extent – about nationality in the case of mainstream entertainment films, needs to be broken down to distinguish legal and financial identity from cultural and visible identity. The former relates to eligibility for financial incentives including tax relief, and remains largely invisible to audiences. But the latter has probably become more important in recent years due to the rise of a whole new culture surrounding cinema. This has a number of components, in addition to the actual viewing and collecting of films in digital format. There is participation in online fan culture; tourist and leisure activities related to favourite films[74]; and other specific activities related to particular titles. Increasingly these spheres of activity overlap and interpenetrate, as websites offer maps and audio guides for visiting film-related locations, and contribute to what the authors of the screen-related tourism report *Stately Attraction* termed "the generalised effect" of film and television, "building up a bank of images and impressions which are only indirectly linked to the screen product itself".[75]

Jubilee

74. UK Film Council et al, *Stately Attraction: How Film and Television Programmes Promote Tourism in the UK,* 2007.
75. UK Film Council et al, *Stately Attraction: How Film and Television Programmes Promote Tourism in the UK,* 2007. Section 3.4 p20.

There is another sphere of influence, or impact, which we have already identified as zeitgeist moments (see section 5.5) – the strong associative links that are formed between certain films and prevailing attitudes or events, which can lead to film titles, soundtrack music or iconic images becoming shorthand to evoke a complex pattern of associations. The fact that a newspaper or television report in many parts of the world can trigger such associations by means of a portrait of one of the James Bond stars or the phrase 'The Full Monty', is evidence of a more pervasive cultural impact. Evidently, certain UK films can sum up experience in ways that resonate in other cultures – and in rare cases, can lead to direct behavioural imitation (as with *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and, more recently, with *The Full Monty* and *Bend it like Beckham)*.

8.3 Methodology

Impact and perception are only possible when there is circulation of UK films. This section explores the cultural impact of British film and the cultural perception of Britishness in four geo-political/cultural areas: Western Europe (represented by two countries that have traditionally driven demand for British films, France and Italy); Eastern Europe (represented by Poland, the most populous country in this geopolitical sphere outside of Russia); the Mediterranean area (through an investigation of Lebanon, Egypt and Israel); and the United States, selected in view of the complex and interdependent relationship between the UK and US film industries. The reference period for this section of the study is 1987 to 2007. Each area was analysed by means of quantitative and qualitative data.

8.4 The cultural impact and perception of British films in Europe

8.4.1 Perceptions and cultural impact in France, Italy and Poland

In both France and Italy, a growing number of UK films have been released in the past 15 years.[76] The Top 30 UK films in France and in Italy provide a key to understanding the great number of admissions achieved by UK films during the peak years.[77]

In both countries, Harry Potter films occupy the first three positions.[78] In France, the next positions in the chart are occupied by *Four Weddings and a Funeral, Notting Hill, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Die Another Day, Bridget Jones' Diary* and *Bean. The Full Monty* occupies the 14th position.

In Italy, with the exception of *The Full Monty, Billy Elliott* and *Trainspotting* which occupy the 10th, 21st and 29th positions,[79] the rest of the list is composed of almost the same blockbuster titles as France: *Troy, Notting Hill, Bridget Jones's Diary, Shakespeare in Love, Mr. Bean: The Ultimate Disaster Movie,* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.*

As we have already noted, these are the titles whose cultural identity is least attached to notions of Britishness from the perspective of European audiences.[80] Despite their excellent performance, these films do not seem to contribute to affirming any particular British image, with the exception of the romantic comedy (see below).

Harry Potter films are the best example of an identity which seems to oscillate between UK and US cultures. We encountered four types of perceptions:

• Harry Potter films are, in part, culturally UK films, because they are adaptations of British novels and they are shot in the UK. The approach to magic and the relationship between adolescence and adulthood seem to be typically British as well;[81]

76. Our statistical analysis is based on figures from 1992 to 2007 for France and from 1994 to 2007 for Italy. For a detailed analysis of the circulation of UK films in these countries, see Appendix III.
77. See Table 1 and 4 in Appendix III. It was not possible to provide the same table for Poland since data was not available.
78. In a different order: *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* in France; *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* in Italy. It is important to note that *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* do not appear in the CNC and Cinecittà data because they are not considered UK films. By contrast, UK Film Council data considers these films as British. For more explanations, see Appendix III.
79. The Top 30 for France is based on the period 1992-2006; the Top 30 for Italy is based on the period 1994-2006.
80. See section 8.1
81. Only some of our French and Italian interviewees defended this position.

- Harry Potter films are culturally US films, because their budget, directorial style(s), special effects and marketing contribute to creating the feeling (or the conviction) that they belong to a Hollywood blockbuster canon;

- Harry Potter films are a mid-Atlantic product, devoid of specific cultural marking; they are the expression of a globalised culture where every local taste and cultural differentiation gets lost. The end product can no longer be identified with any specific culture. In this sense, a mid-Atlantic film is perceived as the equivalent of MacDonald's or 'airport food';

- Harry Potter films cannot be classified at all. They constitute a stand-alone category, linked to the singularity of the Harry Potter novels as a global phenomenon in the children fantasy market.

The perception of romantic comedies such as *Notting Hill* (in the Top 30 list) is slightly different. Professionals believe that the audience can recognise a British touch in these comedies, but the presence of stars such as Julia Roberts or Hugh Grant promotes the idea of a 'Hugh Grant film' more than specifically 'a British comedy'. Furthermore, for some, the British touch comes packaged inside a standardised US style. In any case, such films are perceived as having a weak British identity.

The Full Monty is a special case and it is probably one of the rare films in the Top 30 that the audience would clearly recognise as British.[82] It belongs to a category of films unanimously considered culturally British which is often given the name of 'social dramas' or 'social realist movies' (even though *The Full Monty* adapts the social drama conventions, driving them towards ensemble comedy).

In France, British social realist movies are generally perceived as a model for national cinema. They are considered courageous because they approach sensitive issues and bear witness to the harsh social outcomes – inequalities, precarious employment, loss of 'social capital' – in countries predominantly driven by the ethos of the market economy.[83] French audiences value these films all the more because there appear to be too few representatives of the genre in recent French cinema. For some professionals, while the themes are daring, the form is more classical, which is what allows these works to reach a larger audience than one would expect. This is the case with some of Ken Loach's films and of social realist comedies such as *The Full Monty* or *Billy Elliot.*

The social drama genre, championed by Ken Loach, Mike Leigh and the Hanif Kureishi/Stephen Frears films of the 1980s,[84] conveys both in Italy and France, the image of a non-conforming and polemical society, following in the footsteps of the British New Wave cinema of the 1960s. These films talk about social conflict, immigration, integration, war, politics and unemployment, and represent social classes that distributors believe tend to be absent from French cinema, or certainly under-represented. These films dramatise the lives of ordinary people ("people who are very much like us", according to one interviewee), but whose circumstances lead to them doing extraordinary things. They are not particularly beautiful or sexy or heroic; they foster a simple, direct emotional allegiance from the viewer, who comes to identify with and feel attached to them and their story, across the language barrier and the cultural divide.

Directors such as Peter Greenaway and Derek Jarman are also well known by French and Italian cinephiles, but are considered eccentric figures in the British film landscape.

While sharing most perceptions of British film identity, the three European countries in our study also have perceptions that are specific to their own national audiences.

Kes

82. A special focus on the marketing campaign of this film is presented in Appendix IV.
83. There is an unmistakable irony here, given the fact that the *The Full Monty* was entirely financed and distributed by Hollywood major 20th Century Fox.
84. *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987).

8.4.1.1 National perceptions: France

An important retrospective dedicated to British cinema was organised in Paris at the Pompidou Centre in 2000, entitled *Typiquement British. 200 films anglais.*[85] In the introduction to the book accompanying the retrospective, NT Binh and Philippe Pilard explained how hard it is to define British cinema and the impossibility of classifying it or labelling it using current categories. Hollywood has a system, ratified by market discipline and counterbalanced by the independent filmmakers; French cinema has its regulations which attempt to reconcile artistic self-expression with the market; British film is harder to fathom and define, and this difficulty is perceived as both its strength and its weakness.[86]

In France, the identity of British film has sometimes suffered from a tricky relationship with the French press. The late French director and critic François Truffaut's remark about the essential incompatibility of the words 'cinema' and 'England' has not helped the promotion of British cinema in France. Often quoted out of context, Truffaut's jibe has been influential and every French critic seems to have to take a position with regard to it.[87] The identity of British film in France has suffered because of this, even though, in recent years, the work of some French film critics and the organisation of specific events, including retrospectives of UK films at the Pompidou Centre and the Dinard Festival du Film Britannique, have helped to restore the image of British film.

At least ten film festivals dedicated to British film have existed in France since the mid 1990s. The most important is the annual British film festival of Dinard, launched in 1991 at the initiative of the municipality. Located in Brittany, the Dinard Film Festival gathers an audience from the entire region and even sometimes from the English towns on the other side of the Channel. Its reputation is such that French distributors seem keen to offer premieres of UK films to the festival. The award given by the festival (the 'Golden Hitchcock') is well regarded, and has helped many UK films attract a French distributor. Last year's Dinard festival had 24,000 admissions.

In the mid-1980s, a UK Pavilion was established at the Cannes Film Festival. The first promotional initiatives consisted of gala dinners in the presence of a distinguished member of the British film community. The legendary British writer/director duo Emeric Pressburger and Michael Powell were the first people to be honoured in this way.

UK films also circulate in France through DVD releases and on television. A few TV channels have dedicated special programmes to UK films in recent years. Arte was the pioneer, organising the first British soirée in 1992. More recently, Arte has broadcast films by Peter Greenaway, Ken Loach and Alfred Hitchcock, and is preparing a Derek Jarman series.

8.4.1.2 National perceptions: Italy

A sense of loss pervades the Italian professional discourse about British cinema. It is a recurrent feeling, expressed by the contrast between a past made up of happy memories (Free Cinema, the British film renaissance of the 1990s, etc) and a present of uncertain identity. The boundary between the two changes according to the interviewees: it is either the 1960s, characterised by a dynamic and irreverent creative wave, or the mid '90s, with the return of gritty realism mixed with a very British sense of self-deprecation and irony (*Trainspotting*).

When discussing contemporary British film, the comparison with other national cinemas crops up regularly. According to all the professionals interviewed (distributors, journalists, film festival directors), British film is not endowed with the same strong identity as other European national cinemas, such as the German and the French. While it shares with European (and more globally, with non-American) cinemas the challenge of lack of access to cinema distribution, British cinema suffers from a weaker identity. German films have been going through a period of high public recognition over the past decade, due particularly to the pan-European success of three films, *Goodbye Lenin, The Lives of Others* and *Downfall,* which dramatically confronted the country's past.

85. Typically British. 200 English Films, organised by the Pompidou Centre in collaboration with the British Council and the British Film Institute. The retrospective showed more than 200 films over a five-month period (six screenings a day in two theatres). The panorama was divided into 13 major themes: The Redgrave dynasty on screen; Fantasy and imagination: from *The Red Shoes* to *Excalibur;* Shakespeare & Co: Cinema and literature; Horrors and chillers – homage to Hammer films; France viewed by British filmmakers; British humour: from *Kind Hearts and Coronets* to *Monty Python;* From Korda to Kubrick: foreign directors in Britain; The thriller: Hitchcock and many others; Early British cinema: curiosities and collections; Forbidden fruits: homosexuality on screen; Social realism: from Free Cinema to the Thatcher years; Week-end Rock/Pop Music and Swinging Britain: from The Beatles to *Trainspotting;* Art and Cinema; and Documentaries.
86. N.T. Binh, P. Pilard (ed.), *Typiquement British. Le cinéma britannique,* Editions du Centre Pompidou, Paris 2000, p13.
87. Cf. the premise of above-mentioned book by Bertrand Tavernier.

Contemporary UK films do not have many opportunities to be seen outside cinemas. Of course, Harry Potter films and other US-financed and British-produced blockbusters are the most likely to be purchased and broadcast by Italian TV channels, but lower-budget films in the social realist genre, with a few exceptions, seldom appear on Italian television or get widely released on DVD. From 1980 to the present day, UK films have been awarded the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival only twice: in 2002 for *The Magdalene Sisters* and in 2004 for Mike Leigh's *Vera Drake.* Surprisingly, neither of these is in the Top 30 UK films released in Italy: *The Magdalene Sisters* totalled 594,233 admissions while *Vera Drake* had only 229,084 admissions. The lowest ranking British film in the Top 30 (of the past 30 years) attained 872,897 admissions.

There are few opportunities for Italian audiences to connect with classic British films. The Bergamo Film Meeting has organised a British section within the framework of the annual festival since 1988,[88] and on a few occasions the Turin Film Festival has also shown UK films.[89] Nevertheless, these are isolated initiatives, not supported by other media events or by public broadcasting. The absence of films on public television channels is not specific to UK films, but affects cinema heritage in general.

8.4.1.3 National perceptions: Poland

British cinema has always been popular in Poland. The historical reasons for this seem to be rooted in events after World War II, when 150,000 Poles migrated to the UK. This wave of immigration created family connections and therefore a favourable social background for the circulation of British films in Poland, both for new releases (comedies, social dramas) and heritage films (*Lawrence of Arabia* and other David Lean films). The discovery of UK films was made possible by cineclubs, which gave young audiences the opportunity to appreciate independent and specialised cinema.

In recent times, high-profile films such as *Shakespeare in Love, Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *Notting Hill* were released in mainstream cinemas, whereas arthouse cinemas are where Polish cinema-goers can appreciate films by Michael Winterbottom, Peter Cattaneo and Shane Meadows. The only way for Polish arthouse cinemas to show European films viably (including British films) is to spend a great deal of time and effort on promotion and marketing, and to organise special events around them. British arthouse films seem to work better for school screenings: the social realist British genre is especially prized among Polish secondary school teachers, who appreciate these films as educational tools to introduce pupils to social issues and to trigger debate.

Some British directors and their work, especially those from the 1960s, enjoy popularity among Polish audiences, in large part due their political engagement: Lindsay Anderson and Tony Richardson were very popular at the time and continue to be well regarded, because they focused on class and social issues. Their films were used at the time as propaganda by the Polish state, which presented them as evidence of the negative effects of the Western socio-economic system.

Social realist dramas are also popular in Poland. Ken Loach's *It's a Free World* recently provoked a national debate, because of its central theme of emigration which is much discussed in contemporary Poland (one of the popular Polish jokes of the hour is: seven out of ten Poles live in stress; the rest live in London).

Black Narcissus

88. Ealing Studios in 1988, Monty Python in 1989, and also Peter Sellers, Mike Leigh, Shakespeare and the cinema, British science fiction and David Lean, among others.
89. The New British Cinema 1956-1968 in 1991; a British perspective in 1995; and The British Renaissance during the most recent edition (November 2008).

Although the success of a film is not determined by its nationality, in recent times Czech films seem to be particularly attractive to Polish cinema-goers. Geographical closeness and a shared history are probably the reasons for this, as well as the very particular style of Czech films. Poles and Czechs would film the same story in a completely different way, Poles relying on pathos and Czechs on humour.

British TV series and films have also circulated via the public broadcasting channels, though nowadays the space for foreign European films is very limited on TVP2 and TVP1. Due in part to the success of the TV series on which they were based, the Mr Bean and Monty Python films have proved successful with TV audiences. Television channels constitute an important alternative for Poles in search of a less commercially-driven cinema, especially as the cinema admission price is quite high for the average Polish wage earner.

There is no festival dedicated to British film in Poland; nonetheless, summer festivals in small towns (Kazimierz, Cieszyn, Zwierzyniec) attract young Polish audiences to arthouse programming which regularly includes UK films.

8.5 The cultural impact and perception of British films in the Middle East

In spite of the paucity of official industry data, empirical research yields a number of observations about the impact of UK films in the Middle East.

The market for films in the Arab world often relies on the purchase of pan-Arab rights by the distributors (individual territories are too small to offer sufficient return on investment). This practice presents some difficulties when tracking the release footprint of foreign films: a British film licensed by a Lebanese distributor, say, will often be sub-licensed and distributed in the entire Arab region by the same company.

In Egypt, Lebanon and Israel the film market is dominated by US films (in Egypt more than in the other countries).[90] In this context, the perception of UK films is proportionately small in parallel with European films in general.

In addition, the audience responds to the presence of stars almost to the exclusion of any other single factor, and the same selection criterion will apply whether they are considering a local or a foreign film. This factor explains why the only films with significant impact, other than Arab films, are US star vehicles. This is one case in which the mid-Atlantic hybrid identity of certain commercial UK films benefits their cultural impact (Harry Potter films being the best example, but also *Notting Hill, Bridget Jones's Diary*, and *Love Actually).* In general, British cinema is perceived as a fringe of US cinema.

The use of the English language is an added value for UK films in comparison with other European films, since people in the three countries usually speak English.[91] Even though the British accent can be harder to understand from their perspective than American dialects, Middle Eastern audiences in general still prefer watching films in their original language with subtitles, as opposed to having them dubbed.

In Lebanon and Israel, there is still a place for British arthouse films, (Ken Loach, Mike Leigh, Stephen Frears). In Beirut, the Metropolis film theatre does not screen any US films, but programmes films from the International Critics Weeks' selection of the Cannes Film Festival and similar international cinephile fare.

90 In Egypt, a protectionist regulation allows a maximum of seven prints per film for the entire country. These restrictions apply to all foreign films, including US cinema.
91. In Lebanon, though, French is also a well-known language.

The awareness of film auteurs is low among the Lebanese audience: filmmakers such as Ken Loach do not have any real brand recognition and rarely get distributed outside festivals and special screenings. In Israel, British filmmakers are better known than in other Middle Eastern countries, but this does not necessarily guarantee commercial distribution.

Film festivals can sometimes be the occasion to show low budget UK films with no stars: for example, in 2007, the Cairo International Film Festival celebrated British cinema with a sidebar selection, and invited British film professionals to make presentations on their industry and discuss co-production opportunities.

The British Council organises showcases of UK films in the Middle East, and for the past two years its Cairo office has been organising an Independent Film Festival featuring premieres of independent films from Egypt and the UK. The objective of the initiative is not so much the promotion of UK films to local audiences but the promotion of joint film projects between British and Egyptian filmmakers, in order to foster the development of an independent cinema in Egypt. In Israel the British film festival, also organised by the British Council, has proved quite popular.

8.6 The cultural impact and perception of British films in the United States

According to European Audiovisual Observatory data, UK films took by far the highest annual market share of European films released in the US between 1996 and 2006. However, as in Europe, this performance mainly relied on those British titles benefiting from US investment.[92] The five Harry Potter films released between 2001 and 2007 occupy the first positions of the Top 30 chart 2000–07.

In the US, UK films have a special place among European films because of the common language (albeit with a different accent) and the cultural connections between UK and US. They therefore have a strong and secure place when compared to other countries' production.

Americans look at UK films as they look at their own, we are told. When they watch UK films (both small arthouse films and more commercial romantic comedies), they see themselves but 'with a slight twist'. The Americans and the British seem to share a similar – and yet not exactly identical – worldview. A film such as *The Bank Job* (by Roger Donaldson), which took $30 million at the box office, was a standard US film but with a 'special British twist'.

The common language is both an advantage and a potential problem. The English language can be a specific attraction (the pleasure of hearing English well spoken), or it can be an obstacle, arousing fear that films will be unintelligible because of regional accents and dialect. When choosing a film, the first question a US distributor will ask is whether or not American audiences will be able to understand the accent.

In UK films, US cinemagoers find actors they already know through American movies. These actors in a British film make a completely different (and enjoyable) experience.

In the last 15 years, the audience for arthouse movies has been growing in the US.[94] There is a new awareness and acceptance of these films. This has allowed some foreign directors to create an established reputation.

The cultural identity of British film still remains a controversial issue. According to some US professionals, UK films do have a precise cultural identity: James Bond films, for example, reach US audiences with a clear British mark. For other professionals, on the contrary, the identity is not easy to define. A possible source of confusion between the UK/US origin of a film is not the content so much as the scale of the production: British films can be perceived as American if they are released by one of the six major studios capable of creating an event with each launch.

92. See graphs 25 and 26 in Appendix III.
93. See Table 7 in Appendix III.
94. *The Crying Game* is perceived as a turning point.

Seen from an American standpoint, the blurred or ambiguous identity of high-budget US/UK films is not a problem. On the contrary, the overall control of a US studio in, for instance, the Harry Potter films ensures that these meet US domestic requirements in terms of pace, spectacle and accent. Lower-budget films with a greater degree of cultural Britishness, such as Working Title's romantic comedies, have a strong track record of appealing to American audiences and stimulating their interest in visiting UK locations. The 1999 hit film *Notting Hill* is known to have single-handedly triggered a historic inrush of tourists to this landmark area of London, many of them from the US.

Despite shared interests, there are certain themes in UK films which are likely to be of little interest to US audiences, but equally there are themes that may appeal more, notably the subject of Ireland. The spectacular success of Miramax's release of *The Crying Game* in the US was a marketing triumph, but one that built upon a strong existing interest in Ireland and its Troubles among Irish-Americans. The success of a British film in the US, as in this case, can help re-promote it in the UK.

British cinema is a quality label according to some professionals, but not for all films. Furthermore, some distributors state that they would never market a film as British because people could be put off, fearing that they won't understand the accent.

The issue of accent, which recurs in all discussion of how UK films fare in the US, is not trivial. If the British accent is too strong, the film will not perform: one of Ken Loach's films, *Ae Fond Kiss* (2004) was released with subtitles and performed poorly, while Helen Mirren's accent in *The Queen* is perfectly understandable. If there is a collective image of low-budget British film in the US it is that 'there will be difficult accents'. Distributors have variously resorted to playing down British origins, re-voicing or, in extreme cases, subtitling. But the fact remains that while UK audiences are expected to accept American regional accents, US audiences do not show the same willingness in return.

8.7 Location UK

What was once the province of 'train-spotting' film enthusiasts has now become a fully-fledged branch of UK tourism. The modern phenomenon of tourists coming to see the location of a favourite film is often linked to the success of *Notting Hill* (1999), which was partly shot in central and west London locations, and partly in Shepperton Studios. Visitors searching for its locations soon became a notable feature of London summers; and subsequent romantic comedies in the same vein have added to the repertoire of tourist locations. These are now serviced by a number of privately-organised tours and walks (Secret London Walks and Visits), and by maps and websites provided by Film London.

The BBC's 2007 Summer of British Film series included travel documentaries and an online film map adding to a growing sense around the UK nations and regions that film (and television) could provide a more relevant point of cultural contact for contemporary visitors than literature and visual art. There is now a growing library of books as well as websites catering for this interest, and the report *Stately Attraction,* co-commissioned by the UK Film Council and some national and regional screen agencies and tourism organisations, offers an analysis of this activity – which is certainly not confined to the UK, but is perhaps of particular benefit to Britain since UK films are the largest non-US export cinema in international markets (other than Indian and Chinese cinema).

What the UK conspicuously lacks are specialist, film-related visitor attractions to capture this growth market, other than the National Media Museum in Bradford. The Museum of the Moving Image in London was closed in 1999, and film-related displays in London's Science Museum have been moved to Bradford. The privately-run Movieum has opened recently in London's former County Hall building, apparently seeking to fill this gap.

9 Backing Britain: the contribution of public policy to British film's cultural impact

"No-one is ever going to take the place of Hollywood, no-one in the world can do that. What we can do is actually offer alternatives to it."

Alan Parker, *Britain: The Big Picture* (2000)[95]

9.1 Core findings

In this section, the history of UK film policy is examined as an underlying enabling factor in the development of UK films and as a resource in assisting UK filmmakers to deploy UK films for greater cultural impact.

- British film policy began to develop after World War I, when the cultural domination of British cinemas by Hollywood films became apparent. By the 1920s, restricted access to cinema screens in Britain for UK films was an acute problem; they represented just 5% of all releases in 1926. The 1927 Cinematograph Films Act established a progressively increasing quota for UK films. Quota regulation remained in place until it was finally phased out in the early 1980s.

- In spite of the 'quota quickies' phenomenon in the 1930s, recent scholarship has stressed the positive, long-term effect of quotas on the development and sustainability of culturally British production.

- World War II created an opportunity for culturally British cinema to become a means of propaganda for the war effort. In doing so, it found a strong connection with the popular audience at home with war films such as Noel Coward's *In Which we Serve* or heritage epics such as Olivier's screen adaptation of Shakespeare's *Henry V.* Most of these films benefited from financial support from the wartime government.

- After a brief and bruising trade war with the US, Britain's post-war government established two new policy instruments: the Eady Levy – a parafiscal tax on box office to benefit UK production – and the National Film Finance Corporation. These two initiatives were to help British film production for the next four decades. Though they also served to assist American productions in the UK, these mechanisms are widely regarded as having facilitated a vast range of culturally British films, from popular comedies and drama to more specialist fare.

- Other more culturally-focused policies were also deployed during these decades. They included the development of the regional film theatres for specialised film, under the aegis of the British Film Institute (BFI). The BFI also took on the strategic role of supporting individual UK filmmakers in making films outside the cultural mainstream.

- The 1980s witnessed the near collapse of cinema attendance as audiences switched en masse to television and video. As the traditional model for film financing and distribution began to wane, broadcasting regulation stimulated a new partnership between cinema and television. Channel 4, a channel dedicated by remit to minority tastes and interests, became the new force in culturally British cinema, compensating for the decline in theatrical opportunities for low-budget British films.

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- In the 1990s, the combination of European Union funding, bilateral co-production treaties, a buoyant international pre-sale market driven by the dynamic 'classics' divisions of the US studios and UK Lottery money, created new opportunities for culturally British cinema. The early years of UK Lottery production funding have since been dismissed as profligate, leading to domestic overproduction with no attendant impact on the popularity of UK cinema. Since 2000, the channelling of Lottery resources through a unified agency for UK film, the UK Film Council, and through the national and regional screen agencies, has introduced greater market discipline and an emphasis on script development.

- The advent of digital technologies and especially digital broadband, has not only multiplied opportunities to discover and consume UK films but it has also revolutionised communication, exchange and opinion-forming among audiences. DVDs and emergent internet streaming and download pathways have opened up access to British film heritage as never before. New policy tools – including a renewed emphasis on the use of technology for film education – will encourage UK consumers and citizens in developing a more plural and diverse relationship with the rich body of British cinema, going back over 100 years.

9.2 Introduction

Film policy does not make films. But it can make films possible, through various forms of incentive and by helping to correct imbalances in the marketplace. For most of the last 90 years, British filmmaking has faced a challenge that is unique to cinema, although common to most countries other than the US, and especially in Europe. Between 70-90% of the films shown in Britain have been American, with American-controlled distributors in a dominant position since before 1920. This section reviews the history of UK film policy since the 1920s, paying particular attention to the impact of policy on how films reach and affect audiences.

9.3 Giving UK films a chance in the 1920s and '30s

It was the first world war, and the role that film began to play in it, that alerted many governments to the importance of their national cinema. The US government formed a committee to coordinate film propaganda abroad, and noted that entertainment films were good advertisements for the American way of life. Meanwhile, British government involvement in cinema had been confined to matters of safety (the danger of fire in cinemas) and, from 1913, to an arms-length supervision of film censorship through the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) on behalf of the industry and local authorities. But after World War I, when the US emerged as the dominant force in world cinema, many European countries took steps to protect their domestic film industries from aggressive American policies.

Most of these national schemes involved some form of distribution or exhibition quota, linking the number of imported US films to a required minimum proportion of domestic productions. Although regulation was applied at the point of offer to the public, it was assumed that this would have the effect of stimulating domestic production by creating a guaranteed market. In the case of Britain, by the early 1920s access to the exhibition market was an acute problem, and British producers were complaining that distributors' forward and block booking policies were preventing their films from being released.[96] In 1923–24, 'British film weeks' were organised to highlight this problem and to enable indigenous films to be seen; but these were not enough to salvage both the longest-established British producer, Cecil Hepworth, and one of the newest large-scale companies, Stoll, from facing terminal problems.

In 1926, just 36 UK films were made which comprised 5% of all films released, while 624 US films made up 84% of UK releases.[97] Producers and exhibitors reluctantly concluded that only legislation could provide a secure basis for future British production. As a result of their campaign, the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act established a progressively increasing quota of UK films to be offered by distributors and shown by exhibitors, starting in 1929. When the Bill was first framed, synchronised sound was still a novelty, but by 1929 the 'talkies' had triumphed, and the operation of the Act effectively inaugurated a period of modernisation and expansion in British production. Over a hundred new, mostly small, film companies were registered between 1930 and 1936.

96. Rachael Low, *History of the British Film,* vol 4, 1918-1929 (1971), pp81 ff.
97. Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market,* 1907-1934 (1985), p125.

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Many of the leading personnel of British cinema – actors, directors, producers, technicians – started or consolidated their careers during this period. Despite this, historians for a long time regarded the 1930s as demonstrating the negative effect of quota legislation, because British production appeared to become institutionalised as cheap and shoddy. In her *History of the British Film,* Rachael Low identified the Hollywood majors, notably MGM, as responsible for deliberately distributing low-quality British 'quota quickies' to boost their own productions and profits. In a further Cinematograph Film Act of 1938, a minimum cost scale was introduced to boost production values, at which point MGM became a producer of high-budget UK-based films, such as *A Yank at Oxford* (1938) and *The Citadel* (1938). These are the precursors of post-World War II US/UK co-productions, by which Hollywood studios fulfilled British nationality criteria to access UK incentives, while retaining ultimate ownership of the product.

More recent commentators have challenged the conventional interpretation of the 1930s, noting that the 1927 Act may have had unintended negative consequences, but arguing that nonetheless it also had many beneficial effects, both in terms of developing the British industry and producing high quality films which ultimately also had cultural impact.[98] One of these, John Sedgwick, states on the basis of an exhaustive survey of the relative popularity of UK films:

> The quota legislation… provided domestic producers who wished to operate at the quality end of the market the incentive of a protected market segment to make films which people wanted to see [and] such films were made in large numbers during the 1930s… From the viewpoint of the moribund state of the industry in the mid-1920s these results appear nothing short of remarkable.[99]

In a study of filmgoing preferences in the 1930s, Sedgwick demonstrates that UK films such as Gracie Fields musicals and Will Hay comedies were actually more popular than Hollywood films that took more money at the box office through being more widely exhibited.[100] This should provide a salutary warning against equating gross box office with popularity per se.

With this and other well-evidenced analysis of the results of the 1927 Act, it seems clear that this first phase of government film policy was both necessary and effective in securing the production of films that were often popular, that had recognisable 'British identity', and that had cultural impact. Initially, this impact was largely limited to the UK, apart from some high-profile films produced by Alexander Korda, who had access to the US market through his membership of United Artists, and the early work of Alfred Hitchcock. But the careers nourished during the first quota period – Carol Reed, Michael Powell, David Lean, Thorold Dickinson and a host of actors and technicians – would pay more visible international dividends in the following decades. A further important benefit of the first quota period was the establishment of Britain's four major studios – Shepperton, Twickenham, Denham and Pinewood – all launched on the basis of the new assurance of a market for British production.

98. For instance, Ian Christie, ed., *Powell, Pressburger and Others* (1978); Mark Glancy, Hollywood and Britain: MGM and the British 'Quota' Legislation, in Jeffery Richards, ed., *The Unknown Thirties* (1998); John Sedgwick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A Choice of Pleasures* (2000); Steve Chibnall, *Quota Quickies: The Birth of the British B Film* (2007).
99. John Sedgwick, Cinemagoing Preferences in Britain in the 1930s, in Richards, ed., *The Unknown Thirties,* p21.
100. Sedgwick has developed an analytic framework he terms Popstat, which uses a variety of measures, such as frequency of re-booking, to estimate popularity. See Sedgwick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain*, pp55-83.

9.4 Filming for victory: the war years

World War II was good for British filmmaking and its relationship with the UK audience. Filmmakers quickly rallied to the cause and produced some outstanding propaganda films to boost national morale in the early months of the conflict. Despite limited resources, their contribution continued throughout the war, targeting a range of important topical themes: from the need to rally American awareness of Nazism in *49th Parallel* (1941) and the danger of fifth columnists in *Went the Day Well?* (1942); to recognition of bravery in many forms (*Target for Tonight*, *San Demetrio London*, *In Which we Serve, The Way to the Stars);* and the celebration of military success in *Desert Victory* (1943) and *The True Glory* (1945). Even Shakespeare played a part in raising national morale, with Olivier's *Henry V* (1944) a popular as well as an artistic success.[101] Equally important were a number of films that dealt with the home front, stirring debate about what values Britain was fighting to defend and how the post-war world would be organised. Evidence from the box office and from surveys showed that British audiences particularly appreciated films made in Britain, by filmmakers who understood their situation and shared their values.[102] A 1943 Mass Observation questionnaire on 'films you have liked best during the last year' placed UK films in the top three places, with only two US productions in the top nine. The two best liked films by a wide cross-section of the population – *In Which we Serve* and *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* – were also the top box office successes of the year.[103]

Most of this filmmaking benefited from different kinds of government support, such as help with releasing personnel from the services or guidance by the Ministry of Information. The Crown Film Unit was also engaged in making a range of documentaries that played a vital part in the war effort, while information films addressing rationing and civilian defence issues were also an important means of communication between the government and the people. However, the relationship was not always a cosy one. Powell and Pressburger had benefited from Ministry of Information funding for their *49th Parallel*, but when they announced a satirical film about the survival of the Colonel Blimp mentality, Winston Churchill took a personal interest in trying to stop the film being made. Even after Rank backed *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), Churchill continued to try to block its export.

9.5 Bogart, bacon or British Lion? Towards a national cinema, 1949–1979

Britain's fraught economic situation after World War II triggered a crisis in film trade between the UK and the US which would have major consequences for British cinema for the next 30 years. Alarmed by the deteriorating balance of payments situation in 1947, the Chancellor imposed a 75% ad valorem tax on foreign earnings in the UK, which provoked immediate retaliation by the American studios who stood to lose an important part of their export revenue. A stark choice between 'Bogart or bacon' was proclaimed in this economic crisis, and the leading British producers, J Arthur Rank and Alexander Korda, responded to Hollywood's boycott by stepping up their levels of production. However, when the film war was settled within six months they found themselves over-extended as well as facing increased competition from a backlog of prime American attractions.

The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp

101. Release title was *The Chronicle History of King Henry the Fift with his Battell Fought at Agincourt in France.*
102. James Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda,* 1939-1945, I. B. Tauris, 1998, pp106, 190 & 250; Dorothy Sheridan and Jeffrey Richards, eds., *Mass Observation at the Movies,* Routledge, 1987.
103. Richards and Sheridan, pp220-21 ff.

To help these producers, president of the Board of Trade Harold Wilson took steps to increase the British quota requirement and introduce a new regime of financial support for British filmmaking, funded from a parafiscal tax on all box office earnings. The resulting National Film Finance Corporation (NFFC) and the Eady Levy, together with state backing for British Lion as a producer and distributor, became the bedrock of a new policy of support for the national film production industry.[104] The Eady Levy on box office revenues was intended to mitigate the burden of entertainment tax on exhibitors, who received half of its proceeds as a rebate; the other half was divided among qualifying UK films in proportion to their UK box office revenue, with no obligation to invest in further production. To qualify for Eady payments, films had to be produced by UK companies, with a majority of their expenditure going to UK citizens – criteria that would continue to be refined until the abolition of the Eady Levy in 1985, and which have since been superseded by definitions that comply with EU requirements.

As with the introduction of quotas in the 1930s, there have been sharply different interpretations of the effect of the Eady Levy. Traditionally, it has been regarded as encouraging a trend towards films simply aimed at maximum box office impact, and to some extent the films produced by Rank and other British producers in the 1950s would seem to bear this out: the Doctor comedies, the Carry On franchise and Hammer's lurid remakes of classic horror subjects define a new, distinctly populist, British cinema. However, the early NFFC/Eady period also included some of Ealing's finest black comedies, the Dearden-Relph social realist problem films such as *Sapphire*, a number of location-based regional productions, and many of Britain's most cherished war films, including *The Dam Busters, Reach for the Sky* and *Cockleshell Heroes.*

The last of these was made by a new company, Warwick, formed by Americans who were attracted by the combination of the Eady system and lower costs in Britain. Major studios already saw the advantages of using revenues they could not export from Britain, and Disney made its first live action film, *Treasure Island*, on this basis in 1950. A pattern was emerging, which has dominated British filmmaking ever since. US producers became adept at meeting the criteria to qualify for Eady payments, while using American stars and directors in films that were made in British studios or locations. One of the Warwick founders, Albert Broccoli, launched the James Bond franchise with *Dr No* in 1962, while his partner, the Canadian Harry Saltzman, was responsible for such key British New Wave films as *Room at the Top* and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* through the British company Woodfall. The critic Alexander Walker titled his book about the 1960s British film industry *Hollywood, England* (1974), and noted that at one point during this decade, "the Americans were contributing nearly 90% of the finance for film production in Britain". Legally, and in terms of popular memory and cinema history, films such as *Lawrence of Arabia,* the Bond films, *A Hard Day's Night, Tom Jones* and *A Man for all Seasons* were all 'British', and played as such in the UK's cinemas, but they were almost totally American financed. In effect, the policy devised in 1949 against a background of crisis had succeeded in creating a national cinema, even if its landlords often lived abroad.

During the later part of this same period, several other government-inspired initiatives stimulated different kinds of filmmaking and exhibition. The BFI, which had been set up in 1933 amidst industry suspicion, was encouraged in the mid-1960s by Britain's first arts minister, Jennie Lee, to develop a network of modestly-subsidised exhibition venues across the UK that would show a wider range of films than commercial cinemas. Many of these films were subtitled works by French, Swedish, Italian and Eastern European directors who were creating an international 'art cinema' that would shape the taste of a new generation of filmgoers and filmmakers. However, some were low-budget films made possible by the BFI's Production Board, which helped launch the careers of Terence Davies, Bill Douglas, Peter Greenaway, and Sally Potter – filmmakers who would often receive more recognition abroad than at home as representatives of a new British avant-garde cinema. Douglas's *My Childhood* won the Silver Lion at Venice in 1972; fifteen years later Davies' *Distant Voices, Still Lives* won six international festival awards, while in 1992 Potter's *Orlando* won two Oscar nominations and a dozen international awards, including European Film of the Year.

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104. For a brief outline of the Eady Levy, NFFC and the quota system, see Terra Media website at http://www.terramedia.co.uk/law/quotas_and_levies.htm

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Some of this experimental filmmaking was also supported by the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB). The results of BFI, ACGB and London Filmmakers' Co-op production were also circulated internationally by the British Council, together with more mainstream examples of British cinema. By the late 1970s, the UK was as likely to be represented in international festivals by an independent low-budget film such as Derek Jarman's *Jubilee* (Cannes, 1977) as by a more mainstream production. For many, Britain's image had been redefined by its vanguard popular music, visual arts, fashion and sexual liberation, and films reflecting these had a new and international appeal.

9.6 Film, television and video: a new media landscape, 1982–1998

The early 1980s saw both cinema attendance and conventional film production reach a new low in Britain – to the extent that their demise was widely predicted, even as the industry prepared to celebrate British Film Year in 1984. Just 24 British films were produced in 1981, down from 61 in 1979. Yet one of those films was *Chariots of Fire,* which emerged as the surprise winner of four Oscars in 1982 and "rode a wave of patriotic sentiment whipped up during the Falklands War" when re-released.[105] Newspaper headlines of the period included Golden Runners of Roaring Epoch *(Daily Telegraph);* The Kind of Picture We Have Looked for in Vain *(The Times);* Britain Back on the Tracks *(Evening Standard);* and Dash of Inspiration (*The Guardian*). In 1982, both the Communist *Morning Star* and the *Evening Standard* reported scenes of 'incredible' popular enthusiasm for *Chariots of Fire* in Latin America.[106] Despite this apparent evidence of deep cultural, even political, impact, in 1985 the Conservative government abolished the main instruments of UK film policy, the levy and quota, primarily in response to exhibitors' arguments that these were an intolerable burden on a declining industry.

In fact, the industry was in need of investment and innovation. The introduction of the US multiplex concept in cinema design would lead to a turnaround in exhibition by the end of the decade. And although the Rank Organisation made its historic exit from production after disowning Nicolas Roeg's *Bad Timing* (1980), a new opportunity was emerging. The launch of Channel 4 in 1982 introduced a new publishing model for British television, which made possible large-scale investment in film production of the kind that already existed in France, Germany and Italy, but had been unknown in the UK. Channel 4's flagship strand, Film on Four stimulated a new sector of independent producers, whose films could enjoy limited theatrical release before transmission. Among early Channel 4 successes were Neil Jordan's debut *Angel* (1982), one of the first fictional treatments of Ireland's new phase of Troubles, and Stephen Frears' *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) which tackled both racism and gay romance in a winning style. During the next ten years, Channel 4 would become a force in international independent production, usually as a pivotal minority partner.[107] However, its majority funding of *Riff-Raff* (1990) made possible Ken Loach's return to the cinema screen, and his gritty, naturalistic portrait of contemporary British society won the European Film Award in 1991. Five years later, another beneficiary of the BFI Production Board, Mike Leigh, won the Cannes Palme d'Or with *Secrets and Lies* (1996), a vivid treatment of Britain's ethnic complexity, supported by Channel 4 with predominantly French funding.

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105. James Chapman usefully analyses the social and economic climate in which *Chariots of Fire* emerged, in *Past and Present: National Identity in the British Historical Film* (2005), pp271-75.
106. *Ibid*, pp273-73, 359-61.
107. Between 1981 and 1990, Channel 4 part-funded 170 films. John Corner and Sylvia Harvey, eds., *Television Times: A Reader* (1996), p118.

Channel 4's unique status had not been originally designed with the interests of film in mind, but an unintended consequence was the stimulation of a new media industry and a new culture of independent film. Other new elements in that industry and culture were the exceptionally rapid adoption in Britain of home-video recorders, and the proliferation of cable and satellite broadcasters. Films could now be funded by the sale of a wide range of different rights to an increasing number of outlets – and for the first time consumers could collect films by recording them off-air, or rent cassettes for home viewing. Channel 4's remit to foster innovation and cater for minorities led to its support for a network of film and video workshops during the 1980s across the UK, which produced work that often reflected local issues and dissenting views, and served as a training ground for filmmakers who would continue to address regional and 'rainbow' themes (such as John Akomfrah of the Black Audio Collective in Birmingham and Isaac Julien of Sankofa in London). Workshops also emerged in the nations and regions: in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Stirling, in Cardiff, and in Belfast and Derry.[108] Previously such films would have had little or no audience exposure, but they were now transmitted in late-night Channel 4 slots, and were also shown in BFI-supported regional film theatres and in newer media centres, such as The Watershed in Bristol, Nottingham's Broadway and Cornerhouse in Manchester, some of which also housed production workshops. In some ways, this new exhibition landscape was similar to the concept of the 'film society', which first emerged in the 1920s as a counterbalance to commercial cinema and which had continued to exist on the margins. Now it was being reinvented around the UK in a more interactive, if still embryonic, form.

In 1992 the government introduced a new three-year tax write-off for the production of British films (known in shorthand as Section 42, after the part of the Finance Act in which it appeared). However, the mechanisms by which this relief could be accessed in practice were costly and unwieldly, and it came to be used principally by producers of higher-budget, Hollywood films rather than lower-budget British films. A 1994 enquiry by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission into the cinema distribution and exhibition market resulted in minor adjustments to make the environment more competitive by preventing the more powerful companies from imposing unfairly long cinema booking periods for their films (Exhibition Periods Order, 1994).

9.7 A bigger, more European, more digital picture: 1998 to the future

After the abolition of traditional UK film policy measures, Channel 4 seemed to offer a new springboard for film policy in the absence of large-scale government intervention, although British Screen had replaced the NFFC as a modest vehicle for seed-funding British production. Two factors, however, led to the creation of a new platform for UK film policy at the beginning of the new century. The first of these was the growth of European media policy through a series of MEDIA Programmes from 1991 onwards, designed to incentivise cross-border cooperation in film and television. The UK has automatically participated in these (though not without some official resistance), giving access to training, development, distribution and exhibition support schemes. The UK initially participated in the Council of Europe's Eurimages production initiative, but withdrew in 1996. However, British film and media policy has increasingly become subject to EU priorities, and UK films have benefited considerably from various kinds of EU support, including capital and support for infrastructure through the the European Regional Development Fund, to become the most successful export cinema within Europe.[109]

A second new development emerged as a result of National Lottery funds being made available to arts activities in the mid-1990s. Initially, this funding was handled by regional arts councils across the UK, and included some large allocations to groups of film producers organised in franchises in England. Amid a mounting chorus of industry criticism, a number of government-led working groups were convened and prepared their recommendations. In July 1997, the new Labour Government created a new tax relief (Section 48), a 100% first-year write-off for the production of films costing £15m or less. The effects of this took time to work through but eventually had a very significant impact on levels of domestic production.

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108. On the workshop movement, see Margaret Dickinson, ed., *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain,* 1945-1990 (1999), pp69-71.
109. Two UK productions (*The Queen, Notes on a Scandal*) and one co-production (*Irina Palm*) are among the ten highest-grossing films in the Europa Cinemas network for 2007-08.

In 2000, a new film agency was created – the UK Film Council, charged to promote film culture through education and access, and to help develop a sustainable domestic film industry. Its formation followed the publication of two significant reports: *Making Movies Matter*, published in 1999 by the BFI Film Education Working Group; and the Film Policy Working Group's *A Bigger Picture* (1998). The main financial instruments favoured by the Labour Government were the Section 42 and Section 48 tax incentives, supplemented by Lottery funding. Funding for exhibition was transferred from the BFI to the UK Film Council and partly delegated to the national and regional screen agencies. A major initiative to install digital projection (the Digital Screen Network) was announced in 2004, to support the exhibition of British and specialised films in a range of cinemas across the UK. While it is too early to arrive at any overall assessment of the UK Film Council's various strategies, there can be no doubt that having one single body to co-ordinate policy and initiatives across the full spectrum of activities in the UK increases the likelihood of their success.

In April 2007, two new tax reliefs for British film production were introduced, one for films costing £20 million or less, the other for films costing more than that. These replaced the Section 48 and Section 42 schemes, which had been increasingly bedevilled by investors' propensity to use them as tax avoidance opportunities. The new reliefs, which were designed to go directly to production companies and had much lower transaction costs, were accompanied by the introduction of a 'cultural test' for British films, to ensure compliance with EU state aid rules (Article 92 of the EU Treaty).

The history of British film policy has shown that, throughout most of the 20th century the film production sector has required some form of state support, either through a national quota or by providing some kind of production funding. Between 1949 and 1985, these two mechanisms operated in tandem, and effectively secured a continuing national element in production as well as exhibition, despite the sharp decline in cinema-going. In today's very different media landscape, the central challenge – just as in the 1920s – is still the saturation of cinema's cultural space by Hollywood. That domination has if anything increased since the 1920s and '30s, and needs to be addressed, as European policy-makers have acknowledged and as UNESCO's recent Declaration on Cultural Diversity recognises.

New media technologies and forms offer enormous opportunity for individual choice and for access to a wide range of audiovisual products. Digital restoration is creating marketable new versions of classic films, and is overcoming the invisibility of old movies. DVDs and forms of Video on Demand (VOD) are making British cinema heritage accessible as never before. Film and media education is also flourishing, although relatively little of it actively addresses issues of national culture within a global context. More positively, the FILMCLUB initiative launched in 2007, supported by the UK Film Council, the BFI, LOVEFiLM and other industry partners, aims to spread awareness of the diversity of cinema in UK schools. The partnership between UK-wide and regional film bodies, Film: 21st Century Literacy widens this strategy to young people in general, aiming to equip them to appreciate new films in the context of film heritage and history.

All the evidence suggests that UK film is popular and achieves wide cultural impact when it becomes visible and accessible in an otherwise crowded marketplace. UK films have been strikingly popular in certain eras: in the 1930s, after the quota system began to work effectively; in the 1940s, during the war; in the 1960s, after US finance helped relaunch UK films; and again in the 1990s, when new cinema building helped films to reach wider audiences. When, it might be asked, are we going to begin to teach cinema history as an essential part of UK history? When will we include leading directors such as Alfred Hitchcock, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, David Lean, Ken Loach and Gurinder Chadha, and influential film entrepreneurs such as Michael Balcon, David Puttnam and J Arthur Rank in the national curriculum? The evidence of the existing cultural impact of UK film presented in this study suggests there is a considerable potential to enhance and deepen such impact through public policy.

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Glossary

ACTT

The Association of Cinematograph and Television Technicians (ACTT) was known as the ACT from its creation in 1933 until 1956, when it added Television to its title, to reflect its remit as the leading union for crews and technicians working across Britain's audiovisual industries. This powerful union went into decline in the 1980s, finally merging with BETA to create the current amalgamated union BECTU.

AMPAS

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) is mostly known all over the world for the glamorous annual Academy Awards events, or Oscars®. Based in Los Angeles, the Academy has a membership of over 6,000 professionals, the majority of them from the Hollywood film industry. Academy award winners receive lifetime membership. Aside from organising the annual Oscars® ceremony, AMPAS has a year-round calendar of industry events delivering on its mandate of advancing the arts and sciences of motion pictures.

BAFTA

The British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) was founded in 1947 by leading British cinema figures including Alexander Korda, Carol Reed and David Lean. BAFTA is best known to the public through its annual award ceremonies. Its most prestigious, the British Academy Film Awards is televised UK-wide, as is its TV equivalent, the British Academy Television Awards. Often described as the 'British Oscars®' the film awards reward outstanding films from all nationalities, but they mainly focus on British and American cinema.

BBFC

The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC), first established in 1912 as the Board of Film Censors, is an independent, non-governmental body which provides classification for films released in cinemas and on video/DVD. BBFC has no statutory powers of its own, and its decisions regarding a film's classification may be overruled by local councils on appeal. However, over time BBFC has gained the respect of the industry, parliament, the public and local authorities.

BECTU

The Broadcasting Entertainment Cinematograph and Theatre Union (BECTU) is the amalgamated union representing technicians working across the range of television, film, entertainment, leisure and interactive media. Its membership is over 26,000 strong and the union represents its members in collective bargaining with employers' organisations. A TUC affiliate, BECTU was formed from the late 1980s merger of ACTT and BETA (see entry for ACTT above).

BFPA

The British Film Producers Association (BFPA) represented the British studios and independents as well as the UK subsidiaries of the US studios from the 1950s to the early 1980s. The organisation was latterly restructured and became the BFTPA, admitting television producers into its membership for the first time. After a brief interim period in 1990 when it adopted the shorter name of The Producers' Association, the organisation finally merged in 1991 with the Independent Programme Producers Association, IPPA, to become Pact (see entry for Pact, below).

Cinematograph Films Act 1927
Seen by historians as a pivotal, yet controversial, piece of legislation for UK film, the 1927 Act was put in place as a means of trying to remedy the domination of UK cinemas by Hollywood films. The Act introduced the quota regulations which compelled exhibitors to screen a certain proportion of local British films, based on total screen time during the year. The quotas were heavily criticised for generating the infamous 'quota quickies' – cheap films of dubious quality which enabled operators to comply with their obligations at minimal expense. However, recent scholarship based on fresh research has tended to emphasise the value of the quotas in enabling the development of a genuine UK studio system, turning out culturally British films with popular appeal.

'Cross-over' film
A 'cross-over' film generally refers to a lower-budget genre film or specialised film, initially targeted at a specific segment of the audience, which confounds initial commercial expectations by attracting a mainstream audience in significant numbers. Celebrated examples of UK cross-over successes include *The Crying Game*, *The Full Monty* and *East is East*.

Eady Levy
Based on legislation passed as part of the Finance Bill 1950, the Eady Levy was in place for 35 years until 1985, making it the most durable mechanism of public policy to incentivise local British production. The levy was a percentage taken off the box office receipts of films released in the UK. Funds raised through the levy could be utilised by local production companies, including the US studios' subsidiaries, to fund new UK films. The levy owed its name to Sir Wilfred Eady, the Treasury official who devised it in 1949 at the request of Harold Wilson, then president of the Board of Trade.

IMDb
The Internet Movie Database (IMDb) is an internet phenomenon and one of the most popular databases on the worldwide web. IMDb currently claims over 57 million visits per month, and its user comments and ratings system, which invite user feedback and participation in the critical assessment of films, was a precursor to the spread of informal review sites and blogosphere posts.

Inward investment
In the context of UK films, inward investment describes films which are made in the UK but substantially financed and controlled from overseas, thereby bringing valuable currency and tax revenue. The main source of inward investment film activity in the UK is from productions from Hollywood.

IS (intuitive sample)
The abbreviation IS refers to an intuitive sample of 200 British films selected for the purpose of this study. For details on the method used to select the intuitive sample, see Appendix I.

MEDIA Programme
The MEDIA Programme consists of a programme of financial support to the European film and audiovisual sectors, administered through the EU Commission in Brussels from a series of five-year budgets approved by the European Parliament and monitored by the EU Council of Ministers. Launched in the early 1990s, the MEDIA Programme breaks down into a series of individual funds which support the four broad strategic areas of development, training, promotion and distribution (which includes film and programme sales to third countries outside the EU). The UK has been a contributor to and recipient of MEDIA support since its inception.

National Lottery

National Lottery funding for film first came about in the late 1990s, and represented a considerable new source of money for production. Film funding was initially administered by the arts councils of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In 2000, the administration of Lottery funds for England was handed over to the UK Film Council, to support a series of incentive funds ranging from development to production and distribution/exhibition. Devolved administration of Lottery funding was maintained in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

NFFC

A measure created alongside the Eady Levy, the National Film Finance Corporation (NFFC) was set up to provide production loans on commercial terms to the UK film industry. The NFFC was also abolished in 1985, after over three decades as a mechanism which enabled local producers to compensate in part for the steady decline in cinema-going and the attendant decline in revenues from cinema exhibition.

Pact

The Producers' Alliance for Cinema and Television is the trade association for independent film and television production companies in the UK. Founded in 1991 from the merger of the rival Independent Programme Producers Association (IPPA) and The Producers' Association, Pact has been credited for major gains in levelling the playing field between independent producers and terrestrial broadcasters, in the two decades since the introduction (in legislation) of the 25% independent production quota.

RS (random sample)

The abbreviation RS relates to the random sample which was devised for this study, taken from a comprehensive database of all known feature length films released in the UK between 1946 and 2006. See Appendices I and V for further information on the random sample.

Section 42 & Section 48

Section 42 of the Finance (No 2) Act (1992) and Section 48 of the Finance Act (No 2) Act 1997 enabled investors in UK-produced films to benefit from deferred tax; the measures were successful in attracting fresh capital into UK cinema. Sections 42 and 48 corresponded to specific tax incentives granted to companies making films qualifying under the Films Act 1985, in the UK. Section 42 offered an accelerated tax write-off over three years for companies making higher budget films, and was largely used by Hollywood studios making films in the UK. After a successful campaign by UK independent producers, a bespoke tax break, Section 48, was introduced in 1997 to incentivise local, lower-budget production, for films with under £15 million of qualifying expenditure. The 100% write-off of the investment in the year of expenditure attracted new capital into local production, resulting in record production levels by the early 2000s. However, unforeseen practices on both tax breaks, including the notorious 'double-dipping', led to both tax breaks being abolished in 2006, to be replaced by a straightforward tax credit.

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