

# **“Coming to a Town Near You?”: Cultural Policy and Identity in Local Art-House Exhibition**

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## Abstract

Addressing a much neglected area of film studies this thesis deals with how 'art cinema' developed as a distinct category of cinema through the practice of film exhibition in Britain. Focusing upon how the exhibition of art cinema played an integral role in the formation of an identity for such films, the role of local cinema exhibition will be shown to be a decisive factor in how the course of art cinema progressed in the crucial period from the mid-1920s to the mid-1980s. Concentrating upon the city of Hull during this period as a local example of a country-wide trend the thesis highlights how issues of cultural policy and geography play vital roles in determining the identity of art cinema and its audience. Tracing a narrative from early instances of art cinema exhibition in Hull the thesis addresses how local cultural policy often conflicted with national policy. This negotiation of often contradictory identities resulted in an uneasy balance whereby art cinema was positioned in relation to notions of national, regional and local perception of need. The thesis addresses these concerns through a consideration of the film society movement, commercial exhibition in the city and the Hull Film Theatre (HFT) that was established as part of the British Film Institute's (BFI) regional film theatre initiative during the 1960s.

The history and operation of the BFI in relation to the regional film theatres will be shown to significantly direct the course and identity these theatres subsequently took. Rather than cater to an audience eager to experience art cinema, the thesis shows that such audiences were created by the very process of establishing and operating a regional film theatre. The creation of the county of Humberside in 1974, and the annexation of Scunthorpe Film Theatre and the Whitgift Film Theatre in Grimsby by the new Humberside County Council, will be discussed as having a marked effect upon not only provision of, but also the identity of, the three regional film theatres in Humberside. These practices are addressed here as significantly challenging the generally accepted view that art cinema is primarily characterised by the films themselves rather than the exhibition and consumption of such cinema.

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# Introduction

The title of any discipline cannot alone hope to contain, nor dictate, the parameters of investigation brought to bear on the subject of study. As Barry Barnes observes in *Interests and the Growth of Knowledge* (1977), the ‘history’ of disciplines advance not through a sequential application of abstract knowledge but from a process whereby specific historical moments dictate the ‘accepted’ knowledge and scope of any body of thought.<sup>1</sup> Such is the case with film studies as a discipline. No longer bounded by the film text alone, film studies has grown to embrace a wealth of associated subjects, disciplines, causes and effects that come to shape not only the production of films, but also their reception. The causes and effects of this reception form the core of this thesis.

Branches of academic focus have in recent years shifted away from films as fixed texts towards the study of contexts. This in turn has led to a growing body of research dealing with the way in which film, and perhaps more importantly the whole institution of cinema, communicates beyond the film text itself. The emphasis upon social, cultural, political, institutional and personal perspectives has led to a number of sub-disciplines of which reception and exhibition studies in film are the two most important in respect of research that follows, and between which this thesis is situated.

Whilst much research in exhibition studies has focused upon American, and to a lesser extent British, commercial contexts, there remains a lack of original work addressing ‘minority’ interests. Similarly, reception studies, whilst dealing in great detail with the minutiae of reception, has dealt less with the effects of such reception on the wider perspectives of cinema and cinemagoing. Dealing with such omissions this thesis addresses how exhibition practices in one country (Britain), screening a certain type of film (‘the best of World cinema’) through dedicated sites of exhibition (the film

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Barnes, *Interests and the Growth of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1977).

society movement and the British Film Institute's regional film theatres), negotiated meanings relating to the types of films screened and the viewing experiences that were often appropriated differently in specific locales (the commercial cinemas, film societies and regional film theatre of Hull).<sup>2</sup>

## **From text to context**

Research in recent years has made a concerted effort to articulate ideas concerning film that fall outside of the text itself, arguing that the way in which film is *received* is of arguably as much, if not more, importance than the text. Developing into such sub-disciplines as film reception and film exhibition these works seek to highlight how much the industrial, institutional, political, cultural and social contexts of film production, distribution and exhibition influence the ways in which film, and cinema as an institution, speaks to its audiences. Due in no small part to the availability of archival material, the tendency of existing studies is to focus upon examples that privilege an American, mainstream, experience.

Positing a 'distinction between what might be called film history and cinema history', Richard Maltby and Melvyn Stokes' introduction to *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema* presents research that 'endeavours to address the evidential and methodological issues in writing historical studies of cinema that are not centrally about films'.<sup>3</sup> With so much context to cover the text itself has a tendency to disappear. Yet it is the decades-long neglect of the many contexts of film and cinemagoing that has prompted such research so that an imbalance towards context

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<sup>2</sup> Hull Film Theatre (HFT) programme, January-March 1969.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Maltby and Melvyn Stokes, "Introduction" in *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema*, ed. Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes and Robert C. Allen (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), p.1.

is understandable. Unfortunately, as Maltby and Stokes note, the move from ‘an aesthetic history of textual relations between individuals or individual objects’ to the ‘social history of a cultural institution’ is still presented as a project of ‘writing the history of the American cinema’.<sup>4</sup> The aim of this thesis is to rectify the imbalance evidenced by an over-reliance upon the American context of early ‘mainstream’ cinema by both reception and exhibition studies in recent scholarly work.

Much contemporary work has gone to great lengths to present local ‘micro-histories’ aimed at redressing a bias in film research away from the film as the central object of study. To a similar end, recent research has begun to represent non-American cases in which Britain has figured prominently. Nevertheless one particular form of film exhibition in Britain has so far elicited little serious attention. In his recent survey of British cinema exhibition, *From Silent Screen to Multi-Screen: A History of Cinema Exhibition in Britain Since 1896* (2007), Stuart Hanson’s aim to ‘chart the development of cinema exhibition and cinema-going in Britain from the first public screening [...] through the opening of 30-screen “megaplexes”’ is undermined somewhat by the neglect of what might be termed as ‘specialist cinema’ exhibition, films that are programmed and positioned against the dominant mode of mainstream exhibition.<sup>5</sup>

Taking on a variety of guises, and reflecting the uses to which films are put, as much as their content, ‘specialist cinema’ exhibition in Britain can be traced through specific exhibition spaces. This thesis will argue that conceptualisations of ‘art cinema’ has been at least partially, if not largely, reliant debates around exhibition for its meanings and longevity. Dedicated premises such as The Film Society in London in the inter-war years (1918-1945), the various local film societies that operated out of community halls and commercial cinemas, the commercial cinemas that expanded their

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>5</sup> Stuart Hanson, *From Silent Screen to Multi-Screen: A History of Cinema Exhibition in Britain Since 1896* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p.1.



interest to ‘Continental’ cinema and the British Film Institute (BFI) sponsored regional film theatres (RFTs) that spread throughout Britain from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, were all ways of exhibiting a specific type of film. These various exhibition practices can be viewed as a significant, and much neglected, aspect of how cinema was envisioned, positioned and received in a particular historical period. Therefore, these exhibition spaces had a significant impact upon how we now come to view films and how a conceptualisation of ‘specialist cinema’ developed as a distinct category through the practice of film exhibition in Britain.<sup>6</sup>

Addressing this much neglected area of film studies, the thesis deals with how the practice of screening, and the discourse surrounding, ‘specialist cinema’ played an integral role in the formation of an identity for such films. The role of specialist exhibition venues, the film society movement, commercial cinemas and the BFI’s regional film theatres will be shown to have been decisive factors in how the course of ‘specialist cinema’ progressed in the crucial period from the mid-1920s to the mid-1980s. Concentrating upon the city of Kingston-upon-Hull (Hull) during this period as a local example of country-wide trends highlights not only specific responses to national agendas but also how issues of cultural policy and geography play vital roles in determining the identity of ‘specialist cinema’ and its audience.

Tracing a narrative from early instances of such exhibition in Hull, through to the establishment of the local film society, to the creation of the BFI-sponsored Hull Film Theatre (HFT) in 1969 and the annexation of two further regional film theatres (Grimsby and Scunthorpe) due to the creation of the county of Humberside in 1974, the thesis examines how local cultural policy often conflicts with national policy.

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<sup>6</sup> The issue of labelling will be addressed in more depth in Chapter 1. For now the label of ‘specialist cinema’ is used to reflect current distinctions made concerning a particular type of film.

The various policy directives of the BFI highlight how this negotiation of often contradictory identities resulted in an uneasy balance whereby this specialist exhibition was positioned in relation to notions of national, regional and local perceptions of need. Rather than cater to an audience eager to experience 'specialist cinema', the thesis claims that such audiences were 'created' by the very process of establishing and operating such exhibition sites. The programming of the regional film theatres and their discourse with a 'potential audience', as articulated through printed programmes, attests to the ambivalent nature of such film exhibition. Local political imperatives are shown to have significantly affected provision, whilst challenging the generally accepted view that 'specialist cinema' is primarily characterised by the films themselves, rather than the exhibition and consumption of such films.

Rather than unquestioningly accepting such simplistic binary oppositions as 'art versus commerce', 'enlightenment versus entertainment', 'tradition versus modernity' and 'Hollywood versus Europe/The World', the thesis will posit a number of more refined instances of cultural negotiation that seek to satisfy the (perceived) needs of an area and population whose own perception of need often differed from that of those in a position to dictate policy.

Concentrating upon the city of Hull from the mid-1920s to the mid-1980s, the thesis is divided into three periods in order to help chart the development of a specific type of exhibition in relation to changes in local and national policy and provision. Part One deals with the city of Hull and its cinema history from the mid-1920s to 1969 as well as focussing upon the creation and operation of the British Film Institute during this period. Part Two then addresses the period from 1969 to 1974 when the Hull Film Theatre was established through the BFI's regional film theatre initiative. Part Three deals with the period from 1974 to the mid-1980s by tracing the direction the HFT took when the county of Humberside was created and the regional film theatres of Grimsby

and Scunthorpe were annexed to the new county. Part Three also addresses the significant changes that occurred in and around the BFI during this period that had an impact upon the operation and identity of the Hull Film Theatre.

Through this periodisation a case will be developed regarding the way in which films that may now be classified as instances of ‘specialist cinema,’ accruing a significant measure of that classification through the practice of exhibition. Tracing the lineage of such exhibition on a local scale from the 1920s to the mid-1980s allows for a clearer understanding of the association between film and exhibition outlets. The development of the film society movement, the establishment of dedicated ‘continental’ cinemas and the forging of the regional film theatre initiative all played a significant role in creating an identity for a certain type of cinema that had yet to accumulate a widely used descriptive label such as ‘specialist cinema.’

Becoming the main exhibition sites for this type of film in the county, the regional film theatres of Humberside altered their identity to such an extent between their opening and the mid-1980s that to call them ‘regional film theatres’ was to question the label itself. The gradual decline in cinema admissions in Britain from a high of 1,635,000,000 in 1946 to 214,900,000 in 1969 was, to a large extent, responsible for this dramatic shift in provision from the Humberside RFTs. The nadir of 54,000,000 cinema admissions came in 1984 and directly led to the opening of the first multiplex in Britain in 1985 (The Point in Milton Keynes) and a significant alteration of programming at the Humberside RFTs, heralding a shift in the screening of ‘specialist cinema’ and a suitable point to conclude the thesis.

## Contextualising ‘Art Cinema’

To understand the development of ‘specialist cinema’ exhibition in Britain as distinct from that of any other country it is first necessary to briefly address the issue of labels. The term ‘specialist cinema’ is a current label often used to describe not only a certain type of film but also a certain type of cinema. Inherent in its usage is the notion of a whole apparatus that revolves around a certain type of film, not the least of which is exhibition. The tracing of the evolution of this label can therefore be thought of as a large part of this thesis. Used mainly by journalists, critics and those administering for the arts, ‘specialist cinema’ comes from the language of *The Guardian*, *Sight and Sound*, and the UK Film Council whose observation that ‘non-mainstream, or foreign language, or specialised films receive very limited exposure’ in the UK betrays the difficulty in labeling certain types of film.<sup>7</sup> It has yet to fully permeate the writing of academic film studies, whose preferred choice of labels stems from more established terms. Coined to refer to a specific style of film, and then to a specific cinematic institution, the label ‘art cinema’ has become a more widely adopted term than specialist cinema in academic writing over the past thirty years.

Conceptions of exactly what is meant by the term ‘art cinema’ come from many sources, not the least of which is the practice of exhibition that forms the core of this thesis. The problem with using such a term stems from the need to speak uniformly from a historical perspective that stretches from the mid-1920s to the mid-1980s, about a style of film whose characteristics had yet to be formally identified and for which the label ‘art cinema’ had yet to be coined. Academic usage of the term can be traced back to the work of David Bordwell, whose 1979 article ‘The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice’ established the formal characteristics that are now routinely associated with

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Specialised Distribution and Exhibition Strategy for the UK’, (London: UK Film Council: Strategic Development Unit, 2002), p.3.

such cinema.<sup>8</sup> Working as somewhat of a corrective to the investigation into the formal characteristics of art cinema, the notion that certain, non-American, specifically non-Hollywood, produced cinema was deserving of fuller attention developed. Seen as, variously, more serious, more realistic, more worthy or merely more deserving of concentrated attention, such cinema was discussed in terms that highlighted its difference from what was seen as the norm (mainstream Hollywood). Opposed to the genre, studio and star-driven cinema of Hollywood, 'art cinema' became synonymous with the products of certain countries, film 'movements,' or specific directors. Used as promotional tools in the marketing of such films the exhibition outlets to be discussed in this thesis can be thought to participate in the reification of the notion of 'difference' so often attributed to 'art cinema'.

Having set the academic register regarding the use of the term 'art cinema', the approach offered by Steve Neale in 'Art Cinema as Institution' was a response to Bordwell in the form of a discussion of the ways that art cinema circulates in the flow of the institution of cinema. Part of this institution is the exhibition sector that Neale classifies as a significant aspect in the process whereby 'art cinema' is constructed. This process is one that chimes with the project of this thesis.

The construction of a specific exhibition space not only for Soviet films but also for other films considered to have particular 'artistic' qualities set the seal on the construction of Art Cinema as a cinematic space distinct from that of the mainstream cinema of entertainment.<sup>9</sup>

Whilst Neale meant not only specific exhibition sites but the whole institutional apparatus that surrounds films, there still remains an issue that much recent research has sought to modify. The problem with the idea of a 'cinematic space' constructed solely

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<sup>8</sup> David Bordwell, 'The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice', *Film Criticism*, 4:1 (1979), pp.56-64.

<sup>9</sup> Steve Neale, 'Art Cinema as Institution', *Screen*, 22:1 (1981), pp.31.

for the exhibition of films that are deemed in need of a special place in which to best appreciate them is that it still privileges the film as the centre of attention. When approached from the perspective of specific national and local geographic and cultural policy a more nuanced picture emerges. Addressed this way the course ‘art cinema’ took in Britain through the practice of exhibition offers a way to characterise such cinema in a manner distinct from the formal and institutional methods previously applied.

As both Barbara Wilinsky in *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* and Haidee Wasson in *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* demonstrate, the development of ‘art cinema’ has its origins in the specific circumstances of exhibition that are unique to each location, be it country, county, cinema or institution.<sup>10</sup> While exhibition forms the core of recent work such as Stuart Hanson’s research and Mark Jancovich, Lucy Faire and Sarah Stubbings’ *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption*, which pays close attention to the local in detailing the patterns of film consumption in Nottingham from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present, such work still takes a broad subject as its focus.<sup>11</sup> A detailed historical analysis of the development of ‘art cinema’ (or, rather, ‘specialist cinema’) exhibition in Britain can highlight not only the lack of any previous sustained investigation but also the need to consider the role that such exhibition actually played in the evolution of the concept of ‘art cinema’.

The conceptual problem of characterising ‘art cinema’ in an academic context should not, however, be misapplied in an historical analysis of such cinema. Care

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<sup>10</sup> Barbara Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire with Sarah Stubbings, *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption* (London: BFI, 2003).

should be taken so as not to imply that those involved in the production, distribution and exhibition sectors ever used the term when they did not. A whole range of labels designed to refer to a variety of films will be shown to have been used throughout the period from the mid-1920s to the mid-1980s, some unique to a specific style of film and some later appropriated to refer to a wholly different set of films. This is the reason I have favoured 'specialist cinema' as a descriptive term here. The problem remains, however, of how to refer to a type of film that may now be regarded as an instance of 'art cinema,' but which was never referred to as such in the period under discussion. As this thesis addresses the evolution of a particular type of exhibition in Hull over six decades, it also traces the route taken by what is now called 'art cinema' and the slow accumulation of what we now come to regard as the characteristics of 'art cinema'. While a variety of historical terms are deployed in this thesis, therefore, it is always in the service of a larger discussion of what is now termed 'specialist' or 'art cinema'.

## **Structure of the Thesis**

### **Chapter One**

In order to approach the topic of 'art cinema' exhibition in Britain as evidenced through the local context of cinema exhibition in Hull and Humberside, it is necessary to draw upon a number of academic disciplines and sub-disciplines to situate the thesis and provide valuable context. In tune with such an aim Chapter One will provide a survey of the literature relevant to the research conducted in the thesis.

Contemporary interest in film exhibition has produced much valuable work, with two anthologies in particular extending the field of inquiry. Ina Rae Hark's

*Exhibition: The Film Reader* (2002) and Gregory A. Waller's *Moviewatching in America: A Sourcebook in the History of Film Exhibition* (2002) provide a clear indication that complex issues of film exhibition can offer a valuable insight into how social, cultural and institutional factors influence all aspects of cinemagoing. Offering multiple viewpoints on the subject of film exhibition, these works nevertheless suffer from a lack of in-depth analysis necessitated by the compendium format. Larger scale research into the exhibition sector provides opportunities to engage in much more depth with the nuances of particular periods, locations or institutions. Richard Abel's *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900-1910* (1999) and Gregory A. Waller's *Main Street Amusements: Movies and Commercial Entertainment in a Southern City, 1896-1930* (1995) both offer exemplary templates for dealing with complex issues of location, period and institutional influence in relation to film exhibition.

Research into film exhibition would not be nearly as complete if it did not take into account the reception of film. Making possible the close attention to film exhibition as a legitimate area of study, research into the reception of texts offer a valuable way to gauge the effectiveness, or not, of any exhibition strategy and to what extent reception is negotiated by the audience. Originating from work in the field of cultural studies, research into reception offers a way to understand how, according to Janet Staiger, 'the expectation of pleasure transform individuals into audiences in which social subjects choose whether to enter into the position offered by that experience'.<sup>12</sup> With spectatorship no longer treated as an abstract entity created by the film text, reception studies treats audiences as real spectators that respond to texts in a variety of often contradictory ways. Taken together, both reception and exhibition studies offer a valuable way in which to investigate the development of 'art cinema' exhibition in Britain.

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<sup>12</sup> Janet Staiger, 'Reception Studies in Film and Television', *The Film Cultures Reader*, ed. Graeme Turner (London: Routledge, 2002), p.46.



Addressing ‘art cinema’ and its reception necessarily involves discussion of an audience. When reception studies dismissed the notion of a spectator interpellated by the text it distanced itself from such abstraction by proposing an active, actual audience. In this purposeful leap from the abstract to the actual a gap was created. There exists a chance to bridge this gap by reference to the ways in which audiences are ‘imagined’ by those that seek, or even create, an outlet for a particular product. The work of Benedict Anderson on ‘Imagined Communities’ can here be invoked to investigate not only the concept of an ‘art cinema’ audience but also the community imagined as unified by the controversial creation of the county of Humberside in 1974.<sup>13</sup>

Helping to understand this annexation of a previously separate part of the country, work conducted in cultural geography will be shown to provide a way to discuss how notions of space and place effect the provision of ‘art cinema’ exhibition in a particular locale. Whilst cultural geography can help explain the relations between place and provision, the relations between national and local can also be approached through the lens of cultural policy. The particular policy applied by those in a position to dictate provision (namely the cinemas, which housed film societies and the BFI, which initiated the regional film theatres) offers a way to approach the matter of ‘need’ in relation to audiences. This ‘need’ is often manifested as prescriptive practices based upon paternalistic notions of what is best for others and mundane matters of finance. Chapter One therefore is best viewed as a gathering together of important and influential material that not only inspired and directed this thesis but which also helps to understand and interpret the research it contains.

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<sup>13</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

## Chapter Two

Developing at a different rate and in different circumstances than the American ‘art-houses’ described by Wilinsky, the provision of exhibition sites designed to screen ‘art cinema’ in Britain reached its peak during the decade from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. Rather than the independently-operated venues evident in America, however, the main form these cinemas took in Britain was as state-subsidised venues operated under the BFI’s regional film theatre initiative. Chapter Two looks in detail at this significant development through a historical analysis of the BFI. The focus will fall upon the establishment of the BFI in 1933 and its development as a cultural institution whose remit of film enlightenment changed from one of support to provision via the abandonment of its educational purview and the creation of the National Film Theatre and the regional film theatres. Focusing on historical, political and policy shifts, the direction the BFI followed is seen as one directed more by factors external to the Institute itself than by any internal progressive policy.

From 1966 to 1976 approximately 60 regional film theatres were opened around Britain in locations supposedly chosen for their geographical importance in the spread of ‘art cinema’ throughout the country. Intended to ‘establish centres throughout the country for the showing and study of film, on the lines of the National Film Theatre in London’, the BFI’s regional film theatre initiative sought to expand access to ‘art cinema’ in line with its public body remit to ‘encourage the development of the art of the film’.<sup>14</sup> This expansion of an essentially metropolitan model progressed with scant regard for local specificities and resulted in regional film theatres that had very little to do with the ‘region’. The particular narrative of the BFI will be seen to be one of mixed

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<sup>14</sup> *The National Film Theatre Outside London: Suggestions for Local Authorities* (London: BFI, 1966), p.37; James Quinn, ‘Outside London: A Report to the Governors of the British Film Institute’ (London: BFI, 1965), p.2.

motivations by the time the chapter ends in 1969 with the establishment of Hull Film Theatre as the country's 25<sup>th</sup> regional film theatre.

### **Chapter Three**

As noted, concentrating upon geographically precise locations such as the city of Hull and the county of Humberside means that issues of cultural geography cannot be ignored. Particular social, political and cultural changes in Hull and Humberside meant that responses to national movements such as the film society and regional film theatre initiatives were filtered through locally specific agendas with often contrasting and contradictory outcomes. Similarly, just as local priorities alter national policy so national policy stems from often conflicting and contradictory needs and desire. A consideration of cultural policy and the ways in which need and circumstance played a crucial role in the screening of a certain type of cinema in, firstly, the film society movement and, secondly, the regional film theatre initiative, is therefore crucial to understanding the direction such exhibition practices took.

Paying attention to these issues, Chapter Three will address the use of Hull in the thesis, alongside the associated cinematic heritage of Grimsby and Scunthorpe when annexed by the newly created county of Humberside, in order to illustrate pro- and prescriptive practices in the exhibition of 'art cinema'. Just as specific films classified as belonging to a particular genre or movement are themselves individual texts appropriated in the cause of generalisation and classification, the specific location and context of exhibition enables a much more focused concentration on the specific instances of local exhibition and reception. With almost endless possibilities to select from when considering the screening of 'art cinema' in Britain, the choice of Hull and

the county of Humberside as the focus of research is justified as neither typical nor atypical of spaces screening 'art cinema,' but rather as one historical instance of a much larger, country-wide, set of trends.

A locality is never innocent in the construction of meaning, however, and no new enterprise appears in a city without having to establish itself amongst a whole complex of existing buildings, provision, expectations and competition. For these reasons the chapter will address the history of Hull as a port city characterised by its location and economic origin, which was established by both its accessibility by water, and therefore an important export and import route, and conversely, its inaccessibility via land as it developed on the east coast of the country and the north bank of the River Humber. This paradox of accessibility firmly established the character of Hull and is reflected in the city's cinema history. With the geographical development of pre- and post-war city, and with suburban cinemas reflecting not only the shifting priorities of consumers but also the shifting identity of the city's film society and commercial continental provision, the spatial organisation of the city's cinemas formed a key element in the identity of the regional film theatre when it opened in 1969.

## **Chapter Four**

The establishment and operation of Hull Film Theatre (HFT) forms the subject of Chapter Four. The chapter will show that the HFT, as operated by Hull Corporation, grew more out of the policy of the BFI than that of the Corporation. The chapter will firstly address the origin of the film theatre in the city in the context of the regional film theatre initiative. This context enables the decisions made by both the BFI and Hull Corporation to be shown to be based not so much upon need as upon circumstance. It

also demonstrates that the exhibition of 'art cinema' in the city developed not through a lineage of previous provision, but through a desire to be a part of a national network of regional film theatres.

With policy decisions aiming to find a balance between the needs of the public and the assumptions of 'art cinema' as a category, a changing conception of what constitutes an audience becomes evident in the dialogue that HFT conducted with its *potential* audience through the editorial of its printed programmes. In their influential study of the cultural phenomenon of James Bond, *Bond and Beyond* (1987), Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott argue for the plurality of 'texts' and text-reader relations. Stating that 'neither texts nor readers [...] exist prior to or independently of the processes through which the struggle for textual meanings is socially enacted', they contend that a false hierarchy of reading practices is formulated.<sup>15</sup> Such a hierarchy ignores certain text-reader relations that are then 'written off as marginal, aberrant, quixotic or whatever'.<sup>16</sup> One such text-reader mediation discourse that has so far undergone little serious analysis is the discourse of printed film programmes.

Communicating with the public through the editorials of the printed programmes, the discourse that developed was one filled with contradictions. The film theatre positioned the films as being 'offered' to the public, and therefore there existed a situation whereby the film theatre 'selected' certain films of note for the audience to choose from, thereby becoming a cultural arbitrator in ways that the mainstream cinemas failed to do. The chapter analyses this discourse to discern just how the film theatre envisioned not only itself, but its potential audience. Addressing institutional policies for creating 'specialist' audiences within this potential audience for the HFT, the chapter will lastly highlight the way in which the audience was segmented through

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<sup>15</sup> Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond* (London: Palgrave, 1987), p.61.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

the provision of ‘members-only’ and ‘general public’ screenings that sought a certain audience, based not so much on the demographic of the potential audience but on the perception by the public of the theatre as either a ‘regional film theatre’ or a ‘public amenity’. Never simply a homogenous group, considered in opposition to the audience for commercial cinema, the audience for ‘art cinema’ has traditionally been seen as one consisting of middle-class, intellectual and aspirational people of a certain age. The approach to programming differential strands aimed at either a certain generalised, but still ‘specialist,’ potential audience; or, programming to the elements within a general audience which might have specific expectations of ‘specialist cinema’, complicates the notion of a fixed and uniform audience whilst also highlighting the way in which the films screened became part of the complex identities of the regional film theatres.

## **Chapter Five**

Having addressed the origin of the HFT and the way in which it approached its potential audience through the editorials and its ‘members-only’ strand, it is natural to progress to the consideration of its operation. Chapter Five will approach the issue of the identity of both the HFT and the concept of ‘art cinema’ beginning with a consideration of the programming of the HFT and its relationship with the BFI and other regional film theatres in the country. The place of Hull in the chain of provision for regional film theatres with regard to its film programme will be shown to be one whereby the location of Hull as a city directed its ‘art cinema’ provision.

The discourse that emerged in the printed programmes concerning the place of HFT as a venue providing a certain type of film for the city is one caught between apologist and enabler. Regularly noting the length of time that films took to reach the

HFT, the tone adopted simultaneously celebrated the cultural diversity of the city *and* bemoaned the position the city seemed to have on a national level. To complicate this process further, locating the identity that HFT sought to create for itself becomes problematic when considering the differentiated audience strands that the film theatre promoted. By establishing ‘senior-citizen’, ‘children’s’ and ‘director’ screenings the film theatre sought to differentiate its potential audience, and in this process to call into question whether the theatre was a BFI-sponsored regional film theatre, a local cultural amenity or both. The chapter will end by discussing the ways in which such moves directed the provision and reception of films screened at HFT and the extent to which these factors affect the identity of a regional film theatre.

## **Chapter Six**

The identity of Hull Film Theatre as one of the BFI’s regional film theatres had, from its establishment in 1969, relied primarily upon its relationship to the city of Hull, the local corporation and the BFI. In 1974 this situation changed dramatically with the creation of the county of Humberside, a subject that Chapter Six takes as its focus. The Local Government Act of 1972 reorganised the boundaries of local government in an attempt to create a more efficient system of regional and local control. To this end the county of Humberside was created encompassing the East Riding of Yorkshire on the north bank of the Humber estuary and North Lincolnshire on the south bank. With Hull City Council now a unitary authority within the county council, the operation of Hull Film Theatre passed to the county council, which also gained control of two other regional film theatres in the new county: Whitgift Film Theatre (in Grimsby) and Scunthorpe Film Theatre. This expansion of control, not only over a new county and its population

but also over two appropriated film theatres, highlights the need to consider both the cultural geography and policy of a region that sought to negotiate its identity through its position as perceived from both inside and outside the county.

Chapter Six will therefore consider the ensuing struggle with shifting geographies of power that saw Hull Film Theatre ceding a measure of its unique identity as a 'local' civic amenity to one amongst a trio of 'regional' film theatres. With government pressure on local councils creating tensions similar to the dynamic through which the BFI established the regional film theatres, the changing notions of what it meant to be part of a particular community will be seen to have been negotiated partially through cultural provision.

The rebranding of Humberside's three film theatres was part of a strategy both to create a financially viable operation and communicate a collective identity that sought to unify the population of a county which numbered in excess of 880,000 but which was divided in two by the River Humber. The chapter will firstly address the development of Humberside and the ways in which the new council sought to bring a measure of parity to the operation of the county's three regional film theatres and secondly explore how this resulted in a gradual erosion of the founding characteristics of 'art cinema' provision. The extent to which this provision met the needs of the audience is next addressed when considering the operation of all three Humberside film theatres and the way in which the potential audience was approached and treated within the concept of a local and loyal population. The appeal to a selective audience through the programming of themed seasons will be shown to be part of a process in which the new county council fought to negotiate an identity for the region's film theatres. The chapter will lastly address the new county and its film theatres in light of the construction of the Humber Bridge and its effect upon the operation of the film theatres



and how the years following the construction of the bridge were decisive ones for the identity of regional film theatre provision in the county.

## **Chapter Seven**

The changes in the operation and programming of the three Humberside regional film theatres is evidence of the way in which ‘art cinema’ exhibition in the region altered over the period. This alteration is placed in context by returning to wider issues such as the internal conflict in the BFI and the policies designed to bring a measure of unity to the regional film theatres. Chapter Seven will therefore deal with the programming policy of the regional film theatres as a loose network (and never the ‘third circuit’ that was continually invoked) in relation to conflicts arising with the BFI concerning the rapid expansion of the regional film theatre initiative and the debate over structured programming. Progressing in parallel with the expansion of the regional film theatres, the BFI underwent a significant period of turmoil in which policy decisions were questioned and departments reorganised. Stemming from these debates came the idea of a Regional Consortium of film theatres that was intended to bring a measure of stability to the desire to present ‘art cinema’ in the regions, which the chapter will next address. That the regional film theatres of Humberside did not join this consortium goes some way towards highlighting how much the identity of the film theatres had altered over the course of the 1970s and 1980s.

When situating the thesis in the area of film studies that concentrates upon context rather than text a clear trajectory for what is to follow becomes evident. The gradual shift in attention from films themselves to the surrounding contexts of promotion and

consumption offers ways to interpret the much neglected area of 'art cinema' in the wider context of its use by a range of both interested and uninterested parties. The specific use of the Regional Film Theatres, Hull Film Theatre and Humberside as the focus of the thesis allows the nuances of this use to be brought to the fore. Whilst others have approached the various topics that inform this thesis from a variety of academic perspectives it is hoped that what follows adds to the continuing debate. Positioning the thesis and its structure in relation to past and present academic inquiry into 'art cinema,' and its various associated topics, it is therefore appropriate to progress to a survey of the significant literature in the area under discussion.

## Moving into Exhibition: The Thesis in Context

Situating a topic as large and complex as that of the development of art cinema, as seen through regional exhibition, necessarily requires contextualisation. What follows, therefore, aims to place regional ‘art cinema’ flows in relation to pertinent historical and academic arguments regarding the study of film exhibition and reception. It begins by mapping some of the relevant work in audience and reception studies, as this will form the basis of the methodology used in this thesis.

Whilst the subject of Film Studies ostensibly takes film, or aspects closely related to film, as its core object of study, its origin as a subject takes literary theory, and the centrality of the text, as its starting points. In this conception, the film itself is privileged as bearer of authorial intent and the context of its production and reception is deemed as being of only secondary importance. The changes wrought in this position by, on the one hand, theoretical work centred mainly around the journal *Screen* in the 1970s (relating to psychoanalytic and Marxist engagements with film) and, on the other, the development of cultural studies approaches that deal with issues like class and context, have both led to the decentring of the text as the source of meaning.

Highly influential in this latter regard, the work of David Morley provides an insight into the social conditions that determine viewer responses.<sup>1</sup> Primarily working on the subject of television viewing, Morley took issue with the ‘universalist theory of the formation of subjects-in-general’ proposed by the psychoanalytic school of thought

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<sup>1</sup> See: David Morley and Charlotte Brunson, *Everyday Television: Nationwide* (London: BFI, 1978); Morley, *The Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding* (London: BFI, 1980); Morley, ‘Texts, Readers, Subjects’, in *Culture, Media, Language*, eds. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis (London: Unwin Hyman, 1980) and Morley, *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure* (London: Comedia, 1986).

and challenged the position that ‘serves to isolate the encounter of text and reader from all social and historical structures *and* from other texts’.<sup>2</sup> Rather than simply demanding a fuller engagement with the context of viewing in which discourses surrounding the consumption of texts contribute to what Stuart Hall offered as ‘preferred’, ‘negotiated’ or ‘oppositional’ readings, Morley proposed a more intricate relation between readers and texts.<sup>3</sup> In this conceptualisation, the effect the text has upon the reader is not one whereby context shapes the reading of a text, but one whereby context shapes the *way* in which such readings are taken. The particular context in which reception takes place therefore guides the manner of the reading and as such results in a more nuanced understanding of reception. As Morley states, the context of reception must therefore

be analysed in terms of the effects of social relations and structures (the extra-discursive) on the structuring of *the discursive space* – that is, of the ‘inter-discourse’. These structured relations cannot produce ‘a reading’ (and no other) in any specific instance. But they do exercise a limit on (that is, they ‘determine’) the formation of the discursive space, which in turn has a determinate effect in the practice of reading at the level of particular text-reader encounters.<sup>4</sup>

This highlighting of the relations between extra-textual and textual determinants proved to be highly influential in the field of cultural studies, whose Marxist-ideological leanings were in danger of becoming prescriptive. The emphasis in the work of Morley on the possibilities of not only supplementary but also more comprehensive accounts of the interaction of text and audience has been enthusiastically embraced in the realm of film studies by those wishing to elucidate the filmic experience and relates to the thesis in the manner in which the place of exhibition affects available interpretations of filmic texts.

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<sup>2</sup> Morley, ‘Texts, Readers, Subjects’, p.173; original emphasis.

<sup>3</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘Encoding / Decoding’, in *Culture, Media, Language*, p.128-138.

<sup>4</sup> David Morley, ‘Texts, Readers, Subjects’, p.174; original emphasis.

A second particularly notable study of text-reader relations can be found in Ien Ang's work *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (1985) concerning the audience for the television show *Dallas*, its focus on the home as a site of multiple reading strategies and the notion that 'it is in the actual confrontation between viewer and programme that pleasure is primarily generated'.<sup>5</sup> Furthering this call for a more systematic address of the audience research by Ang, Philip Corrigan, Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes, Vincent Porter, Sue Harper and Robert C. Allen led the way in film studies towards creating what Janet Staiger identifies as either 'text-activated', 'reader-activated' or 'context-activated' models of reception.<sup>6</sup>

Whether from a sense of moral guardianship, social protectionism, individual empowerment or a desire to foreground underlying psychological determinants, the study of audiences has a lineage based firmly in the need to counter the emphasis placed upon the text as the site of all meaning. As Richard Maltby has noted in relation to the 'new film historians' and the turn towards a poststructuralist approach to film and media:

The tasks of the 'new film history' of the 1970s and 1980s were threefold: to revise and correct the existing, under-researched histories that represented the available overviews of the period; to develop a film history that adhered more closely to the established protocols of academic historiography; and to provide an alternative mode of study to the dominant practices of textual interpretation, borrowed in the main from literary criticism and inflected with the concerns of semiotic, structuralist and psychoanalytic theories.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (New York: Methuen, 1985), p.10. See also: Ang, *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Audiences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p.56.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Maltby, 'On the Possibilities of Writing Cinema History from Below' (Unpublished Paper: Presented during 'The History of the Social Experience of Moviegoing: An "E-Seminar" 2006': Organised by Robert C. Allen and Kate Bowles), p.5.

Work that stemmed from this desire to counter such bias has subsequently focused a much more direct gaze upon the notion of actual, rather than abstract, audiences. Yet the notion of an ‘audience’ was never wholly absent. From the advent of the mass media of film and television, various historically positioned theories have arisen attempting to warn against, explain and, perhaps most significantly, direct the effect these media have upon the potential individual or collective audience(s). From morally instigated studies concerning ‘media effects’ and the ‘hypodermic’ model through ‘uses and gratification’, ‘encoding/decoding’ theories and the turn towards Lacanian psychoanalysis, to the current appropriation of cultural studies’ concern with empirical audience responses, research concerning media and audiences tends towards either the text or the audience, or a conflation of the two, to explain the dynamic between product and consumption.<sup>8</sup> What these valuable positions routinely fail to acknowledge, however, is the role that industrial modes of production, distribution and exhibition have in determining what, how and when products reach the audience and how this very process directs the possible reactions available to any of the above investigative models.

## **Expanding the Field: Reception Studies**

Janet Staiger’s research in the area of reception studies, most notably *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (1992) and *Perverse*

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<sup>8</sup> For a thorough engagement with the various theories informing reception studies see: Nicholas Abercrombie & Brian Longhurst, *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* (London: Sage, 1998); John Corner, ‘Reappraising Reception: Aims, Concepts and Methods’ in James Curran & Michael Gurevitch, eds. *Mass Media and Society* (London: Arnold, 1996); Robert Lapsley & Michael Westlake, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Denis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory* (London: Sage, 1987); Shaun Moores, *Interpreting Audiences: The Ethnography of Media Consumption* (London: Sage, 1993).

*Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (2000), exemplifies an approach to the study of film which privileges 'contextual factors rather than textual material or reader psychologies as most important in illuminating the reading process or interpretation'.<sup>9</sup> Whereas previous, text-centred, approaches often posited a process, be it ideological, psychoanalytic or linguistic, that led to a homogeneous conception of the 'subject', the turn towards reception envisioned not only an active, individual viewer but one whose experience was as much altered by contextual and historical factors as by personal traits. In allowing the context of consumption to enter into consideration, a vast array of questions and associated methodologies became mobilised in order that the peculiarities of reception might be more fully explicated.

With this redress of the imbalance in film studies in mind, Allen proposed 'the enlarging of the notion of exhibition and the audience to encompass a more general historical concern with reception'.<sup>10</sup> Positing four 'components' to this reconsideration of film and its relationship to audiences, Allen begins by seeking a greater engagement with the particular economic, social and historical differences in the exhibition of film as practiced throughout America. Secondly, Allen stresses the importance of addressing the audience as socially-constituted beings that experience films based on a variety of factors, many in tune and many at odds with the assumptions of the film industry.

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<sup>9</sup> Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p.xi. See also: Janet Staiger, 'Announcing Wares, Winning Patrons, Voicing Ideals: Thinking about the History and Theory of Film Advertising', *Cinema Journal*, 29:3 (Spring 1990), pp. 3-31.

<sup>10</sup> Robert C. Allen, 'From Exhibition to Reception: Reflections on the Audience in Film History', *Screen*, 31:4 (1990), p.349. For two highly influential and engaging studies in the field of exhibition studies that accept Allen's challenge and deal with cinema exhibition at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century see: Gregory A. Waller, *Main Street Amusements: Movies and Commercial Entertainment in a Southern City, 1896-1930* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995) and Richard Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). A recent eseminar entitled '*The History of the Social Experience of Moviegoing: An "Eseminar" 2006*', organised by Robert C. Allen and Kate Bowles and conducted with participants from across the world, evidenced the vibrant and innovative research continuing to be conducted in this vein.

Thirdly, he offers the notion of ‘performance’, the ‘immediate social, sensory, performative context of reception’, the surrounding context of consumption that attracts the audience, be that theatre location, design, or level of comfort.<sup>11</sup> Lastly, Allen proposes greater attention to what, borrowing from earlier literary reception theory, he calls ‘activation’, the underlying structures that such reception research points towards.<sup>12</sup> Here he is addressing the way that the process of reception itself may or may not change over time and how it may vary according to a whole host of influences addressed in his three ‘components’. Essentially addressing how particular audience groups make, or made, sense of films under particular circumstances and in particular moments, Allen aimed to add to a growing interest and body of research in reception studies that resists charges of academic solipsism and that ground reception studies of film in social, historical and economic circumstances:

Thus, charting the location of theatres in cities, hamlets, and villages, or unearthing box office records for a particular film, or reconstructing the critical discourse surrounding a given filmic text has relevance for the history of filmic reception not in itself but only in relation to what these data might suggest about the underlying structures of reception, their interaction, variability, modification over time or resistance to change.<sup>13</sup>

This growing call for a more considered approach to reception in film studies has led to a wealth of studies engaging with a variety of perspectives that examine texts in a number of positions vis-à-vis the audience.

The work of Barbara Klinger offers one way of approaching reception that places emphasis upon the heterogeneity of positions from which meaning can emanate.

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<sup>11</sup> Allen, ‘From Exhibition to Reception’, p.352.

<sup>12</sup> For a consideration of the origins of reception studies in literary theory see: Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974) and Robert Hans Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetics of Reception* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

<sup>13</sup> Allen, ‘From Exhibition to Reception’, pp.353-354.



In *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (1994), Klinger addresses the historical perception of the director from the perspective of the institutions of journalism, mass media, academia, the film industry and star publicity that shape the ways in which an ideological identity for his films is created and filtered.<sup>14</sup> This emphasis upon the multifarious nature of, not only possible reception positions and strategies, but also the historical and methodological predisposition of academic investigation, is further elaborated in a later piece by Klinger outlining the ‘radical flux of meaning brought on by changing social and historical horizons over time’.<sup>15</sup> Yet in considering historical events from the perspective of a new approach such as reception studies the issue of changes in social, cultural and academic emphasis and significance brought about by intervening years is raised.

Reception studies have endeavoured to account for any possible disparity by seeking to acknowledge the scope and aims of any investigation and by resisting any generalizing or totalizing viewpoint. Klinger confirms this, and echoes Morley, when she stresses that ‘those pursuing issues of reception interrogate such contextual elements to understand how they helped negotiate the film’s social meaning and public reception, attempting to pinpoint the meanings in circulation at a given historical moment’.<sup>16</sup> This emphasis upon a ‘given historical moment’ has proven to be one of the most useful aspects of academic research in reception studies. Pinpointing a period in which to interrogate the interactions between texts and readers provides an opportunity to access wider social, cultural, economic and political formations, the to better illustrate the diversity inherent in interpreting films and the cinemagoing experience. It is for this

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<sup>14</sup> Barbara Klinger, *Meaning and Melodrama: History, Culture and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Klinger, ‘Film History Terminable and Interminable: Recovering the Past in Reception Studies’, *Screen*, 38:2 (1997), p.111. See also: Klinger, ‘Digressions at the Cinema: Reception and Mass Culture’, *Cinema Journal*, 28:4 (Summer 1989), pp.3-19.

<sup>16</sup> Barbara Klinger, ‘Film History Terminable and Interminable’, p.114.

reason, among others, that reception studies has been adopted as the methodology in this thesis.

With the adoption, by a range of academics, of an approach that deals with the audience as constituted of real humans (as opposed to psychoanalytically determined 'subjects'), the way was opened for a vast array of research. Not all of these approaches are without associated problems, however. It is important to note that, while notionally always present, the audience, be they individual or collective, is often inaccessible. Empirical audience research, likewise, is useful only in as much as the manner in which research was undertaken illuminates the contexts surrounding any available position of reception. This lack of actual engagement has not gone unnoticed, and the use of ethnographic methodology to investigate the role of audiences in the reception of texts has become prevalent in recent years.<sup>17</sup>

A relatively more specific and methodologically distinct approach to the study of reception can be found in fan studies. Addressing texts consumed by (significantly) invested audiences, the study of fandom offers one approach to reception that engages with the myriad appropriations of texts by viewers, often challenging the notion of a preferred (hegemonic), negotiated or oppositional reading triptych. The value of such research lies in the way it highlights the economic, cultural, social and historical nature of any engagement with a text and the necessity of caution when drawing conclusions from results, especially concerning those that have invested certain aspects of their lives (money, time, energy, enthusiasm) in a text (film, star, genre, director, television programme).

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<sup>17</sup> For a fuller consideration of ethnography and audience studies see: Shaun Moores, *Interpreting Audiences: The Ethnography of Media Consumption*; Shaun Moores, *Media and Everyday Life in Modern Society* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000); Martin Barker and Kate Brooks, *Knowing Audiences: Judge Dredd, its Friends, Fans and Foes* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1998); Will Brooker and Deborah Jermyn, eds. *The Audience Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003); Jostein Gripsrud, *The Dynasty Years: Hollywood Television and Critical Media Studies* (London: Routledge, 1995).

Helen Taylor's work on the reception of *Gone with the Wind* (1939) by female fans has become an exemplar of such an approach. In its use of questionnaires and calls for correspondence from fans of the film, Taylor is able to gauge

how *Gone with the Wind* lives in the imaginations, memories and experiences of individuals and groups – that is, through the eyes of its fans who, to judge by the statistics of book sales, film and television viewing figures and a wealth of memorabilia and popular references, come from many nations, classes, races, generations and life experiences.<sup>18</sup>

The audience here is a real one connected to the text via an investment in aspect(s) of the film and its surrounding contexts of marketing, exhibition and consumption. The work of Henry Jenkins furthers this debate by looking at the way that 'fans appropriate, rethink, and rework media materials as the basis for their own social interactions and cultural exchanges'.<sup>19</sup> In this version of reception, fans appropriate texts in a manner that enables autonomy over the text and shifts the emphasis from inherent and contextual meanings to the site of their cultural engagement with the text (be that web-forum, slash fiction, fanzines or conventions).

A number of problematic issues with reception studies of film are apparent even from this brief synopsis. While the increasing use, and subtle differences in the use, of reception and audience studies offers a welcome insight into the social and cultural life of films beyond inherent meaning and value, the burgeoning research in this area has disproportionately privileged American cinema, specifically Hollywood, as its main area of focus. Based on the predominance of American films in cinemas around the world, the choice of such films as models for reception research would seem to reflect

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<sup>18</sup> Helen Taylor, *Scarlett's Women: Gone With the Wind and its Female Fans* (London: Virago, 1989), p.17-18.

<sup>19</sup> Henry Jenkins, 'Reception Theory and Audience Research: The Mystery of the Vampire's Kiss', *Reinventing Film Studies*, eds. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Arnold, 2000), p.175. See also: Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

the choices made by audiences for this style of cinema. This preponderance suggests that any determined emphasis on the reception of films from other parts of the world would lay themselves open to charges of over-compensation based solely on this imbalance. There remains an imbalance, nonetheless, and much remains to be learnt of the ways in which audiences experience not just individual non-Anglophone films, but the various categories of film that are often claimed to work in opposition to American, and specifically Hollywood, films.

### **‘Art Cinema’: The Labelling of a Discourse**

Whereas the term ‘specialist cinema’ is a label primarily used in late-20<sup>th</sup> and early-21<sup>st</sup> century writing, the thesis deals with a period pre-dating its modern development. Rather than simply reflecting a style of film, the manifestation of the term ‘art cinema’, and its many synonyms, stems from the use to which both the film industry and academia has put the term. What follows illustrates how much exhibition, reception and academia are imbricated in the meaning(s) associated with art cinema and the development of those meanings over time. Acknowledging that the etymology of a term helps in understanding its use at given times and in given situations, the origins of the discourse around, and label of, art cinema can help to explain its position in film culture and beyond. Betraying power relations that Raymond Williams notes are ‘always primarily embedded in actual relationships, and that both the meanings and relationships are typically diverse and variable, within the structures of particular social orders and the processes of social and historical change’,<sup>20</sup> paying attention to the rise and application of art cinema as a term will help to place its usage in context. This

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<sup>20</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1976), p.22.

context will enable a fuller picture to emerge of how interested parties (both industry and academic) shaped the form of a certain type of film, rather than the film shaping the label.

In attempting to describe films that are deemed to be in opposition to some notion of the 'mainstream' of cinema, a number of labels have developed historically, all accompanied by particular associations. Labels such as 'specialist film', 'continental film', 'independent film', 'foreign-language film' and 'art film' all connote notions of difference (if mainly from Hollywood, then also from previous labels, as the change and use of terms progresses). Whilst the labels above deal with the singular, another set of labels aim to signify a wider mechanism than just the single film. The mere substitution of cinema for film significantly alters the meaning attributable to 'continental cinema', 'specialist cinema', 'independent cinema', 'foreign-language cinema' and 'art cinema', with single films replaced by the whole institutions of 'cinema,' and all the associations of industrial-aesthetic complexes. Further to this, the additions of 'world cinema', 'alternative cinema', 'cultural cinema' and 'quality cinema' to this list offers a glimpse of how far from definitive or stable these classifications can be. Yet, it is the establishment of a third set of labels which is most illuminating in relation to the reification of a specific experiential understanding of non-'mainstream' cinema.

Whilst it could be argued that terms like 'classic cinema', 'cult cinema', 'transnational cinema', 'accented cinema', 'third cinema' and 'minor cinema' have either created or are in the process of creating a space either inside or in opposition to the categories named above, these are often used by only limited numbers of stakeholders. 'Art cinema' as a label in contemporary use has had the most purchase in both the film industry and academia. However, it is also a complex and conflicted term that is embedded with certain and often specific associations. For example, the label can be split into 'repertory cinema' and 'art-house' to help explain one way in which art

cinema as a category currently refers not only to films, but also to the sites of their exhibition. In the case of 'repertory cinema', a policy of screening a limited type of film is alluded to ('classics' and revivals); but, it is the more inclusive term 'art-house' that connotes an exhibition space more readily associated with a particular type of film.

A further complication is the addition of the label 'art-house films,' which explicitly refers to not only the type of film screened and the site of exhibition, but actually removes the emphasis from the film and shifts it onto the cinema. The film becomes detached from its identity as a film that usually screens in a particular type of cinema and becomes a film whose identity is inseparable from the 'art-house' itself. This leads to a situation whereby the space in which the film is screened becomes the primary route through which the film is interpreted. These fluid parameters, whereby an 'art-house film' can mean both a style of film *traditionally* programmed by the specialist cinemas *and* a film that by mere selection by a range of cultural arbiters becomes an 'art-house film', highlights a process by which selection becomes paramount.

Tracing this evolution in what can be called 'labelled' cinema illustrates that a wide variety of labels have been applied to films in order to connote notions of difference, uniqueness, cultural worth and even superiority. 'Labelled' cinema therefore refers here to any epithet used to distinguish a film or style of cinema from what has become known as the norm (Hollywood). As has often been noted, the dominance of Hollywood films in the exhibition market only fully occurred due to the strong position it built in light of the devastation of the European film industries during the First World War.<sup>21</sup> Despite this gradual dominance of the exhibition sector by Hollywood product (especially in Britain which shares a common language with America), a distinction

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<sup>21</sup> See: David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film* (London: W.W. Norton, 1996); Elizabeth Ezra, ed. *European Cinema* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2004); Pam Cook, *The Cinema Book* (London: BFI, 1985).

between films produced in America and those produced elsewhere was being made. This distinction was one the film industry was quick to employ.

## **Historicising the Art Cinema Label: Industry and Academic Usages**

Stemming from the origin of cinema as adjunct to the more established and prestigious productions of theatre, the filmed theatre productions of the French 'Société Film d'Art', established in 1908 were, according to Kenneth Macgowan 'the first highbrow motion picture movement'.<sup>22</sup> It is in the way which such films were positioned in relation to their contemporaries that the course of the 'art film' as we have come to experience it developed.

Tracing the growth of art house cinema in post-war America in *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* Barbara Wilinsky addresses the business practices, audience appeal and industry concerns surrounding the exhibition market for such films.<sup>23</sup> Beginning in the late 1910s and early 1920s, a market for specialist exhibition grew from social conditions that had established the provision of small theatres and exhibition spaces designed to meet a perceived local need. The multi-ethnic nature of New York gave rise to the ethnic theatres which catered to sections of the population that desired films that spoke directly to their culture and experience. Such was the popularity of these exhibition spaces that, as Douglas Gomery notes, 'it was just not possible to establish a foreign language cinema outside a teeming ethnic neighbourhood'.<sup>24</sup> Alongside such geographically and culturally specific theatres

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<sup>22</sup> Kenneth Macgowan quoted in Cook, *A History of Narrative Film*, p.52.

<sup>23</sup> Barbara Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), p.174.

Wilinsky notes the rise of 'little cinemas, [...] newsreel theatres, upscale suburban theatres, and private film venues' that

demonstrated the potential of establishing an alternative art film culture by setting up an entire industrial system around alternative films, distinguishing alternative theaters from mainstream theaters not just by showing different films, but also by establishing unique atmospheres within the theaters and, finally, by differentiating the little cinemas and the films shown in them from the Hollywood film industry on the basis of artistry and culture.<sup>25</sup>

It was the 'little theaters', small, independently-owned cinemas that relied on regular patrons willing to pay higher admissions for exclusive and non-mainstream films, that gave rise to the phenomenon of the 'art-house' in America. Modelling themselves on French ciné clubs and The Film Society in London, the little theater movement created an entire system of film production, distribution and exhibition in order to support the import of European films that could not sustain long bookings at traditional mainstream cinemas. The creation of distinct spaces in which to consume an alternative to Hollywood cinema was mirrored in Britain around the same time but took its impetus more from the venue than the neighbourhood.

Establishments that opened in the 1920s and 1930s in Britain, such as those in London (the Film Society, Studio One, the Academy, Everyman, Cameo-Poly and the Curzon), were venues that happened to show 'continental films' and hence were tied to a specific identity via a specific programming policy (one that could change and still retain its name, if not identity). This policy of programming 'continental films' was to lead to the burgeoning of similar venues throughout Britain (the Cosmo in Glasgow was a significant early example of such a cinema outside London), established to provide an opportunity to view films that were neglected in the mainstream exhibition sector of the period. That the majority of these endeavours took the format of the (London) Film

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<sup>25</sup> Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters*, p.46.



Society is by no means insignificant, and a tradition of screening ‘films of distinction which are not ordinarily shown commercially’ became the basis of the film society movement that spread throughout the country during the inter-war and post-war period.<sup>26</sup> The distinction between films from America and those produced elsewhere, and the quality difference often inferred, is seen in *The Penguin Film Review* of October 1947 when Julia Wolf claimed that ‘outstanding *continental films* first made their entry into this country soon after the First World War’.<sup>27</sup> Not yet adopting a meaning synonymous with risqué content that would come with relaxation of attitudes and laws in the 1960s and 1970s, ‘continental films’ were, for Wolf at least, films that ‘whatever their language [...] have a message for the whole world to read’.<sup>28</sup> Yet as the term implies, ‘continental films’ limits which films can be included and was therefore an strictly limited term and one destined for replacement by critics, had not the establishment of specific exhibition venues brought about a change in terminology first.

This change shifted the emphasis from the film to the site of exhibition, illustrated by Elizabeth Harris who wrote in 1948 that ‘a *specialised* cinema is frequently thought of as one which shows films of an origin other than British or American’.<sup>29</sup> This shift in emphasis, from the style of film exhibited to the exhibition policy (and therefore identity) of the venue in which the films were screened, plays a major role, not only in the subsequent establishment of the exhibition market in Britain but also in the consumption of film. Markedly different from the development of art cinema in America, the development of what might called here a ‘specialist’ exhibition

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<sup>26</sup> Leeds Film Society programme opening declaration September 1937 (Leeds Local Studies Library, 1937).

<sup>27</sup> Julia Wolf, ‘The Continental Film in Britain’, *The Penguin Film Review*, 4 (October 1947), p.89; emphasis added.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth M. Harris, ‘The Function of Specialised Cinema’, *The Penguin Film Review*, 6 (April 1948), p.80; original emphasis.

strand in Britain contrasts with the establishment of the 'post-war art house movement' in America as previously mentioned and addressed by Barbara Wilinsky.<sup>30</sup>

If, by the post-war period Wilinsky speaks of, an 'alternative film', 'art film' and 'art-house' culture that can be discerned in America, there appears a certain caution in the work of Penelope Houston, and an acknowledgement of a hierarchy, when she claims that 'an art-house cinema is a fine thing: an all art-house cinema would be a catastrophe'.<sup>31</sup> Significantly, it is the 'alternative' to which 'art cinema' is positioned that gives the films collected under its banner much of their meaning. With Hollywood situated as the dominant film industry whose films have the greatest exposure in the exhibition market in Britain, America itself or elsewhere, the primary differentiator in distinguishing the identity of these 'art' films is Hollywood. As such, what has come to be known as art cinema had as its foundation: firstly, a belief that film need not necessarily be designed only to entertain its audience but could be created as an 'art form' and, secondly, that there existed venues distinct from the commercial cinemas in which such films could be consumed. It should be noted that the labels discussed above were never primarily employed by the industry itself, but rather by those commenting upon the industry.

The labelling of films for export and consumption by those with an interest in alternative film cultures became a common practice long before the arrival of art cinema as a term. It was the increase in the exhibition of European cinema in the art-houses of America, and to a lesser extent in Britain, in the 1950s that helped solidify the notion of a cinema that could sustain a particular type of exhibition. The development of art cinema as a category was powered by its use as a category over and above the content of films and in this regard academic study played a significant role.

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<sup>30</sup> Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters*, p.46.

<sup>31</sup> Penelope Houston, *The Contemporary Cinema* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1963), p.170.

Writing in the 1960s and beyond, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith paid particular attention to the films of the European *auteur* directors and helped create an idea of this particular exhibition practice as centred around ‘the best of the world cinema’ in Britain. Nowell-Smith’s work is one instance of how art cinema as a discourse developed in ways often determined by its distinctiveness.<sup>32</sup> This process of defining a style of film by certain traits is symptomatic of attempts to distinguish cultural products from one another by referencing that which it is not, is opposed to or is different from. Moving through this process art cinema became associated with certain stylistic features (form and content), and contextual origins (director, movement, or country). Talking about art cinema became a way to approach issues of otherness and as such focussed upon the films or their immediate contexts to highlight their difference.

Regarding the academic study of film one article in particular can be said to have made a lasting impression upon the discourse of art cinema. David Bordwell’s 1979 article, ‘The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice’, laid the foundations for what has become one of the most dominant approaches. In his attempt to ‘consider “art cinema” as a distinct mode of film practice, possessing a definite historical existence, a set of formal conventions, and implicit viewing procedures’, Bordwell essentially creates a lens through which to view films as different to the ‘norms’ of Hollywood cinema.<sup>33</sup> Yet through this lens what becomes apparent is that rather than defining the idiosyncratic codes and conventions of ‘art cinema’ Bordwell does just the opposite, by

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<sup>32</sup> Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, ‘Italy Sotto Voce’, *Sight and Sound*, 37:3 (1968); Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Steven Ricci, eds. *Hollywood and Europe: Economic and Cultural Interchange, 1945-95* (London: BFI, 1996); Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, ed. *The Oxford History of World Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>33</sup> David Bordwell, ‘The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice’, *Film Criticism*, 4:1 (1979), p.56.

a reification of the codes and conventions of a 'classical narrative norm', a project revealed as a major concern in later publications.<sup>34</sup>

Such 'art cinema' conventions as realism, authorial expressivity, ambiguity, psychologically complex characters, reaction as opposed to action and open-ended narratives became the tropes to be sought in characterising a cinema that differed from the norm of Hollywood. It is easy to see that it is only a small step from characterising such films to creating films based upon these tropes. In so far as the term 'art film' was proclaimed by Bordwell to refer to cinema that 'foregrounds the *author* as a structure in the film's system' so the term 'art cinema' can be thought of as a totalising term used to generalise on behalf of, not of the films, but of those using the term.<sup>35</sup>

Whether employed by an exhibitor to describe a style of programming, or by an audience member to state a preference, the modern use of art cinema has connotations as to the status of those employing the term and hence an implicit value judgement as to its worth. Nevertheless the codes, conventions and 'implicit viewing procedures' Bordwell associates with 'art films' are only part of a complex system of processes, ones rooted in the historical poetics of his method, and lacking in a sense of the experiential. Written in the late 1970s the article came late in the development of the regional film theatre initiative which, along with its antecedents, had already established its own specific way of communicating the essence of 'art cinema' to audiences through various exhibition venues and practices.

As the characteristics of any given social situation become embedded in the routine of the class experiencing it, so culture becomes what Pierre Bourdieu describes

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<sup>34</sup> See: David Bordwell, *Narration and the Fiction Film* (London: Routledge, 1985); Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Bordwell, and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1996); Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> Bordwell, 'The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice', p.56; original emphasis.

as ‘not what one is but what one has, or, rather what one has become’.<sup>36</sup> This condition of possessing the requisite skills to interpret a work of art stems from the formation of identity associated with the circumstances of environment, class, upbringing and education. As such the ‘art film’ can be thought of as stemming as much from the particular circumstances and content of its production as from the (deliberately) unique form of its exhibition and the competences of those with a vested interest in its consumption. As Bourdieu further elaborates ‘the work of art considered as a symbolic asset (and not as an economic asset, which it may also be) only exists as such for a person who has the means to appropriate it, or in other words, to decipher it’.<sup>37</sup> Based so much in the circumstances of development and the associated institutions, pressures and rituals of that development, the appropriation of the necessary ‘means’ in order to both contribute to and understand a particular work of art can be thought of as particularly restricted.

Approached from a perspective that places the ‘art film’ within a distinct category in and of itself (irrespective of what it is defined against), there exists an opportunity to use this term as a way of appealing to certain traits in society (for instance, as a desire for social mobility or the need to at least appear as if this is occurring). Added to this is a concomitant desire to make available the institutions through which this advancement can occur. Through such symbolic provision of ‘cultural wealth’, the shift from the classification of films as based in the content of the film (‘continental film’, ‘art film’) to the site of exhibition (‘specialist cinemas’, ‘art-houses’) can be seen as part of the process of inculcation of many disparate and diverse films and styles under one, all-encompassing rubric.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Outline of a Theory of Art Interpretation’, *International Social Science Journal*, 2:4 (1968), p.601.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 600.

<sup>38</sup> See: Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Routledge: London, 1984; Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge:

Discussing the origin of ‘art cinema as institution’, Steve Neale observes that during the period when polemical writing on cinema was becoming institutionalised and the ideas and language for subsequent debate were being minted, ‘Art Cinema was often defined as the “enemy”’: as a bastion of “high art” ideologies, as a kind of cinema supported by *Sight and Sound* and the critical establishment, therefore, as the kind of cinema to be fought’.<sup>39</sup> It was during the 1960s and 1970s that much of what came to be discussed as the dichotomy of art versus commerce found its voice in a reaction to a previous privileging of esoteric and obscure cinema over more popular and accessible works. Nevertheless the terms of the debate neglected the industrial side of art cinema and, as Neale notes, there was

never any systematic analysis of its texts, its sources of finance, its modes and circuits of production, distribution and exhibition, its relationships to the state, the nature of the discourses used to support and promote it, the institutional basis of these discourses, the relations within and across each of these elements and the structure of the international film industry.<sup>40</sup>

This neglect has roots extending beyond the scope of this thesis, yet it is sufficient to say that the film society movement, with its genesis in notions of exclusivity and access to the neglected, offers a parallel history to the emphasis usually placed upon authorial intent and ambiguity. In documenting the exhibition history of art cinema a chance emerges to gauge just how much the content of films usually bracketed as belonging to art cinema actually dictated their selection.

The film societies in Britain offer one way to approach this topic. The genesis of the film society movement is often claimed as stemming from the desire to screen cinema that for a variety of reasons was unavailable elsewhere, these reasons including

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Polity, 1991); Bourdieu, *The Love of Art: European Museums and their Publics* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990).

<sup>39</sup> Steve Neale, ‘Art Cinema as Institution’, *Screen*, 22:1 (1981), p.12.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

strict censorship laws, prohibitive trade practices and financial risk. Here lies an important distinction between the desire to screen cinema that has been ‘neglected’ as opposed to the desire just to ‘see’ a particular film. This distinction lay in the wish to construct a group of like-minded people versus the desire to merely watch a film. This in turn led to the association of ‘alternative’ forms of cinema with a particularly successful model for their exhibition context. Countering claims that the text was the defining characteristic of ‘art cinema’, Neale considers that the

construction of a specific exhibition space not only for Soviet films but also for other films considered to have ‘artistic’ qualities set the seal on the construction of Art Cinema as a cinematic space distinct from that of the mainstream cinema of entertainment’.<sup>41</sup>

Whereas Neale’s ‘cinematic space’ is a figurative one, there is much to learn about the constitution of art cinema as a particular style of film from attention to the actual spaces in which it was exhibited. The institution of art cinema identified by Neale lays the groundwork for a more detailed analysis of the roles that exhibition spaces played in the formation of art cinema as a category, and begs the question as to exactly how much such a category was moulded by its exhibition sites. In the arguments developed throughout the thesis the cinematic space of art cinema is as much, if not more, the exhibition space rather than any ‘artistic qualities’ of the films.

Adding greatly to the roster of academic research into art cinema exhibition, whilst simultaneously signalling the lack of serious research dealing with a British context, Mike Budd’s research offers a significant study of the exhibition of art cinema in early twentieth century America. Budd’s research into the exhibition in America of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919) addresses the film text, its production and its promotion, review and reception in America to highlight how all these elements congeal

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 31.

to 'suggest some of the complexity and thickness of the matrix of determinations within which cultural products like films – and film reviews – are received'.<sup>42</sup> Highlighting how much art cinema has come to be associated with specific exhibition spaces Budd notes that 'Appearing at the enormous Capitol Theater in New York in 1921, *Caligari* was an art cinema text without the corresponding institutions of art cinema reception – theater, critical discourse, and a defined, perhaps even self-conscious audience'.<sup>43</sup> Budd here acknowledges three of the defining characteristics that had come to signify 'art cinema'.

Claiming a 'defined' and 'self-conscious' audience for art cinema highlights how much such thinking had become part of the routine way in which circulating dialogue had solidified by the 1980s around a narrow band of idiosyncratic assumptions. Screening *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* in a cinema such as the Capitol Theater in New York takes the film out of the realm of the little theaters and into a mainstream and essentially out of the minority and to the masses. Complicating the claim is the fact that the 'corresponding institutions of art cinema reception' Budd mentions were only in their infancy when this screening took place in 1921. Adding further to the problem of retrospectively interpreting art cinema practice is the issue of art cinema discourse referred to by Budd of which, writing in 1986, he himself was an early interpreter. Developing at different rates in different circumstances and different countries the art cinema label and practices vary so much that to generalise is to miss the opportunity to gain insight into a variety of local and idiosyncratic practices. All of which fed into art cinema discourse as it developed since the late 1970s, as art cinema discourse underwent a change of emphasis.

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<sup>42</sup> Michael Budd, 'The National Board of Review and the Early Art Cinema in New York: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* as Affirmative Culture' *Cinema Journal*, 26:1 (Fall 1986), p.4.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.



Speaking partially to this, Andrew Higson comments on the lack of a 'single universally accepted discourse of national cinema'.<sup>44</sup> Advancing the notion that prior use of the term 'national cinema' had been both restrictive and directive, Higson champions a use of the term to move 'towards an argument that the parameters of a national cinema should be drawn at the site of consumption as much as at the site of production'.<sup>45</sup> Whilst never developed as a term to signify a particular exhibition or consumption practice, 'national cinema' has come to represent a number of positions through which film can be discussed.

Taken on a purely literal level, the term is a way of addressing the product of a particular country, its filmmakers and its 'industrial infrastructures'.<sup>46</sup> An issue with such an approach is that it neglects to address the cultural, economic and social factors that invariably intercede in an industry where the exchange of product does much to shape that very product and alter the meanings films connote, both within and outside of a particular country (especially in Europe where physical boundaries are permeable). Extending from the emphasis placed upon the output of specific countries Higson claims that 'national cinema' can also be discussed in terms of how the films of any specific country speak to the experiences of that country, critical and complementary, individual and collective. Moving beyond the context and content approach to 'national cinema', a 'criticism-led approach' highlights the way in which parties beyond the production of the films (critics, academics, distributors and exhibitors)

tend to reduce national cinema to the terms of a quality art cinema, a culturally worthy cinema steeped in the high-cultural and / or modernist heritage of a particular nation state, rather than one which appeals to the desires and fantasies of the popular audience.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Andrew Higson, 'National Cinema', *Screen*, 30:4 (1989), p.36.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

This invocation of the audience into the debate on how this particular label has been approached heralds a finessing of the argument concerning the use of the various labels to describe a cinema other than Hollywood. An opportunity to greatly enhance the scope and deepen the understanding of how audiences experience such films is created by recognising the ‘possibility of an exhibition-led, or consumption-based, approach to national cinema’.<sup>48</sup> The tendency to limit this engagement with issues surrounding audiences to ‘question[s] of which films audiences are watching, and particularly the number of foreign, and usually American films which have high-profile distribution within a particular nation state’, he claims, misses a chance to fully exploit the relationship between expectation and provision from the perspective of audience, exhibitor and location.<sup>49</sup>

Researching one such instance of historic art cinema practice, Haidee Wasson details the creation of the Film Library at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the position it has taken in the history of art cinema exhibition in America. Developing a Film Library in 1935 to archive films in danger of being lost, destroyed or merely forgotten, the library effectively ‘mobilized particular assumptions about film, art, and audience’.<sup>50</sup> Wasson’s project belongs to the growing body of work interested in moving away from a ‘film-centered approach’ that ‘does little to help us understand the conditions under which such films came to our attention as art (or as foreign) in the first place’.<sup>51</sup>

If the characteristics of art cinema as identified by Bordwell and since elaborated on by many others belong firmly to the film text itself, recent work around national and art cinema has shown that the circumstances surrounding the appropriation by the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema*, p.5.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 27.

exhibition sector of such films predates this formal identification by many decades. As

Wasson observes:

To invoke the term *art cinema* is to reference a complex of factors including not just the films themselves or their mode of production but also crucial interfaces that form the distribution, exhibition, and discursive contexts that mediate our encounter with films and constitute the apparatus of cinema.<sup>52</sup>

Here Wasson notes the many aspects that constitute what we now know as art cinema.

The problem faced now is documenting how much, in what manner, in which order and to what degree these aspects affected the subsequent development of not only art cinema discourse but the practices that gave rise to the discourse. Wasson posits these ‘interfaces’ as contexts that ‘mediate our encounter with films’ and she highlights the process whereby films become merely one aspect in a whole chain of factors that coalesce to inform our impression of one or many films. This is useful to this study due to the manner in which film is unseated as the centre of study and placed in a chain of possible interpretation. It is in this ‘many films’ category that film movements, national output, genres and art cinema circulate, all informed by the ‘crucial interfaces’ Wasson mentions.

Documenting the rise of art cinema in America, whether through Douglas Gomery’s focus upon business practices, Barbara Wilinsky’s interest in little cinemas or Wasson’s research into how particular attributes of art cinema exhibition became irrevocably tied to the viewing practices previously associated with museum attendance, necessarily draws upon the various labels historically used to describe specific films and institutional contexts. Returning to the issue of labels that opened this section, recent trends have seen the debate around such labels encompass ‘world cinema’ and its antecedent terms. A number of texts ‘surveying’ the contemporary landscape of films

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid; original emphasis.

from around the world deal, in one manner or another, with the problem of defining 'world cinema'. In *Contemporary World Cinema* (2005) Shohini Chaudhuri claims world cinema as a term is in flux; flux stemming from the critical discourse around Third Cinema, the label applied in the 1960s to films originating from a struggle for liberation in both content and context.<sup>53</sup> Whereas First Cinema was that of Hollywood and Second Cinema that of Europe (what came to be known as art cinema), Third Cinema was that of Latin America, Africa and certain areas whose cinematic output was perceived as a statement on the imbalance of power and a critique of the 'norm'. Chaudhuri then extends this definition to include Neale's idea of art cinema as institution. She applies Neale's concept to world cinema as a category, a type of cinema that 'encapsulates the dispersed and decentred model of film production and distribution that increasingly prevails, especially if it is used to emphasise the interplays between national, regional and global levels of cinema'.<sup>54</sup>

This recognition of the category of 'world cinema' as originating from a fragmented approach to film production and distribution, rather than the film text itself, posits the label as a remedy to the dominance of Hollywood and its long-established production, distribution and exhibition model. Another way that world cinema has been discussed is when the collected cinematic output of the whole world is invoked without necessarily privileging or neglecting any one nation or institution. This particular way of approaching the term is best illustrated by the dialogue stemming from the regional film theatres to be discussed in this thesis whose promotional material often boasted of screening 'the best of the world cinema'. If this usage has lost favour of late to be replaced by the idea of a post-colonial, post-modern, transnational view of 'world cinema', it still holds enough resonance to make any absolute definition almost

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<sup>53</sup> Shohini Chaudhuri, *Contemporary World Cinema: Europe, The Middle East, East Asia and South Asia* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

impossible. As Annette Kuhn and Catherine Grant state in the introduction to their edited collection, *Screening World Cinema* (2006) 'world cinema is not so much a contested term as, frequently, a perfunctory, contradictory and catch-all one'.<sup>55</sup> Yet the work in their collection furthers the notion that 'world cinema' inherits the mantle of third cinema. Throughout the collection the claim is that discussion of such an amorphous term as world cinema must take into account the historical as well as the present and in doing so must negotiate the political, social and cultural specificities of any local, national, colonial, neo-colonial and post-colonial contexts. World cinema then, like art cinema or alternative cinema, is a term that shifts meanings dependent on how and who deploys it and, it is for this reason, that this thesis resists the temptation to apply a single term to the films being screened in regional 'art' theatres, preferring instead to use reception studies to examine how such terms are deployed in specific contexts.

In approaching world cinema from this perspective it should be noted that these contexts extend beyond the filmic, physical and geographical. Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim, in their recent edited collection *Remapping World Cinema: Identity, Culture and Politics in Film* (2006), offer an approach in which they 'propose to rethink world cinema in three ways: as a discipline, a methodology and a perspective'.<sup>56</sup> As sections of this thesis will claim, the practices of cinemas labelled as 'art cinema' and 'world cinema' very rarely exist independently of the critical and academic discussion of such. As art cinema came into academic use as a term late in the 1970s to describe a style of cinema that had established particular formal and institutional characteristics so too world cinema has become a preferred term for cinema that offers perspectives upon various responses to a global flow of images, information and identities. These

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<sup>55</sup> Catherine Grant and Annette Kuhn, eds. *Screening World Cinema: A Screen Reader* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), p.1.

<sup>56</sup> Dennison, Stephanie and Song Hwee Lim, eds. *Remapping World Cinema: Identity, Culture and Politics in Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), p.7.

responses, according to Dennison and Lim are then open to interpretation by world cinema as a discipline, primarily ‘Euro- and US-centric in their orientation’, as a methodology, bringing other disciplines and interests into the field, and as a perspective, altering the possible outcomes of research.<sup>57</sup> None of which provides a simple answer to the question ‘what is world cinema?’ any more than it is feasible or desirable to define a singular notion of ‘what is art cinema?’

Posing such a question in the 21<sup>st</sup> century invariably brings current concerns with trans-national identity flow and formation and a re-imagining of historical events and eras to the fore. This re-imagining of historical periods also involves the re-imagining of old labels. In collecting his writing on European cinema over the past forty years into one volume, Thomas Elsaesser engages with one such re-imagining.<sup>58</sup> In noting that the very idea of claiming a *European cinema* ‘has slipped between the declining relevance of “national cinemas,” and the emerging importance of “world cinema” there appears the simultaneous cementing of older terminology. The process of reaching for a definition of world cinema and exactly what it is, or more tellingly is not, has given new life to older terms such as art cinema.

As Elsaesser skilfully dissects the various levels at which the discourse of European cinema either falters or flies, he reiterates the concept of art cinema as one belonging to the notion of the *auteur*, as of minority appeal, in need of subsidy and, most tellingly in the context of this thesis, belonging in ‘the *art-house* or *program cinema*’.<sup>59</sup> As evidenced above, the function of the various labels that art cinema has operated under since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is inseparable from the uses to which they have been put, whether by the cinema industry itself or academic study art cinema as a category. Yet from Neale to the recent work of Elsaesser, the conditions of exhibition

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 491-492.

have routinely been claimed to be a formative factor in the definition and identity of art cinema. This thesis therefore employs an understanding of art cinema as a constantly shifting, unstable category that can expand to take in other terms from world cinema to cult cinema, or contract to describe single films as 'art films,' depending on who is employing the term and to what ends. However, research into the exhibition sector of the film industry as a whole has only just begun to open up this valuable field of inquiry.

### **The Site of Meaning: Exhibition Studies**

Following from the growth of reception studies in film, exhibition studies seek to highlight often neglected interactions between text and context. Reflecting this, the site of consumption has become a recent concern in film studies with a variety of approaches offering testament to the diversity and wealth of research in this area. Much akin to early attempts to categorise audiences, initial work on film exhibition came from the industry itself and its desire to gauge the success or failure of certain practices, venues and locations in order to better function as a business. Yet the particularities of the context provided by the exhibition site for the reception of films have traditionally been seen as of little interest in the study of film.

A tentative remedy to this deficiency was proposed by Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery in *Film History: Theory and Practice* (1985) whereby, in charting the principle ways in which film history has traditionally been approached (from Aesthetic, Technological, Economic and Social perspectives), a call for more localised research

into exhibition was made.<sup>60</sup> Gomery answered this call himself with *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (1992), in which he addressed film exhibition from a business perspective.<sup>61</sup> By focussing primarily upon an economic history of film exhibition in America, Gomery discusses how the ‘economic structure and behavior of an industry often leads to important social change’.<sup>62</sup> He notes that technological, social and aesthetic factors are never unidirectional, only affecting exhibition as the end in a chain of supply, but that exhibition is often a powerful determiner of exactly what gets made and in what manner. Recognising that the study of exhibition offers a wealth of material relating to the reception of film, two recent anthologies specifically addressing film exhibition have further added to the profile of this branch of film studies. *Moviegoing in America: A Sourcebook in the History of Film Exhibition* (2001) and *Exhibition: The Film Reader* (2001) both attempt to present film exhibition as offering an insight into the varying and often culturally specific differences in film reception.<sup>63</sup>

Acknowledging that the supply chain from production to exhibition leaves trace marks upon a text that over time become yet more, what Tony Bennett calls ‘pluri-dimensional social destinies’, Ina Rae Hark rightly draws attention to the need to concentrate upon wider issues than the text.<sup>64</sup> Distribution, access and consumption are significant aspects of an exhibition sector that would benefit from a more concentrated focus on business, architecture, local history, urban geography, marketing and

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<sup>60</sup> Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1985).

<sup>61</sup> Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

<sup>62</sup> Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, p.xviii.

<sup>63</sup> Ina Rae Hark, ed. *Exhibition: The Film Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002); Gregory A. Waller, ed. *Moviegoing in America: A Sourcebook in the History of Film Exhibition* (London: Blackwell, 2002).

<sup>64</sup> Tony Bennett quoted in Valda Blundell, John Shepard and Ian Taylor, ‘Editors’ Introduction’, *Relocating Cultural Studies: Developments in Theory and Research*, ed. Valda Blundell, John Shepard and Ian Taylor (London: Routledge, 1993), p.17; Hark, *Exhibition: The Film Reader*, p.1.



reception. Echoing this sentiment, Gregory A. Waller praises the recent tendency in such research that

foregrounds the role of promotion and advertising in a consumer society and charts both the emergence of a metropolitan-based national culture and the enduring appeal of locality, neighbourhood, and community.<sup>65</sup>

This latter emphasis upon aspects of locality has emerged recently in a number of works seeking to highlight the local as a way to elucidate the specificities of exhibition and the varying experiences from location to location of what has traditionally been seen as a homogeneous practice. Yet the history of art cinema exhibition in Britain has seldom been addressed, the peculiarities of its development often clouded by attention to the American context or a focus upon the individual films that have come to characterise art cinema.

Reassessing the state of the ‘historical turn’ in film studies, a body of work he himself helped inaugurate over twenty years ago with *Film History: Theory and Practice*, Robert C. Allen recently notes the ‘suspicion of the empirical’ still prevalent in a field that cannot quite decentre the text as the principal focus. Surveying research addressing neglected areas of early cinemagoing in America that ‘foregrounds regions, places, spaces, communities, audiences, and historical periods that, despite pioneering work by some resourceful scholars remain marginalized, unintegrated, or simply unexamined’, Allen nevertheless fortifies the view that it is through the examination of an *American* experience that a counter to textual predominance can best be enacted.<sup>66</sup> Research into film reception often seeks to foreground the strengths of the research by documenting examples of moviegoing that highlight the methodological process of

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<sup>65</sup> Waller, *Moviegoing in America*, p.5.

<sup>66</sup> Robert C. Allen, ‘Relocating American Film History: The “Problem” of the Empirical’, *Cultural Studies*, 20:1 (2006), p.61.

empiricism itself. Such research begins by unearthing archival documentation and collecting oral histories of neglected people and places. This process often highlights the ‘modernity thesis’ whereby the experience of film exhibition and reception coincided with technological, societal, economic and cultural changes in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The privileging of early, rural, often mainstream, American experiences of moviegoing neglects a significant amount of possible subjects and experiences, not the least of which is the exhibition of art cinema in Britain. Whether as a matter of geographical bias towards the concentration of art cinemas in London, as lamentation about exhibitor’s continual reluctance for experimental and adventurous programming policy or the lack of state subsidised intervention, discussion of art cinema exhibition in Britain has traditionally taken a jaundiced view of the situation. As Roy Stafford notes in addressing cinema-going, distribution and exhibition in 1950s Britain, foreign films represented a growing attraction for cinemagoers, but their ‘popularity [...] is partly (perhaps mainly) attributable to their depictions of adult sexual behaviour which were not possible in British films’.<sup>67</sup> This association of foreign films and explicit material was such that ‘explicit sexuality became expected in foreign films, to such an extent that, “foreign film”, “art film”, “adult film” and “sex film” were for several years almost synonyms’.<sup>68</sup> Recognising this, Mark Betz’s work on the promotional material for a similar type of art cinema in America highlights the fact such cinema was simultaneously criticized and defended by critics and that ‘this “yes, but” gesture regarding sexploitation and art cinema is ubiquitous in scholarly work on the latter, and

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<sup>67</sup> Roy Stafford, ‘What’s Showing at the Gaumont? Rethinking the Study of British Cinema in the 1950s’, *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, 4 (2001), p.99.

<sup>68</sup> Peter Lev, *The Euro-American Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), p.13.

its precedents extend back to the first serious explicators of art cinema'.<sup>69</sup> Herein lays evidence of the sustained lack of emphasis upon the specificities of art cinema and exhibition in Britain as it relates to the growth of the art cinema market. It is only recently that work centred on exhibition of any form of cinema has begun to surface.

In his survey of how 'changing geographies of film exhibition have shaped cinema-going in Britain', Phil Hubbard relates the shift towards 'Multi Leisure Parks, Family Entertainment Centres and Regional Shopping Centres' as having a profound effect upon the way in which film is received, often to the 'exclusion of a significant faction of society from these new spaces of consumption'.<sup>70</sup> Focussing on Leicester as an example of changing exhibition contexts and consumption, Hubbard concludes that 'the city is thus responding to changing consumer desires at the same time that it shapes those desires'.<sup>71</sup> In furthering the debate around exhibition in the context of local specificities, Hubbard joins a growing number of academics interested in the dynamic found between the specific instances of local exhibition and the wider forces that often shape (and, as will be argued in this thesis, are shaped by) these crucial contacts between industry and public. In a similar focus on geographical differences in the exhibition sector in Britain, Barry Doyle surveys literature addressing these differences between 1934 and 1994 with particular emphasis upon regional disparity.<sup>72</sup> Finding that industrial areas of Britain in Lancashire, Cheshire, Scotland, the Midlands and

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<sup>69</sup> Mark Betz, 'Art, Exploitation, Underground' in *Defining Cult Movies*, eds. Mark Jancovich, Antonio Lazaro Reboll, Julian Stringer and Andy Willis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp.202-222.

<sup>70</sup> Phil Hubbard, 'Going Out (of Town): New Geographies of Cinema-Going in the UK', *Scope: An Online Journal of Film Studies*, February 2004, <<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/film/scopearchive/articles/going-out.htm>> [accessed 14 February 2007].

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Barry Doyle, 'The Geography of Cinemagoing in Great Britain, 1934-1994: A Comment', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 23:1 (2003), pp.59-71; see also: Jeffrey Richards, 'Cinemagoing in Worktown: Regional Film Audiences in 1930s Britain', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 14:2 (1994), pp.147-166.

Yorkshire, which had previously been home to a majority of cinemas during the 1930s and 1940s, suffered the most due to cinema closures in the 1950s and 60s, Doyle notes that

the geographical shift in cinemagoing both reflected and shaped a growing tendency for cinema attendance to become an occasional, considered event reserved for a wealthy southern middle class and in this mirrored developments in other areas, especially professional football and county cricket where the move up-market and down south was well underway by the 1960s.<sup>73</sup>

This geographical shift in the concentration of cinemas during the period was obviously linked to changes in leisure patterns in Britain and changing uses and needs with regard to film consumption. This change can in turn be linked to ideas concerning cultural geography, taste, cultural capital and differentiation that have begun to illuminate the debate concerning the value and use of art in society, with the work of Pierre Bourdieu informing and expanding this discourse.

Adopting Bourdieu's notion of distinction and cultural capital, whereby the objects, practices and whole systems of classifying and structuring our existence (habitus) that we routinely encounter can only ever be constituted in relation to other objects, practices and systems, recent work has taken this notion and applied it to the realm of film exhibition and consumption. Working in an American context, Janna Jones' research into 'the contemporary perceptions and practices of audience members at the Tampa Theater [in Florida]' notes how changes in social and cultural needs of the Tampa area and its citizens altered the use of the theatre over the years from one of popular city-centre leisure retreat to one of high-cultural consumption.<sup>74</sup> Beginning with

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<sup>73</sup> Doyle, 'The Geography of Cinemagoing in Great Britain, 1934-1994: A Comment', p.69.

<sup>74</sup> Janna Jones, 'Finding a Place at the Downtown Picture Palace: The Tampa Theater, Florida', in *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, eds. Mark Sheil and Tony Fitzmaurice (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p.123.

suburbanization in the 1960s, the change in the theatre's perceived identity and subsequent usage is irrevocably linked with the geographical reorganisation of the city from one of leisure and retail usage to one of primarily business use. Alongside this shift in use comes an attendant shift in identity, with Jones noting:

With the loss of its popularity, the theater was transformed into a treasure for some of Tampa's residents who perceive themselves as members of a high(er) culture. Many of the patrons who go to the picture palace imagine the Tampa Theater to be a place of *distinction* and they envisage themselves as part of a community of discriminating patrons.<sup>75</sup>

It is here that the notion of an audience as doubly constructive of and constructed by both an exhibition site and its programmed films becomes useful. This process highlights the almost endless complexity of film reception which this thesis seeks to address in terms of what has come to be known as art cinema. Distinctions can be drawn at various points in what can be called a continuum of cultural provision. From the production of a text that will fit into a category that exists in part due to the existence of another (Hollywood vs 'Art Cinema') to the consumption of a text in large part constrained by these distinctions (multiplex vs 'Art-House'), these labels are themselves the product of sets of choices all playing a role in the provision and consumption of culture. In seeking to highlight the way in which cultural capital is utilised by those wishing to enjoy the associated benefits of a certain habitus, those implicated in its use aim to separate the cultural object from the economic and social context in which the object is produced and consumed. This 'disavowal of the economic' therefore separates the product from the context of consumption and renders the object less mutable to external forces such as trend, circumstance and indifference. Yet the context in which 'art films' are exhibited does lend a legitimacy to both the films and the audience itself.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 124; original emphasis.

As Bourdieu claims in his discussion of an exhibition of modern furniture and utensils held in the prestigious Lille Museum in Denmark ‘the mere fact that works are consecrated by being exhibited in a consecrated place is sufficient, in itself, profoundly to change their signification and, more precisely, to raise the level of their emission’.<sup>76</sup>

The turn towards taste cultures to explain consumer choice has proven useful in a number of studies and helps signal the interdependency and mutual difficulties experienced by exhibition sites and their geographical locations which simultaneously give and are given meaning by this connection. Highlighting the importance of place and the meanings associated with them, Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire focus upon a British context for their research into film consumption. They place the social aspects of consuming film in all its technological and exhibitory forms within a consideration of the cultural geography of Nottingham film consumption from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>77</sup> Offering a welcome corrective to the bias towards America, the study succeeds in demonstrating that ‘the meanings of different modes of film consumption are tied to their location within the cultural geography of the city’, and as such further complicates the notion that the text has any claim on inherent meaning.<sup>78</sup> Whereas studies such as these aid immensely in our understanding of the nature of film consumption and its associated causes and effects, there still remains a lack of emphasis upon specific contexts of film exhibition.

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<sup>76</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Outline of a Theory of Art Interpretation’, *International Social Science Journal*, 2:4 (1968), p.599.

<sup>77</sup> Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire, *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption* (London: BFI, 2003).

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

## The Local Site: Cultural Geography

Doreen Massey states in her work into the spatial relations that determine the identity of locations that

processes take place over space, the facts of distance or closeness, of geographical variation between areas, of the individual character and meaning of specific places and regions – all these are essential to the operation of social processes themselves.<sup>79</sup>

It is the acknowledgement of these processes that gives this thesis on the operation of cultural policy and the tensions inherent in the conception and provision of such policy much of its focus. As work in the field of cultural geography has shown, the identities of a location are bound in a chain of signifiers that spread from a relational attitude to a number of factors that affect the various meanings associated with place. Expressed another way, as Mike Crang has stated ‘cultural geography looks at the way different processes come together in particular places and how those places develop meaning for people’.<sup>80</sup> Stemming from the concern with natural environments and their interrelations with societies, cultural geography draws attention to the complexity of the relationships between not only natural environments and society but also the impact cultural industries have upon the perception and reference points available to people to create meaning out of their immediate environment.

Exploring the ways in which meaning is accrued and made sense of, cultural geography posits the idea that old certainties based on Marxist notions of the economy as the fundamental arbiter of power relations within society are no longer able to explain the complexity of modern life. Technological, economic, interpersonal and

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<sup>79</sup> Doreen Massey, *Spatial Divisions of Labour: Social Structures and the Geography of Production* (Macmillan: London: 1984), p.52.

<sup>80</sup> Mike Crang, *Cultural Geography* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.3.

cultural ‘advancement’ have rendered old models obsolete. The recent work of Tim Hall, Simon Roodhouse, Stephen Graham, Simon Marvin, Sharon Zukin, Saskia Sassen and, especially, Doreen Massey all claim that the meanings generated within and between geographical spaces in relation to cultural practices are often shaped by larger forces. Such forces are what Rustom Bharucha identifies as ‘network[s] of social, historical, political, and economic contexts at once localized and mediated by global and national agencies’.<sup>81</sup> One example of such a national agency and the impact it had upon a local instance is the central concern of this thesis, the negotiations that occurred relating to the identity of the BFI’s regional film theatres and, especially, the regional film theatre located in the city of Hull.

The need to appreciate the tensions that occur in relation to the identities that specific locations foster, what Benedict Anderson called ‘Imagined Communities’, is of significant importance in the consideration of how national, regional and local interests conceived of cultural provision and its place within their respective agendas. The BFI and its regional film theatre initiative provide a way to view these tensions as a study in how local and regional identity is influenced by a national organisation. Anderson’s research stresses that the decline in religious belief and use of Latin in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Rustom Bharucha, *The Politics of Cultural Practice: Thinking Through Theatre in the Age of Globalization*, (London: Athlone, 2000), p.1. See also: Simon Roodhouse, *Cultural Quarters: Principles and Practices* (Bristol: Intellect, 2006); Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Polity Press: Cambridge, 1994); Massey, *Spatial Divisions of Labour: Social Structures and the Geography of Production* (Macmillan: London, 1984); Massey and John Allen, eds. *Uneven Re-Development: Cities and Regions in Transition* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1998); Massey, John Allen and Steve Pile, eds. *City Worlds* (London: Routledge, 1999); Tim Hall, ‘Opening up Public Art’s Spaces: Art, Regeneration and Audience’, in *Cultures and Settlements*, eds. M. Miles and N Kirkham (Bristol: Intellect, 2003); Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, ‘The Social and Cultural Life of a City’, in *The City Cultures Reader*, eds. Malcolm Miles and Tim Hall, with Iain Borden (London: Routledge, 2004); Sharon Zukin, *The Culture of Cities* (London: Blackwell, 1995); Saskia Sassen, ‘A New Geography of Centers and Margins: Summary and Implications’, in *The City Reader*, eds. Richard T. LeGates and Frederic Stout (London: Routledge, 1996).



century Europe, coupled with the rise of capitalism and print technology, made it necessary to invent communities that could only ever be imagined because

the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion.<sup>82</sup>

Whilst Anderson here addresses the nation as the emerging focus of attention in the period he addresses, regional and local identities provide the focus of this thesis. Whereas Anderson discusses the nation as imagined because not all of its inhabitants will meet or know of the others, regions, locales and communities can be thought of as equally imagined. Used to aid an understanding of how audiences conceive of themselves as part of a community of like-minded individuals consuming ‘art cinema’ in an ‘art-house’, the concept of the imagined community can also help explain the need to address a new ‘community’ in the county of Humberside through such policies as shared programming of the region’s film theatres. The traditional dichotomies of rural/urban and centre/suburb prove difficult to sustain in such formations and, as Saskia Sassen notes ‘become increasingly inadequate to deal with intraperipheral conflicts’.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless such conceptions of the metropolitan/periphery nexus and the idealised sense of place associated with historical periodisation fail to take into account the often contradictory positions held by the same institution, group or individual. Whereas it could be claimed that Hull’s identity developed primarily due to its location, the changing characteristics of this identity are bound by what this location means to those who have the power to shape that identity. The city was seen as associated with a moribund fishing industry, and as such the perception of Hull from outside the city formed itself into a vision steeped in nostalgia wedded to the decline of industry,

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<sup>82</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso: London, 1991), p.6.

<sup>83</sup> Sassen, ‘A New Geography of Centers and Margins’, p.210.

prospect, and therefore a lack of progress. Seen from inside of Hull, the very same situation manifests itself in a number of ways tied to changes nationally from an industrial to a service economy and a feeling of local abandonment in a time of need. Responses to the creation of the county of Humberside were closely linked to the final ratification of the Humber Bridge development, a scheme designed to link the north and south banks of the Humber, which commenced two years before the creation of Humberside in 1974, and was intended for completion in 1976.

Discussed in terms of regeneration by the county council, yet contested by a vocal section of the local population, the regional changes taking place in Hull in the early 1970s are symptomatic of the emerging notion of cities and regions as commodities to be marketed, with the use of culture a significant part of this strategy. Public art and its spaces became one way in which the local could be offered to the wider population. Tim Hall calls these ‘art works that endorse “official” views of the city, those of local authorities and commercial developers [...] and celebrate and enhance the spaces produced by these interests’.<sup>84</sup> In the context of Hull and Humberside during the 1970s, the changing uses and conceptions of physical culture (the creation of the regional film theatres and the decline of mainstream cinemas) and symbolic culture (the creation of Humberside) are symptomatic of a trend moving away from ideas of the democratic and liberating power of culture towards a conception of culture as self-sufficient and symbolic. This ‘symbolic economy’ operates to present spaces, places and institutions as belonging to a specific location where, as Sharon Zukin notes ‘cultural activities are supposed to lift us out of the mire of our everyday lives and into the sacred spaces of ritualized pleasures’.<sup>85</sup> The changing geography of cities enabled this project to gain credence with suburbanisation and gentrification shifting relations with regard to the city centre of class and business and allowing

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<sup>84</sup> Tim Hall, ‘Opening up Public Art’s Spaces’, p.47.

<sup>85</sup> Zukin, *The Culture of Cities*, p.12.

culture to replace industry as a means of attracting both interest and loyalty. The presentation of culture as enlightenment thus became married to the realisation that ‘culture is also a powerful way of controlling cities’ and that ‘as a source of images and memories, it symbolizes “who belongs” in specific places’.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless these ‘specific places’ of cultural and geographical enactment are never the product of unmediated design and a consideration of cultural policy, a strand of cultural inquiry that has gained much attention in recent years, allows a fuller picture of exactly what structures, implicit or explicit, shape cultural provision.

### **The Site of Provision: Cultural Policy**

The particular reasoning behind any attempt to provide a service, whether conceived as profit or provision, can help illuminate not only the circumstances in which policy is created but the desired effects of such policy. As Justin Lewis and Toby Miller argue:

Cultural policies produce and animate institutions, practices, and agencies. One of their goals is to find, serve, and nurture a sense of belonging, through educational institutions and cultural industries.<sup>87</sup>

Often viewed in terms of the effects cultural practices have upon those they purportedly exist to ‘serve’, an engagement with cultural policy enables an explanation of subsidised provision that articulates what Tony Bennett, following Foucault, calls the ‘governmentalization of culture’. As he explains:

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Justin Lewis and Toby Miller, ‘Introduction’, in *Critical Cultural Policy Studies: A Reader*, eds. Justin Lewis and Toby Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p.2.

The emergence of the modern relations between high and popular culture can be viewed as an artefact of government in view of the degree to which the former was – and still is – subjected to a governmental technologization or instrumentalization in order to render it useful as a means of social management.<sup>88</sup>

Seen this way, the BFI's regional film theatre initiative becomes caught in the shift in the policy framework of government that was designed to make culture central to any conception of 'good citizenship' and move away from the conception of great authors, works and canonisation. This complex of positions whereby those initiating cultural policy present an implicit rhetoric of 'belonging' to a subsidised cultural network (implied as unsustainable without the good intentions of government) is shown to be part of a shift towards using culture as a form of legitimisation for government. When Labour won the general election in Britain in 1964 they instigated a change in the way that the arts were administered and approached as an area in need of subsidy. Whilst undoubtedly aiding many worthy causes, including the regional film theatre initiative, it also creates a situation whereby such causes become the beneficiaries of an 'enlightened' government. Bennett's recent work on museums as 'vehicles for popular education' on the one hand and 'instruments for the reform of public manners' on the other, can help explain the competing, and often conflicting, values associated with the regional film theatres. Struggling to find a consensus as to their worth, the regional film theatres progressed through a variety of guises that manifested themselves in a number of ways. One point of view concerning the creation of the regional film theatres was as a response to criticism of a metropolitan (London) bias for the exhibition of 'the best of the World Cinema'. Another perspective was as an attempt to determine the cultural predilection of the nation (or at least certain sections of it). The initiative could also be seen as a worthwhile project of arts subsidisation embarked upon by a new government

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<sup>88</sup> Tony Bennett, 'Useful Culture', in *Relocating Cultural Studies: Developments in Theory and Research*, p.71.

(the Labour government of 1964). Yet another viewpoint could see the film theatres as a strategy of cultural legitimisation on the part of local authorities attempting to gain from associations with London. As the initiative developed over the course of the 1970s it could be seen to change in emphasis from the geographical dispersion of theatres in the early years of expansion to one of self-sustainability and local need. Nevertheless, as will be illustrated later in the thesis, the point of view that found most favour during the 1970s was as a failed attempt to emulate a metropolitan project in a wide variety of individual locations that paid little heed to local specificities.

As Bennett illustrates in relation to the museum, the display of objects became paramount in the democratising of the space of culture for the people. The change in attitude afforded by ‘new principles of scientific knowledge’ allowed a policy shift whereby ‘the common or ordinary object, accorded a representative function, was accorded priority over the exotic or unusual; and things were arranged as parts of series rather than as unique items’.<sup>89</sup> This grouping of objects in order to better illustrate a more comprehensible lineage and relevance to the general public finds consort in the programming policy of the National Film Theatre in London at the time of the origin of the regional film theatre expansion where seasonal programming of films was the norm. The situation in the regions progressed in a different direction, however, with programming only becoming an issue when used as one of a number of arguments against the rapid expansion of the regional film theatres into the regions. Revealed in programmes, policy documents, BFI and council minutes, contemporary reports and personal memoirs, the changing conception, use and application of cultural policy play a significant role in the evolution, development and subsequent use of ‘art cinema’ as a category of film production, exhibition and consumption.

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<sup>89</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.10.

Whilst the subject of this thesis has not been documented in any great depth before, the survey of relevant literature discussed above is testament to the wealth of research that feeds into the subject to be discussed. Due to the range of disciplines, subjects and approaches mentioned in this survey it is natural to encounter different methodologies. These differing methodologies are understandably used in their respective research projects in order to best approach the subject under review. This thesis is no different.

In the shift from text to context as evidenced by the recent rise of reception and exhibition studies there can be observed a marked tendency to ignore the former in favour of the latter. While this can to a large extent be explained by an understandable desire to foreground the many ways in which film studies have been underserved by focussing so narrowly upon the text itself, the omission of the text from contextual accounts often misses valuable opportunities for connections. Empirical research and archival study are by far the most relevant research methodologies for the presentation of material that deals so intimately with history but to limit oneself to the context purely because it has formed the basis for a discipline is to do a disservice to the subject. A number of research methodologies can yield significant findings if the material demands it and so it is with this thesis. Minutes of meetings, from councils and institutions, newspaper reports, industry correspondence, secondary literature, departmental reports and promotional material all offer valuable access to the history of art cinema exhibition in Britain. All can be considered important in the discourse of art cinema exhibition locally and nationally and some can even be considered 'texts' in their own right. In the rush to shift focus away from films themselves to the surrounding contexts of production, distribution and exhibition it should not be forgotten that the close analysis of such texts can often yield much that is important. In detailing the emergence of a discourse of art cinema in Britain the thesis will therefore not only use archival and

empirical methods to interpret its findings but also textual analysis, not so much of the films themselves, but of the material so readily used in the promotion and discussion of a type of film heavily imbued with notions of context.

**Part One**  
**1925-1969**