

# BEYOND THE BOX OFFICE

## REPORT ON THE SEMINARS HELD TO DISCUSS *STORIES WE TELL OURSELVES - THE CULTURAL IMPACT OF UK FILM 1946-2006* BETWEEN OCTOBER 2009 AND JUNE 2011

### 1. Executive summary

This report summarises the discussion at ten seminars in the UK and Europe between 26 October 2009 and June 2011 on the UK Film Council's 2009 report *Stories we tell ourselves – The Cultural Impact of UK film 1946-2006*.

Key conclusions were:

- Strong support for a research programme to understand the cultural contribution of film
- Public (Government) support for independent and specialised films regarded as essential
- Exhibitors, distributors and broadcasters contribute to and influence in key ways the cultural significance and impact of film, but impact also occurs in the wider society, beyond the normal boundaries of distribution
- Film is a multifaceted art form and powerful communication tool like no other. It can transcend time, community and geographical boundaries and promote an understanding of different cultural backgrounds
- Films reflect and contribute to our understanding of National and Regional character, but assigning films unique nationalities is problematic
- Linguistic diversity has both positive and negative effects on the cultural reach of films
- More support is needed for UK Black and Asian filmmaking and improved on-screen portrayal for significant cultural impact to be achieved
- Film societies, clubs and festivals make important cultural contributions
- The digital revolution increases the opportunities for cultural impact
- Film plays an important role in education and should have a more prominent place in the school curriculum
- Film tourism provides a further channel of cultural impact

# BEYOND THE BOX OFFICE

## 2. The events

In association with key partners, the UK Film Council/BFI held a series of ten events between October 2009 and June 2011. The purpose of the events was to present and discuss ***Stories we tell ourselves - The Cultural Impact of UK Film 1946-2006 - A study for the UK Film Council*** (the “Study”), to encourage debate on the cultural impact of film and to raise and consider issues which may be of interest in the formulation of public policy for film and professional practice.

The first event, in Prague at a meeting of the European Film Agency Research Network, and the second, at Birkbeck College, London, were focused on giving expert scrutiny to the methodology of the study and encouraging new methodological approaches to the assessment of cultural impact. At Birkbeck, the audience was primarily academic and, in Prague, professional researchers from European film agencies. At the subsequent events, there were broad audiences including people from the film community, screen agencies, education, public policy and communications and the debate focused mainly on the content of the findings of the Study.

Each of the events followed a similar agenda:

- Introduction by the hosts.
- Explanation of the background to the Study by representatives of UK Film Council/BFI representatives
- Presentation of the findings by the study’s authors.
- Commentary by leading film professionals from a broad range of backgrounds.
- A panel and audience debate.
- Summarising remarks.

Appendix One gives examples of the views participants expressed at the seminars. Appendix Two describes the individual events.

Further details including speaker presentations can be found at:

<http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/culturalimpactseminars>.

## 3. Background to the Study

Film is a significant industry in the UK, worth around £4.5 billion per year and contributing over £1 billion to the UK’s exports. However, it is the *cultural value* of film that is more significant for public policy. It is the cultural contribution of film that motivates financial support from Government in the form of grant-in-aid to the BFI, Lottery funding for British and other culturally-motivated film activities and tax relief for British film production, and aligns state aid for film with the competition rules of the European Union.

To assist policy makers decide how much money to allocate to film, we ideally need a measure of cultural value in economic terms. However, arriving at such a measure is a challenging task. Some would say it is neither appropriate nor possible. However Government as a practical matter does make financial decisions about the level of support it gives to cultural activities, so the decision will be made anyway, with or without an objective measure. If a measure can be developed, this will assist policy making and policy implementation.

# BEYOND THE BOX OFFICE

Before trying to measure the cultural value of film, we first need to know what it is we are measuring. This was the objective of the UK Film Council's 2009 study into the cultural impact of film from 1946-2006. The task given to the researchers<sup>1</sup> was to review existing literature and data in order to arrive at a view of the impact of film on UK society in the period since the Second World War. In brief, the findings were:

- Four categories of cultural impact can be discerned: censorship and notoriety, quotations in other media, zeitgeist moments and cumulatively changed perceptions.
- Films regarded by cultural commentators as culturally significant tend to challenge or satirise the status quo, while randomly selected UK films tend to be more reflective of the cultural assumptions of the day.
- Under-represented diverse communities, Nations and Regions of the UK now have better representation on screen.
- Web-based indicators such as IMDb ratings, messages and numbers of YouTube clips may serve as proxy measures of cultural impact.
- New digital media have broadened the possibilities of cultural impact, making appreciation more democratic and disrupting the hierarchical modes of distribution of the past.

The findings were derived from a statistical study of British films since WWII, 30 case studies of culturally significant British films and the literature on UK film (including National and Regional film) containing many more examples of significant films from the period in question.

A full copy of the report can be found at:

[http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/media/pdf/f/i/CIReport\\_010709.pdf](http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/media/pdf/f/i/CIReport_010709.pdf)

## 4. Summary of the seminar discussions

Participants generally agreed that film plays a significant role in society over and above its economic impact, that role being defined here as its 'cultural impact'. The Study was broadly welcomed as putting culture back on the agenda as an important topic. The debates centred mainly around how film and other professionals understood, assessed and took into account in their work the cultural contribution of film and its impact on society.

Reflecting the findings of the Study, there was strong agreement that film is a powerful means of communication that can influence our sense of identity, well-being, community and place in the world. Cultural impact was described as 'the traces film can leave in people's memories, how it influences what people do and say'.

Debate at the seminars covered a wide range of topics such as: the international nature of film and how it transcends both time and geography; how public support and the definition of nationality can affect the types of film we see; how exhibitors, broadcasters and distributors play a significant role in influencing what we see and the impact it makes; the value of film as a multifaceted art form which can appeal across age groups and cultures; whether the film industry has a sense of moral responsibility towards its audience; the relationship of film with education; factors which can influence a film's success, including authenticity and a sense of 'ownership'; the portrayal of National and Regional themes.

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<sup>1</sup> Narval Media (Bertrand Moullier), Media Consulting Group (Paris) and Prof. Ian Christie (Birkbeck).

# BEYOND THE BOX OFFICE

Following is a summary of the key topics of discussion. Examples of the comments made on these topics can be found in Appendix One.

- **Cultural impact**

How a film's messages reach its audiences and the impact they can have was discussed at several of the events. At the European Parliament the case study of *The Full Monty* was examined and showed how the impact of a film can be felt far beyond the cinema and should no longer be seen as the product of a single kind of consumption.

It was felt that film was different from other art forms and can have a greater impact for a variety of reasons including: the way it travels internationally; the way it deals with time and space; how the technical side appeals to a younger audience; its sophistication, combining sound and visuals that appeal to the senses on many levels; the intensity of its emotional connection. These and its celebrity culture make film a communication tool like no other. It is a means of telling stories about ourselves in a way that can have broad and long-lasting impacts.

- **Public investment in film**

Much discussion referred directly or indirectly to the question of public investment in film, whether in the form of subsidies, financial incentives or quotas and whether for production, distribution or exhibition. There was a consensus among speakers and participants that public support was necessary for specialised and independent films to survive and flourish. Some British participants commented that people in other European countries seem to have a stronger sense of what is culturally important than we do in the UK and this feeds through into policy in a clearly identifiable way.

Specialised and independent films were seen as important for many reasons including the promotion of diverse stories and themes and the development of a broad range of talent. A number of speakers raised examples of films that were regarded as culturally important and which the producers claim would not have been made without public money, such as *The King's Speech*. Others noted how public support had prompted local filmmaking to be more culturally relevant and how when there had been a paucity of targeted public funding the diversity of National films had been reduced. The ability of local funding sources to create film communities with the confidence to explore a variety of ideas greater than the sum of the parts was also discussed.

The issue of quotas for specialised films was raised on a number of occasions and, more generally, the need for public support for the distribution of specialised films. It was said that the British Government supported quotas from 1929-1985 and many great filmmakers were a product of this intervention. How the French system encouraged French filmmaking was considered. European support for specialised films, through Europa Cinemas was welcomed as effective. Others raised the concern that if people were to a degree compelled to see certain films this might be counterproductive by creating the view that certain films are second rate. Exhibitors made the point that support for marketing would be needed to make any consideration of quotas worthwhile.

# BEYOND THE BOX OFFICE

- **The role of exhibitors**

The important role that exhibitors play was discussed at a number of the seminars. Some thought that specialised screens were seen as crucial for bringing a diverse array of films to the audience and promoting a more discerning audience with a broader understanding of film. The need for proper marketing support for specialised films was stressed, as in the above discussion of screen quotas. The UK Film Council Digital Screen Network was seen as particularly important for these films.

- **The role of broadcasters**

The important role of broadcasters and their influence on feature film was a common topic, as was the relationship between film and television.

It was felt that broadcasters must recognise their responsibility towards film. This arises from the fact that they control the majority of funding for audiovisual content and have privileged access to a broad swathe of the national audience. This applied in Ireland as well as in the UK. One point made was that TV is subject to a set of constraints on content, whereas film and screen agencies can support the expression of broader points of view. It was noted that TV funding for drama is decreasing.

It was recognised that TV was a great source of UK film talent and that narrative-led production in TV had been a driver of social realism in film.

- **Distributors and distribution support**

The role of distributors was discussed at several seminars, particularly the need for marketing and distribution support for independent and specialised film. European distributors were concerned about the decline in the number of good independent European films across Europe, for reasons such as difficulty in accessing finance, the decline of DVD, reduced broadcaster funding and the overall quantum of public funding for production.

The relationship between the cultural impact of film and the success of its distribution was discussed and the general view was that a film's cultural impact was not necessarily connected to its box office success. A film could be seen and referred to across a multitude of media. Messages and stories could play out to people without them even having seen the film.

- **A film's nationality or origins**

The policy issues around the definition of nationality were raised by a few speakers. How the nationality or origins of a film are defined influences the public support it receives which in turn influences the sorts of films we make and accordingly the cultural impact. It was generally acknowledged that the issue is complex and that there are inherent dangers in trying to 'pigeon-hole' a film according to its nationality. The many issues around how an audience perceives a film's nationality were discussed, as was the question of whether cultural impact is intensified by National or Regional 'ownership'. *Braveheart* for example had US funding, was partly shot in Ireland, yet was perceived by audiences as a Scottish film.

# BEYOND THE BOX OFFICE

The Dublin seminar noted the difficulty of assigning a film a unique nationality when there are so many 'cross-over' films between the UK and Ireland (eg *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, *Mona Lisa*, *My Left Foot*, *Bloody Sunday*).

- **Authenticity**

This issue of authenticity came up frequently: what is authenticity, do filmmakers have any sort of responsibility to the truth, does authenticity in films increase their economic success or on the contrary does honest portrayal of reality impact adversely on their entertainment value? The question of audience reaction to stereotyping and whether it is valid in the context of a film was also discussed.

- **Language**

The question of language was discussed. On the one hand, it was queried whether the use of original languages could be limiting and impact adversely on the international appeal of a film. On the other hand, if language helped establish a national identity and sense of ownership, these could create a platform for cultural impact and economic success. Linguistic diversity was viewed positively in the cultural context and it was felt that the advent of digital distribution with its ability to efficiently reach diverse audiences would be good for maintaining and promoting linguistic diversity. The possible negative impact of subtitles on UK and US audiences was noted.

- **Black and Asian filmmaking**

The Chapter in the Study on films involving Black and Asian talent provoked some discussion. The need for this area to be examined and for special support for Black and Asian talent was discussed, as well as the sometimes problematic on-screen portrayal of the UK's diverse social groups.

- **Film societies, film clubs and film festivals**

The importance of film societies, clubs and festivals was acknowledged. It was thought they had a role to play in promoting diverse films and building discerning audiences with an appreciation for such films.

- **The digital age**

The multitude of opportunities presented by the digital age was discussed. Digitisation is likely to reduce distribution costs and make distribution more flexible so that more specialised films will be able to travel and to find audiences. The need for adequate distribution support for independent films was raised in this context.

The Internet allows more access to information about films than ever before and provides a forum for discussion. At international events it was stressed that there is a need for more information and concerted joined-up thinking on film rights.

The 'long tail' was seen as positive for specialised movies.

# BEYOND THE BOX OFFICE

- **Short films**

Short films were referred to a number of times as a good way to cultivate talent and allow directors to 'learn the ropes'. The growth in popularity of short films adds to the plurality of film styles in the new multiplatform reality.

- **Education and learning**

The role of films in supporting education and learning, and the role of education in developing an appreciation for film was viewed as very important, with a general sense that much more could be done. Film is a powerful means of communication and an art form that can appeal to a younger audience. Teachers were sometimes 'competing' against films when teaching certain subjects such as history. It was suggested that more could be done to help children separate fact from fiction and that filmmakers could be encouraged to help package films for educational purposes.

The examples of *Cry Freedom* for teaching children about the movement against apartheid and *The Queen* for teaching recent British history were given. It was suggested that film studies had not been included in the national curriculum to the same extent as other art forms such as literature.

- **Clustering of film communities**

The importance of clustering of film communities was discussed. A community helps to create confidence and a positive environment for creativity and growth. Scotland was seen as an important example of how filmmakers have taken matters into their own hands to create an 'aspirational node'.

- **Film tourism**

At the Dublin seminar there was a discussion on film and tourism, with the comment that possibly one fifth of Irish tourism could be attributed to the image of Ireland on screen. US websites created a link between films with Irish settings and visits to Ireland, eg in relation to the 2010 film *Leap Year*.

# BEYOND THE BOX OFFICE

## 5. Conclusion

Generally it was felt that film is a complex medium that can reflect and affect our lives profoundly. While its economic value has been well documented in the UK, not enough time and resource has been put into examining its broader contribution to and impact upon society and the Study and these seminars were seen as an important step forward. While a film's *raison d'être* may be to entertain, there are many factors that affect the types of films that are made, the films we see, the films we enjoy and in turn their impact on society

## 6. What next

At the point of writing this overview, the BFI, following on from the work of the UK Film Council up to March 2011, has completed stage two of the project, a study of the cultural contribution of film in the UK through the eyes of ordinary members of the British public. Titled *Opening our eyes: How film contributes to the culture of the UK*, the report on this study is to be released in September 2011 and will be available for download from late September at: [www.bfi.org.uk/publications/openingoureyes](http://www.bfi.org.uk/publications/openingoureyes)

August 2011

# BEYOND THE BOX OFFICE

## APPENDIX ONE

### Examples of views expressed at Beyond the Box Office seminars, by topic:

#### Cultural impact

At the event in Bristol, Mark Cosgrove commented that one colleague had called culture 'the crust which forms on a jar of jam when the lid is left off' and Dick Penny reflected on the culture versus commerce debate and the view that you cannot get innovation without diversity.

Bertrand Moullier commented that the involvement of the state in defining culture is an interesting area. In France there is an intuitive sense of what is culturally important. What happens in a society where this is not clearly defined?

To the question of why is film is differentiated from TV, Ian Christie commented that film has a long shelf life and is an international art form. Film is something that can be seen a long way away in distance and time.

At the Wales event, Jonny Murray was of the view that British cinema's cultural impact is a valuable universal principle, but that it plays out differently in different parts of the UK depending on the 'local particularities of a given Nation/ Region's film cultural and industrial history.'

At the event at the European Parliament, Nessa Childers felt that film had an important part to play in both reflecting change and bringing about change. Film has a strong social and cultural relevance in Ireland. Important themes such as sectarian tensions are often suppressed in the national psyche and not discussed in day to day conversation, but they are played out in the cinema and across the arts. Indeed there is often a perception in Ireland that great events have not been properly digested until they make the big screen.

Nessa Childers also felt that it was more important than ever that we communicate in an effective cultural way. Differences in national characteristics can lead to hostility unless we understand each other's points of view.

At the event at the European Parliament, the case study on *The Full Monty* showed how its themes had been picked up internationally in many situations and media outside the cinema. Mary Honeyball was particularly interested in the fact that films with very specific cultural settings such as *The Full Monty* can travel because they carry universal themes.

Music in film also had its place in creating cultural impact. Ian Christie gave the example of *Chariots of Fire* whose music is seen as a signifier of British sporting spirit in international competition. The strength of the impact was not just about the film, the talent or the music, but the fusion of all three.

At the event in Spain, Santos Zunzunegui endorsed the fact that the cultural impact of film had not been effectively studied and a mechanism was needed to do this. The relationship between the industrial and the cultural was complex. The relationship between national and global filmmaking needs to be examined. There are very few European filmmakers like Almodóvar who can find a place for national culture on the

# BEYOND THE BOX OFFICE

world stage. He keeps traditions alive by updating and modifying them and reflects changes in modern society. The issue of whether there is such a thing as a 'European' film was debated.

Ignasi Guardans explained that the ICAA had archives and clips that were being sent around the world for reasons connected to festivals, education, studies on immigration and so on, and we needed to understand the impact they were having on how our culture was viewed abroad.

At the Bristol event, Rebecca O'Brien made the observation that Ken Loach's movies made a bigger impact internationally than in many parts of middle England. *Sweet 16*, which was located in Scotland, had been culturally owned by the youth in Scotland because they felt it genuinely represented their way of life. A gritty portrayal of the black economy may not be seen as the way people would want to portray themselves, but they liked that it was honest. She also spoke about *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* as a great example of cultural ownership. The Irish felt it was their film, set in their country and using their language. It was also British, but the British put up barriers from the start.

At the York event, Andy Harries talked about *The Queen* and *The Damned United*, saying that he always tried to make films with a meaningful message, because these were more likely to become a great story.

Estelle Morris spoke about film as a newcomer to the Arts that can so strongly tell stories about us. It brought an ability to deal with time and space like no other art form. It engaged the younger generation in a way other art forms could not. It was the means by which our community could talk about itself. Other art forms did not create the culture of celebrity like film did. It was a brilliant communication tool.

In York the question of impact was also discussed by the audience. What did it mean? If it modified behaviour, left a trace, is that impact? Films do not necessarily need to be viewed as 'good' films to live on in the memory. Did films such as *Carry on Camping* leave an impact?

In Ireland John Kelleher commented that the difference between cultural significance and impact per the study is interesting to consider. He had been at the Corona Fastnet short film festival recently. There is no cinema near the village, the nearest being about 45 miles away. Around 130 films had been exhibited- mostly short films. There was an exchange about films and film culture. The films were shown in pubs and cafes.

## Public support for film

In Scotland, Jonny Murray looked at the history of Scottish filmmaking in the 2000s, noting the relationship between cultural impact of national films and the presence or otherwise of local funding and quoting from the Study 'the presence (or not) of devolved public funding affects the content of the resulting films, which precedes and directs eventual cultural impact'. He noted that in the 1980s 'the compound cultural impact of Scottish cinema at that time was deadened because very few filmmakers could develop a body of work, partly because there were no adequate funding sources and they were dependent on London patronage (Channel 4 played a large role)'.

# BEYOND THE BOX OFFICE

Gillian Berrie explained how people were leaving Scotland in the late 1990s because they did not want to explore narrow national identity issues. It was her relationship with the Scandinavians which encouraged her to stay and explore wider topics. For them cultural impact is profound, complex and important and they cannot understand why there isn't more public funding in Scotland. There needs to be a unity of politics, culture and economics.

Eddie Dicks commented that there is a forgetfulness of the structure they have enjoyed which has enabled them to make films. How will the industry have a production future which can reflect culture?

Ian Christie felt it was important that an image of the UK needs to be seen on the screen and public support structures are needed to ensure this happens. At Bristol it was noted that the producers of *The King's Speech* had said that it would not have been made without public funding.

Ignasi Guardans commented that for films to receive national funding they must fulfil certain criteria to do with being experimental or of social or cultural significance. These films have an impact not only in Spain, but also clips and films are sent around the world for educational purposes, for festivals and studies on social issues. The criteria for film funding will impact not only on the sorts of films that are made, but also on how Spain is viewed around the world.

In York, one audience member wondered whether there would be a change in cultural efficacy as funding sources change. She had studied film in Singapore and because there was a paucity of Singaporean film she had studied British film.

## **The role of exhibitors**

Peter Edwards commented that there was an unmet need for a specialised chain in Wales. He noted the success of specialised chains in London. Different films can be seen at these chains which can give them respect in their own countries. A big popular success is needed to create a different dynamic.

In Belfast a participant asked how audiences could increase the breadth of their understanding of film when there were only two specialised screens in the whole of Northern Ireland? The importance of the Digital Screen Network was highlighted.

## **The role of the broadcasters**

In Wales, Elan Closs thought that TV had significantly influenced UK feature film, not only because great talent had come from the TV tradition into film, but also because narrative-led TV production had been a driver of social realism. Broadcasters have access to a broad swathe of audiences and they need to be aware of their responsibilities.

In Northern Ireland, Mike Catto commented on the role of the BBC NI in the 1980s in foregrounding NI issue dramas like *Elephant* which moved from studio play to film drama.

# BEYOND THE BOX OFFICE

Peter Edwards commented that broadcasters must recognise their responsibility to film because as a matter of historical accident they have the majority of the funding for audiovisual content. This view was echoed by Peter Brougham and others in Scotland. This imbalance affected the sort of content we could see. TV commissioners have a certain set of constraints. Film agencies provided a place where people could go to state a different point of view in language plurality, freedom or democracy.

In Bristol there was discussion of broadcaster funding for drama getting more difficult.

In Ireland, Pippa Cross opined that Bloody Sunday had made an impact in the UK because it was shown on television. There was no real appetite for political cinema in the UK – even though, in this case, it had been shown and had succeeded at Sundance and Berlin. She also noted that the market for independent filmmakers in the US had dropped by 66% and how important it was that people had the opportunity to see these films with challenging films and messages and get used to seeing them.

## **Distributors and distribution support**

At the event in Wales, Elan Closs questioned whether niche films and art house were these days viewed as a dirty word. She suggested that public support is needed for the marketing and distribution of local and specialised films, commending BFI intervention. This argument was supported during the debate. Others commented that support had for too long been focused on the producer. Public policy needed to be more audience focused.

At the event in Scotland, it was asked whether there was a correlation between the impact of a film and the impact of its distribution. Do cultural impact measurements become less relevant in the digital era when audiences fragment and people see things on the small screen? At the European Parliament event, Silvia Angrisani observed that there is not always a direct correlation between the box office and the audience impact of a film, which makes the measurement of cultural impact as well as economic impact very interesting.

At the event in Belfast, it was felt that distribution costs were a crucial barrier to the wider promotion and availability of UK film.

At the event in Spain, Enrique Gonzalez noted that he and his fellow distributors were very concerned about the state of independent European cinema. The number of European films for distribution each year was diminishing. There used to be 15 good movies at a time to bring into Spain and now there were only five or six. This was due to reduced DVD sales, the fact that broadcasters were investing less and it was difficult for European films to compete with US marketing budgets. High quality European films do not have the distribution support they need.

In Wales, Ian Christie commented that there was a good argument for quotas. There had been a support system in place from 1929-1985, when the British Government applied quotas. Many great British filmmakers were a product of a market that was forced to make films. He also explained that money is channelled to the cinemas from the European Commission in Brussels to incentivise cultural diversity and this worked effectively through Europa Cinemas. Bertrand Moullier explained the French

# BEYOND THE BOX OFFICE

system, which encourages investment in French feature films by *inter alia* recycling money from the broadcasters

On the other side of the argument, it was acknowledged that a degree of compulsion could lead to the view that certain movies were second rate. It should be relatively simple and cheap in this digital era to bring key films back to the cinema. Exhibitors commented that adequate distribution support would be needed for any system of quotas to work.

The issue of dedicated screens was raised at Bristol and the French system discussed.

## A film's nationality or origins

Peter Edwards commented that 'context is everything' in a debate around whether *Twin Towns* was British or Welsh. He believed that a film's identity flows from the focus of the filmmaker. If we back Welsh talent then a canon of work will emerge which is Welsh. He felt that post devolution the Welsh were on a different journey, that of a re-emerging nation, implying a tougher conversation that might affect the UK constitution.

At the Bristol event, Rebecca O'Brien observed that Ken Loach's movies had a bigger impact internationally than in many parts of middle England. *Sweet 16*, which was located in Scotland, had been culturally owned by the youth in Scotland because they felt it genuinely represented their way of life. A gritty portrayal of the black economy may not be seen as the way people would want to portray themselves, but it was honest. She also spoke about *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* as a great example of cultural ownership. The Irish felt it was their film, set in their country and using their language. But despite strong British elements it caused some controversy in Britain and the British did not seek to claim it culturally in the way the Irish did. In Ireland it had significant cultural impact and was even mentioned in the Irish Parliament. It set the record as the highest grossing Irish-made independent film.

In Scotland, the fact that *Braveheart* was shown in polls to be seen as a Scottish film was discussed. How do you reconcile a tighter definition with audience perception?

In Bristol, Alison Stirling spoke about *Flying Blind*, her movie in production, which would not have been made without public funding attached to which was the condition that it had to reflect Bristol. The regional grounding was important, but Alison had developed a locally based story with universal themes.

In York, Andy Harries said that the concept of British cinema was very important because state funding was organised on a national basis. The question of regional cinema was also raised and discussed.

In Northern Ireland, Mike Catto commented on the influence of The Troubles on filmmaking in Northern Ireland and how this had differentiated the evolution of local filmmaking.

In Ireland Lenny Abrahamson commented that national identity was a recurring theme and questioned what an Irish film was.- was it defined by the talent, the

# BEYOND THE BOX OFFICE

themes, the funding or the locations? There would always be grey areas. Only since Irish filmmakers stopped being obsessed with being Irish had the themes opened up.

## **Authenticity in filmmaking**

On authenticity Elan Closs asked whether the stories we tell ourselves are exportable or whether we have to mythologise to make them exportable? She questioned whether the more a country speaks to itself the less it speaks to the outside world.

At the event in Belfast, it was asked whether the impact of a film was heightened by it being shot in the actual locations it purported to show. Ian Christie thought not. He noted that *Braveheart* had a huge political impact in Scotland and the fact the exteriors were shot in Ireland was of no significance to audiences. Audiences responded to authenticity rather than to literal accuracy. Films dealt in illusion.

Another questioner at the event wondered whether there was an over-simplification of people and situations in film. Mike Catto felt that in a 90 minute film stereotypes were sometimes used in a short-hand way of communicating with the audience, but this may be justified in the broader and more nuanced context of the film as a whole.

At the Bristol event the question of accuracy and the importance of good research was discussed. Rebecca O'Brien said she was happy to see fantasy, but if it professed to be about real issues then there was a disconnect if the geography or historical details were incorrect.

At the event in York, Andy Harries told a story about how Peter Morgan who wrote *The Queen* had made up the words of a statement Tony Blair made to the Queen when he first went to meet her as Prime Minister in 1997. The words from the screenplay are quoted in Tony Blair's memoirs as if he actually spoke them.

Discussing the background to the shooting of *The Damned United*, Andy Harries said that wherever possible he tried to maintain accuracy and reflect the emotional truth of a story, which made it important to use the real location. He had a theory that films dislocated from their real location often will not work.

## **Language**

At the event in Wales Elan Closs wondered whether the Welsh language is a limiting feature or whether it is simply that the UK audience is not open to subtitles.

At the European Parliament event Nessa Childers felt that digital distribution would contribute to linguistic diversity.

At the Spanish event Ignasi Guardans said that language is clearly an important factor in determining a film's identity.

## **Black and Asian filmmaking**

At the Scottish event, Jonny Murray felt that the historical narrative that the authors propose in relation to British Black and Asian cinema, which stresses a long term move away from the idea of a 'cinema of duty' on the part of Black and Asian filmmakers, seems to be one which has strong affinities to post 2000 developments in Scotland.

# BEYOND THE BOX OFFICE

At the event in Belfast, it was asked what was being done to encourage new filmmakers from the Black and Asian communities?

## **Film societies and film clubs**

In Wales, John Newbigin commented on the extraordinary growth of film societies and film clubs targeted at younger audiences. These had a role to play in creating discerning audiences. Peter Edwards agreed and said that the Film Agency for Wales had funded a number of these.

## **The digital age**

Elan Closs commented that the Internet releases us from the restrictions of geography and that digital cinema should provide cheaper and more effective ways for Welsh films to find their audiences. At the event in Spain, Enrique Gonzalez Kuhn raised the recurring theme of the need for adequate distribution support for specialised films.

In Scotland, it was noted that the Internet could be revolutionary for film education. Also, comments were made on the impact of technology and the ability to find information about films through sites like IMDb. The quality and breadth of reactive public discourse allowed by the Internet is new.

At the event in Belfast, Jon Newbigin explained the importance of the roll-out of the Digital Screen Network for specialised films.

At the event at the European Parliament, Nessa Childers spoke about the need for Europe to catch up on digitisation. While 90% of American Films produced last year were available in digital format, in France, which produces more films annually than any other member state, only 50% of films were produced digitally. She noted that taking a broader range of films to less populated areas will lead to the promotion of linguistic diversity and social cohesion.

At the same event, Ian Christie stressed the importance of joined up thinking as we stood at the threshold of universal digital distribution. This was also discussed at the event in Spain.

In Bristol, Rebecca O'Brien encouraged people to consider flexible distribution strategies. With the next Loach movie they would try a 20 print cinema release to reach their traditional audience coupled with a Sky premiere download for younger broader audiences.

In Ireland Pippa Cross raised the issue of rights, commenting that for independent films particularly it is difficult to access older films because of the complexity of the rights situation and this is something that needs to be dealt with in the digital era.

## **Education**

In Wales, Ian Christie thought that film had not been widely enough adopted into the National Curriculum, compared for example to English. Elan Closs explained that the

## BEYOND THE BOX OFFICE

Welsh A Level contained a compulsory element that included studying a film. At the event in Belfast, the panel agreed there was a continuing lack of emphasis on cinema and cinema culture in the UK's education system and more work was needed in this area.

At the event in Spain a member of the audience who ran a video club stressed the importance of films in education and how many schools in Argentina used films to celebrate and learn about national culture and *The Full Monty* was a top choice.

At the event in Yorkshire, Estelle Morris talked about the important role that filmmakers could play in education. When teachers tried to teach children about the Blair era they were competing against *The Queen* for example. Movies often made indelible impressions. Filmmakers could bring more communication skills to the table than teachers. She recalled one lesson about apartheid where she showed *Cry Freedom*. It was the first time the children stayed beyond the bell. Cinema was education as well as entertainment. As a nation we care about the stories we tell our children and our culture. Film is a newcomer to the arts but can be very strongly used to tell about the past. It could deal with time and space in a way other art forms could not. Ms Morris questioned how filmmakers could help children separate fact from fiction. When was a film pure entertainment and when was it education? School teachers would like filmmakers to be their allies. She made a plea to filmmakers to beware the power of film. Young people needed to be trained to decode information.

# BEYOND THE BOX OFFICE

## APPENDIX TWO

### The Events

#### PRAGUE, 26 October 2009

Hosts: Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, Department for Film and Audiovisual Media

Where: Ministry of Culture, Prague at the 7th Meeting of the European Film Agency Research Network (EFARN)

Attendees: European Commission, European Audiovisual Observatory, Eurimages and representatives from 15 European Film Agencies

Speaker: Sean Perkins, UK Film Council

#### LONDON, 27 November 2009

**Hosts:** Birkbeck, Royal Holloway, UK Film Council

**Where:** Birkbeck College.

**Attendees:** Academic specialists from 33 UK universities, nine BFI/UKFC, 18 independents.

### Speakers

David Steele, Head of Research and Statistics, UK Film Council

Carol Comley, Head of Strategic Development, UK Film Council

Ian Christie, Professor of Film and Media History, Birkbeck College

Roy Boyne, Durham University

Christine Geraghty, University of Glasgow

Máire Messenger Davies, University of Ulster

Richard Howells, University of London

Chairs: John Hill (Royal Holloway), Sara Selwood (Editor, *Cultural Trends*), David Steele (UK Film Council).

This seminar was designed to give 'expert' scrutiny to *Stories we tell ourselves* from the points of view of a variety of academic disciplines: sociology, anthropology, visual culture, media studies, film and television.

Some of the key suggestions for the way the research programme should be taken forward were:

- Improve hypothesis formulation and testing in relation to cultural impact, so that the requirements of 'causal adequacy' are met.
- Rather than using pre-determined definitions, try to infer 'Britishness' from the evidence of film content.
- Place more emphasis on gender in the analysis of film and cultural change.
- Explore changing film aesthetics and their relationship to the wider culture.
- Acknowledge the role of education in building the cultural impact of film.
- Be more rigorous in the development and description of quantitative indicators of impact.
- Conduct audience research to explore the cultural contribution of film.

# BEYOND THE BOX OFFICE

- Expand the scope from 'impact' to the 'generation of meaning'.
- Develop a national filmography.

A full copy of the seminar report can be found at:

[http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/media/pdf/e/0/Cultural\\_Impact\\_Seminar\\_Report\\_27\\_Nov\\_2009.pdf](http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/media/pdf/e/0/Cultural_Impact_Seminar_Report_27_Nov_2009.pdf)

## **NORTHERN IRELAND, BELFAST, 9 June 2010**

Hosts: Northern Ireland Film Commission and Queens University Belfast  
Where: Queens University Belfast

### Speakers:

Mike Catto, Lecturer and Broadcaster  
Ian Christie, Professor of Film and Media History, Birkbeck College  
Bertrand Moullier, Senior Consultant, Narval Media  
Jill Tandy, Adviser to the UK Film Council  
David Steele, Head of Research and Statistics, UK Film Council  
John Newbiggin, Adviser to the UK Film Council  
Richard Williams, CEO, Northern Ireland Film Commission

Chair: Brian Henry Martin, Director of Doubleband Films and Chairman of Belfast Film Festival

## **SCOTLAND, EDINBURGH, 20 June 2010**

Hosts: Scottish Screen  
Where: Filmhouse, Edinburgh Film Festival

### Speakers:

Gilliam Berrie, Scottish Producer and Founder of Sigma films  
Ian Christie, Professor of Film and Media History, Birkbeck College  
Carol Comley, Head of Strategic Development, UK Film Council  
Ken Hay, CEO Scottish Screen  
Bertrand Moullier, Senior Consultant, NARVAL Media  
Dr Jonathan Murray, Lecturer in Film and Visual Culture at the Centre for Visual and Cultural studies

Chair, Mark Cousins, filmmaker, writer and broadcaster

## **WALES, CARDIFF 19 July 2010**

Hosts: Film Agency for Wales  
Where: Cineworld

Speakers:

# BEYOND THE BOX OFFICE

Pauline Burt, Chief Executive, Film Agency for Wales  
Elan Closs, Professor of Communications and Creative Industries, Aberystwyth University  
Ian Christie, Professor of Film and Media History, Birkbeck College  
Peter Edwards, Chair of the Film Agency for Wales  
Bertrand Moullier, Senior Consultant, NARVAL Media  
John Newbigin, Adviser to the UK Film Council  
David Steele, Head of Research and Statistics, UK Film Council

Chair: Steve Blandford, Professor of Theatre and Media, Cardiff School of Creative and Cultural Studies

## **SPAIN, SAN SEBASTIAN, September 2010**

Hosts: ICAA and San Sebastian Film Festival  
Where: San Sebastian Film Festival

Silvia Angrisani, Media Consulting Group, Paris  
Carol Comley, Head of Strategic Development, UK Film Council  
Ian Christie, Professor of Film and Media History, Birkbeck College  
Enrique Gonzalez Kuhn, Managing Director, Alta Films  
Bertrand Moullier, Senior Consultant, NARVAL Media  
Santos Zunzunegui, Film Critic and Historian

Chair: Ignasi Guardans, ICAA Director General

## **BELGIUM, BRUSSELS, 2 December 2010**

Hosts: European Parliament  
Where: European Parliament

Silvia Angrisani, Media Consulting Group, Paris  
Carol Comley, Head of Strategic Development, UK Film Council  
Nessa Childers, MEP  
Ian Christie, Professor of Film and Media History, Birkbeck College  
Bertrand Moullier, Senior Consultant, NARVAL Media

Chair: Mary Honeyball, MEP

## **ENGLAND, YORKSHIRE, 7 January 2011**

Hosts: Screen Yorkshire and University of York  
Where: University of York

Speakers:

Ian Christie, Professor of Film and Media History, Birkbeck College  
Carol Comley, Head of Strategic Development, UK Film Council  
Andy Harries, CEO, Leftbank Pictures, Film and TV Producer  
Sally Joynson, CEO Screen Yorkshire  
Estelle Morris, Former Secretary of State for Education and Skills and Minister for the Arts

# BEYOND THE BOX OFFICE

Bertrand Moullier, Senior Consultant, NARVAL Media

Chair, Andrew Higson, Professor of Film and Television, University of York

## **ENGLAND, BRISTOL, 2 February 2011**

Hosts: South West Screen and Watershed

Where: Watershed

### Speakers:

Ian Christie, Professor of Film and Media History, Birkbeck College

Carol Comley, Head of Strategic Development, UK Film Council

Bertrand Moullier, Senior Consultant, NARVAL Media

Caroline Norbury, CEO, South West Screen

Rebecca O'Brien, Producer, Sixteen Films

Dick Penny, Managing Director, Watershed

Alison Sterling, Producer

Chair: Mark Cosgrove, Head of Programme, Watershed

## **REPUBLIC OF IRELAND, DUBLIN, 20 JUNE 2011**

Hosts: Irish Film Board

Where: Irish Film Institute

### Speakers:

Lenny Abrahamson, Director

Ian Christie, Professor of Film and Media History, Birkbeck College

Carol Comley, Head of Strategic Development, UK Film Council

Pippa Cross, CrossDay Productions

James Hickey, CEO of the Irish Film Board

Bertrand Moullier, Senior Consultant, NARVAL Media

Chair: Andrew Meehan, Development Executive

Jill Tandy, Media Consultant, was the specialist adviser to the UK Film Council/ BFI in the design and implementation of the events from June 2010 onwards.