

While this has led to the importance of pre-sales (and, correspondingly, the role of the sales agent who pre-sells territories on a commission basis), it has also meant that, in the absence of traditional sources of finance, producers have increasingly had to look to government-backed agencies and television for support. Thus, for all of the government's determination that it should 'stand on its own feet', it is apparent that what stability the British film industry enjoyed during the 1980s largely derived from a continuing dependence upon the state—either directly in the form of help from state-funded agencies such as British Screen or indirectly through television, and Channel 4 in particular, for which, through licence and regulation, the government possessed a statutory responsibility. Indeed, so important had the relationship between film and television become by the end of the 1980s that, in 1990, the Policy Studies Institute suggested that 'the only factor which appears to have prevented the wholesale collapse of the British film production industry has been the increasing involvement of UK television companies'.⁵⁶ It is this role played by television with which the following chapter will now deal.

⁵⁶ Andrew Feist and Robert Hutchison (eds.), *Cultural Trends*, no. 6 (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1990), 33.

chapter 3

Film and Television A New Relationship

Towards a Fourth Channel

As a result of the economic problems that faced the film industry in the 1980s, it was television that was destined to play an increasingly significant role in the maintenance of British film production. The origins of this relationship between film and television may be traced back to the Annan report on the future of British broadcasting which was published in 1977.¹ The influence of this report, however, was indirect rather than direct. For although the report considered a number of proposals to require television to finance the film industry—including a levy on film transmission, a rise in the cost to television of films shown, use of the levy on excess profits of the Independent Television companies to support filmmaking, and the encouragement of BBC and ITV production funds—it rejected them all on the grounds that the development of a formal relationship between film and television was unlikely to lead to 'the rejuvenation of the British film production industry'.² Despite this pessimism concerning the role that television could play in supporting film production, it was, none the less, the Annan report that paved the way for the relationship between film and television that was to develop during the following decade.

It did so by virtue of its recommendations for a fourth channel. The idea of a fourth television channel had been in circulation since the 1960s but it was not until the 1970s that it really gained momentum.³ With the Annan report, however, its precise character began to take shape. The report was concerned that the new channel should not simply be an extension of the BBC/ITV duopoly and rejected the proposal for an ITV2. Instead it proposed a new fourth channel which would 'encourage productions which say something new in new ways'.⁴

¹ *Report of the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting*, Cmnd. 6753 (London: HMSO, 1977).

² *Ibid.* 342.

³ A useful overview of the pre-history of Channel 4 is provided by Sylvia Harvey, 'Channel 4 Television: From Annan to Grade', in Stuart Hood (ed.), *Behind the Screens: The Structure of British Television in the Nineties* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1994).

⁴ *Report of the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting*, 482.

This would be run by a new Open Broadcasting Authority and financed from a variety of sources including advertising, sponsorship, and grants. The Labour government largely accepted these recommendations but, before it found the time to pass the relevant legislation, it lost the 1979 general election. There were then fears that the incoming Conservative government, under Mrs Thatcher, would simply revert to the idea of ITV2 but the old-style Tory Home Secretary, William Whitelaw, persevered with the proposal, albeit in somewhat modified form, and Channel 4 was successfully launched as the fourth national television channel on 2 November 1982.

Channel 4

Instead of the Open Broadcasting Authority envisaged by the Annan report, the new channel became a subsidiary of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) which also regulated the ITV companies. However, although within the IBA's ambit, the channel was none the less charged with a clear 'public service' remit to provide a distinctive television service. This meant that, under the Broadcasting Acts of 1980 and 1981, the channel was obliged to appeal to tastes and interests not generally catered for by the existing television services as well as to 'encourage innovation and experiment in the form and content of programmes'.⁵ The channel was also provided with a clear set of financial arrangements which avoided some of the difficulties to which Annan's proposals for the OBA might have led. Thus, while its programme-making was to be financed purely by advertising, it was to be done so indirectly in the form of a subscription paid by the ITV companies as a percentage of their net advertising revenues. In return the ITV companies had the right to sell and collect the income from Channel 4's own advertising time. This arrangement provided particularly important financial protection for Channel 4 in its early years as it was not until 1987 that the channel's advertising revenue exceeded its income from the television companies.⁶

The other significant feature of the channel was its adoption of the 'publishing model' of broadcasting envisaged by Annan which, in the context of British broadcasting, was to prove its most notable innovation. Thus, unlike the existing BBC and ITV companies, Channel 4 did not itself operate as a production house but either purchased or commissioned work from independent production companies, the ITV companies, or foreign sources. Its role in sustaining an independent production sector was especially significant and, for the year ending 31 March 1990, 54 per cent of the channel's output was provided by 526 different independent production companies.⁷ In fact it was this development which was probably at the heart of the channel's survival during the Thatcher

⁵ *Broadcasting Act 1981* (London: HMSO, 1982), 13.

⁶ Channel Four Television Company Ltd., *Report and Accounts for year ending 31 March 1990* (London, 1990), 44.

⁷ *Ibid.* 14 and 17.

years. For although it is often regarded as a paradox that the channel was able to support television programming which was so often at ideological odds with prevailing government attitudes, its ability to do so was partly reliant upon its role as a 'Trojan horse' in the restructuring of the economic basis of British television towards a more 'flexible', 'post-Fordist' mode of production that other television companies were then obliged to follow. Thus, in 1987, the government was sufficiently happy with the pattern of independent production, reduced overheads, and flexible labour that the Channel had encouraged to announce that it expected the BBC and ITV to follow suit and to commission 25 per cent of their output from independent production companies by 1992 (a quota subsequently enshrined in the Broadcasting Act of 1990).

It is this combination of public-service principles and a commissioning model of broadcasting that provided the context for the channel's support for film. The channel's first Chief Executive, Jeremy Isaacs, was aware of the role which German and Italian television had played in encouraging film and, in his application for the post in 1980, he expressed his desire 'to make, or help make, films of feature length for television here, for the cinema abroad'.⁸ At this stage, he did not envisage a theatrical release for Channel 4 films in Britain. This was partly because union agreements made 'TV only' films cheaper to produce and partly because a cinema showing would make an early television transmission difficult. Under a barring policy operated by the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association (CEA), such films could only be shown three years after their initial cinema exhibition and this made television investment much less attractive than it might otherwise have been. Despite this obstacle, the channel persevered in providing some of its first commissions with a cinema release. Colin Gregg's *Remembrance* was the first of these and received a short theatrical run in June 1982, a few months prior to the channel beginning transmission. Further 'Film on Four' began to appear in cinemas on a selective basis and the channel also reached an agreement, in 1986, with the CEA that the bar would not apply to films costing under £1.25 million (a figure subsequently increased to £4 million in 1988). However, because of the channel's pressing requirements for programming, many of the early films enjoyed only a short cinema run. Thus, even successful films, such as *The Ploughman's Lunch* (1983) which kicked off the second season of 'Film on Four' in November 1983, were unable to enjoy as full a cinema release as they might have deserved.⁹ Subsequently, as the channel built up a backlog of films, it became normal to allow those films which merited it a proper cinema (and sometimes video) release and a longer television holdback.

This use of a theatrical platform by Channel 4 was not entirely without precedent: London Weekend Television, for example, had shown Peter Hall's *Akenfield* in cinemas in 1975. However, what was new was the level of commitment to supporting film production and the numbers and range of 'television

⁸ Jeremy Isaacs, *Storm Over 4: A Personal Account* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), 25. Isaacs also indicates that his experience as chairman of the British Film Institute Production Board made him conscious of the needs of independent filmmakers for an additional television outlet.

⁹ See Chris Auty, 'Films in Boxes', *Stills*, 8 (Sept.-Oct. 1983), 40-1.

films' subsequently provided with a cinema release. Thus, according to the channel's own calculations, between 1982 and 1992, it invested £91 million in 264 different works.¹⁰ During the 1980s the budget for 'Film on Four' rose from around £6 million to £12 million and the funding of films took three main forms: full funding, co-investment, and the pre-purchase of television rights. Full funding was most common in the early days when the track record of the channel was as yet unproven but it continued to be an option for the channel. Thus, in the case of Ken Loach's *Riff-Raff* (1990), the channel put up the whole of the £750,000 budget. Perhaps, the most notable example of full funding, however, was *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), a film which initially looked quite uncommercial but subsequently proved to be one of the channel's biggest successes of the 1980s and virtually became identified as the 'archetypal' 'Film on Four'. However, such successes notwithstanding, the vast bulk of films with which the channel were involved depended upon co-funding. This usually involved the channel providing a combination of equity investment and payment for TV rights, although in some cases—such as *A Room with a View* (1985) and *Mona Lisa* (1986)—the channel simply pre-bought the television licence.¹¹ The practice of pre-purchasing was, however, a significant development in its own right insofar as television had, in the past, generally bought the rights to television transmission after a film was made rather than before.

For David Rose, Senior Commissioning Editor for Fiction, the policy of 'Film on Four' was to make films 'on comparatively modest budgets . . . written and directed by established filmmakers and introducing new writing and directing talents'.¹² Although the channel displayed a commendable internationalism in its choice of investments, providing backing, for example, to films such as Wim Wenders' *Paris, Texas* (1984), Agnès Varda's *Vagabonde* (1985), and Andrei Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice* (1986), its main commitment was to indigenous British productions, especially original screenplays on contemporary social and political topics. This was certainly characteristic of many of the most popular or critically successful of the films such as *The Ploughman's Lunch* (1983), *Wetherby* (1985), *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985), *No Surrender* (1985), *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987), *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1986), *High Hopes* (1988), and *Riff-Raff* (1990) although it by no means exhausts the range of films which 'Film on Four' supported which also included 'heritage' costume drama (e.g. *Heat and Dust* (1982), *A Room with a View*, *A Month in the Country* (1987)), comedy (e.g. *She'll Be Wearing Pink Pyjamas* (1984)), crime drama (e.g. *Mona Lisa*, *Stormy Monday* (1987)), and the British 'arthouse' film (e.g. *Comrades* (1986), *Fatherland* (1986), *Caravaggio* (1986), the work of Peter Greenaway).

¹⁰ Monopolies and Mergers Commission, *Films: A Report on the Supply of Films for Exhibition in Cinemas in the UK* Cm. 2673 (London: HMSO, 1994), 151. These figures, however, cover more than just 'Film on Four' and seem to include some titles acquired after completion.

¹¹ As a result, the contribution of the channel to individual films varied enormously, ranging from as little as £17,000 to over £1.3 million and from 2 per cent to 100 per cent of the budget. See John Pym who provides financial information on virtually all 136 films transmitted as part of the 'Film on Four' slot between 1982 and the end of 1991 in *Film on Four: A Survey 1982/1991* (London: BFI, 1992).

¹² Quoted in Nigel Willmott, 'The Saviour of the Silver Screen', *Broadcast* (28 Oct. 1983), 13–14.

However, although it is 'Film on Four' with which the channel has been most associated, it was not the only way in which film production was supported. This was also done through the Department of Independent Film and Video which, under its first senior commissioning editor Alan Fountain, was responsible for financing rather more experimental work than 'Film on Four' would generally have contemplated.¹³ Given the growth during the 1980s of a primarily commercial independent sector, the term 'independent' can be misleading. In the case of the Department of Independent Film and Video, however, the idea of independence was specifically linked to a tradition of social and aesthetic radicalism, outside of the mainstream of film and television production.¹⁴ As Fountain explained, the department was concerned to support 'the sort of work unlikely to be taken up elsewhere in the television system' and which would 'represent the alternative, oppositional voice'.¹⁵ The main outlet for this material was *The Eleventh Hour* which supported work both from outside the UK (especially the 'Third World') as well as more unorthodox work from within, particularly political documentaries which defied the conventional TV norms of 'balance' and 'impartiality'. As a part of its policy, the department also supported low-budget independent cinema which typically deviated from the norms of mainstream cinema and sought to combine aesthetic self-reflexivity with political radicalism. Thus, films supported included Ken McMullen's *Ghost Dance* (1983) and *Zina* (1985), Sally Potter's *The Gold Diggers* (1983), Mick Eaton's *Darkest England* (1984), Derek Jarman's *The Last of England* (1987), Peter Wollen's *Friendship's Death* (1987), Lezli-An Barrett's *Business as Usual* (1987), and Ron Peck's *Empire State* (1987).

The department also provided support to the independent film and video workshop sector which had first emerged in the late 1960s. Under the Workshop Declaration—agreed initially in 1982 with the ACTT, the British Film Institute, the Regional Arts Association, and the Independent Filmmakers Association—Channel 4 committed itself to the financing of a number of 'franchised' non-profit-making workshops. Such workshops were to be run co-operatively and were to be committed to 'integrated practice', i.e. not only production but exhibition, distribution, and the development of 'audiences, research, education, and community work' more generally.¹⁶ Although only a proportion of all UK workshops benefited from the franchise system it, none the less, helped to bring stability and financial security to those (about a dozen) which did. In return the channel was provided with a supply of programming for both its *Eleventh Hour*

¹³ In addition to the Drama Department and the Independent Film and Video Department, the channel also supported film through the Multicultural Affairs Department (which provided pre-purchase moneys for films such as *Salaam Bombay* (1988) and *Mississippi Masala* (1991)) and the Films Acquisition Department (which pre-bought a number of films including, for example, *Drop Dead Fred* (1991)).

¹⁴ A good overview of the history of independent cinema is provided by Simon Blanchard and Sylvia Harvey, 'The Post-war Independent Cinema—Structure and Organisation', in James Curran and Vincent Porter (eds.), *British Cinema History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983).

¹⁵ Alan Fountain quoted in *AIP & Co.*, no. 51 (Feb. 1984), 18.

¹⁶ *ACTT Workshop Declaration* (ACTT: London, 1984), 1.

and *People to People* slots, including a number of notable film features such as Trade Film's *Ends and Means* (1984), Frontroom's *Acceptable Levels* (1984), Amber's *Seacoal* (1985) and *In Fading Light* (1989), Cinema Action's *Rocinante* (1986), Sankofa's *The Passion of Remembrance* (1986), Derry Film and Video's *Hush-a-Bye Baby* (1989) and, the first video feature designed for theatrical release, Birmingham Film and Video Workshop's *Out of Order* (1987). The particular importance of this work was its strong connections to the regions and concern to give a voice to those communities (blacks, women, the working class) which traditionally lacked access to filmmaking. The growth of black British filmmaking, in particular, was a key development of the 1980s (see Chapter 11) and was largely nurtured by the workshop movement.

Channel 4 also contributed to British filmmaking by providing support to other organizations involved in film production. In the case of British Screen, the channel was not only one of the original funders but also a major co-investor. Thus, in the period 1987–90, Channel 4 was involved in thirty-two of the forty-nine films backed by British Screen.¹⁷ From 1985 onwards, Channel 4 also became the British Film Institute Production Fund's most consistent source of outside finance. Towards the end of the 1970s, the Production Fund, under Peter Sainsbury (who was Head of Production until 1985 when he was succeeded by Colin MacCabe), had shifted its focus towards low-budget features, providing support for films such as Chris Petit's *Radio On* (1979), Menelik Shabazz's *Burning an Illusion* (1981), Pat Murphy's *Maeve* (1981), Edward Bennett's *Ascendancy* (1983), Sally Potter's *The Gold Diggers* (1983), and most successfully of all, Peter Greenaway's *The Draughtsman's Contract* (1982). The Production Board was supported by the British Film Fund Agency but with the abolition of the Eady levy (which funded the BFFA) its future was put at risk. A deal was negotiated with Channel 4 which provided, in return for television rights, around £500,000 per year towards features, the production of shorts, and development. This money permitted the Board to continue to support a number of 'innovative' features including *Caravaggio* (1986), *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988), *Venus Peter* (1989), *Play Me Something* (1989), *Melancholia* (1989), *Fellow Traveller* (1989), and *Young Soul Rebels* (1991).¹⁸

The BFI Production Board also provided the model for the Scottish Film Production Fund which was established in 1982 with financial backing from the Scottish Education Department and the Scottish Arts Council. Channel Four and BBC Scotland provided additional funding later. Operating on an overall budget of about £214,000 by the end of the 1980s, the fund was committed to the promotion of Scottish cinema and was involved in supporting a range of shorts, documentaries, and features. While it did not have the means to become a major investor in feature production, it did, none the less, play an important

¹⁷ See *Screen Finance* (6 Oct. 1993), 13–14. Subsequent to this, however, cooperation between the two declined due to a deal which British Screen struck with the satellite broadcaster BSkyB in April 1994.

¹⁸ The policy of the the BFI's production division is described at this time as involving a commitment to 'work which is innovative in form, content, production method or use of film and video technology'. See British Film Institute, *Annual Report, 1988–89* (London: BFI, 1989), 18.

role in the development and making of *Venus Peter* (1989) and provided consistent support for the work of Timothy Neat, including his first feature *Play Me Something* (1989).¹⁹ Channel 4 itself also invested directly in a number of Scottish features during the 1980s including *Ill Fares the Land* (1982), *Another Time, Another Place* (1983), *Living Apart Together* (1983), *Heavenly Pursuits* (1986), and the first film feature in Scots Gaelic, *Hero* (1982).

In the case of Wales, the most significant contribution of Channel 4 was the establishment of its Welsh-language television service, Sianel Pedwar Cymru (S4C). S4C was responsible for about twenty-five hours a week of Welsh-language programmes and commissioned around five films or 90-minute documentaries per year. While most of these were for television transmission, some did receive a theatrical release, most notably in the case of Stephen Bayly's *Coming Up Roses* (1986) and Karl Francis's *Boy Soldier* (1986).²⁰ As for Northern Ireland, Channel 4 probably had less impact than in the other 'national regions'. Nevertheless, its support for the workshop movement did make possible the production of the first film features to be made in Northern Ireland since the 1930s, most notably Frontroom and Belfast Film Workshop's *Acceptable Levels* (1983) and Derry Film and Video's *Hush-a-Bye Baby* (1989).

ITV and BBC

However, if Channel 4, by a variety of means, was the most consistent and committed of television companies involved in film production it was not completely on its own. Indeed, the very success of its film policies, and the kudos it enjoyed as a result of them, encouraged other television companies to become involved in film production as well. One company, Thames Television had, in fact, established its own filmmaking subsidiary, Euston Films, as far back as 1971 but, apart from the occasional TV spin-off such as *Sweeney!* (1976), had mainly been involved in the production of television series, shot on film. During the mid-1980s the company decided to return to film production, financing in part *Bellman and True* (1987), *A Month in the Country* (1987), *Consuming Passions* (1988), and *Dealers* (1989) and financing in full *The Courier* (1987).

Central Television also established its own film subsidiary, Zenith Productions, in October 1984. Central had previously financed Stephen Frears' *The Hit* (1984) and Zenith continued with a policy of medium-budget feature investment, producing amongst others *Wetherby* (1985), *Sid and Nancy* (1986), *Wish*

¹⁹ For a discussion of the Scottish Film Production Fund by its first chairman, see Ian Lockerbie, 'Pictures in a Small Country: The Scottish Film Production Fund', in Eddie Dick (ed.), *From Limelight to Satellite: A Scottish Film Book* (Glasgow and London: Scottish Film Council and BFI, 1990). For a different assessment, critical of the Board's move into features (built on in the 1990s), see Colin McArthur, 'In Praise of a Poor Cinema', *Sight and Sound* (Aug. 1993).

²⁰ More recently, films such as *Elenya* (1992), *Gadael Lenin/Leaving Lenin* (1993), and the Oscar-nominated *Hedd Wyn* (1992) have increased awareness of the films which S4C has supported. See David Berry, *Wales and Cinema: The First Hundred Years* (Cardiff and London: University of Wales Press and BFI, 1994), esp. Section Four 'Television and a Welsh Film "Mini-boom"'.

You Were Here (1987), *Prick Up Your Ears* (1987), and *Personal Services* (1987). In October 1987 the company was sold to Carlton Communications who then merged it with their own production unit, The Moving Picture Company. This had been acquired the previous year and, under producer Nigel Stafford-Clark, had been responsible for a number of early 'Films on Four' such as *The Bad Sister* (1983, shot, in fact, on video), *Parker* (1984), and *The Assam Garden* (1985). The new Zenith embarked upon a further slate of productions (including *For Queen and Country*, *The Wolves of Willoughby*, *Patty Hearst*, and *Paris By Night*, all 1988) but ran into financial difficulties as a result of problems with US distributors. In November 1989, Carlton sold 49 per cent of the company to Paramount, following which there was a greater emphasis on television production.

The third television company to establish a filmmaking subsidiary was Granada which set up Granada Film Productions in 1987. The company invested in three productions (all made, in fact, for transmission on Channel 4)—*Joyriders* (1988), *Tree of Hands* (1988), *Strapless* (1988)—before it was merged, in 1989, with Granada's production division which, under Steve Morrison, was responsible for *The Magic Toyshop* (1986), *The Fruit Machine* (1988), and the Oscar-winning *My Left Foot* (1989). Other companies made smaller but, none the less, significant contributions. London Weekend Television put money into *A Handful of Dust* (1987), *The Tall Guy* (1989), *Wilt* (1989), and *Under Suspicion* (1991); TVS co-produced *The Innocent* (1984), *The Dawning* (1988), and *Queen of Hearts* (1989) (all sold to Channel 4); Scottish Television was involved in *Gregory's Girl* (1980), *Ill Fares the Land* (1982), *Comfort and Joy* (1984), *Killing Dad* (1989), and *The Big Man* (1990); Grampian made a small investment in *Play Me Something* (1989) as did Ulster Television in *December Bride* (1990).

As for the BBC, it had a long tradition of shooting drama on film but specifically for TV transmission. During the 1980s, however, the BBC too began to become involved in films intended for cinema release. It did so initially, through the Film Acquisitions Department, which was involved in pre-buying television rights for films such as *Gandhi* (1982), *The Shooting Party* (1984), *The Bostonians* (1984), and *White Mischief* (1987). In the late 1980s, the drama department, under Mark Shivas, also began to invest in films with a view to theatrical release. Four films (*War Requiem* (1988), *Dancin' in the Dark* (1989), *Fellow Traveller* (1989), and *The Reflecting Skin* (1990)) backed by the drama department were given a cinema release and others followed, including *The Object of Beauty* (1991), *Truly, Madly, Deeply* (1990), *Edward II* (1991), and *Enchanted April* (1991).

Television Economics

However, if television—and Channel 4 in particular—became the most significant source of British film finance during the 1980s, it should be clear that this was not simply for commercial reasons. Although Channel 4 has been party

to a number of spectacular box-office successes (especially in the 1990s), the main benefit of theatrical release to the channel (and television more generally) has not been the revenues that have been generated. The channel has, of course, benefited from the critical attention and publicity that a showing in cinemas has encouraged as well as the better viewing figures which films, rather than single television dramas, can generate. It has also gained considerable prestige and a reputation for 'quality' as a result of the support for filmmaking that it has provided. However, when measured according to conventional commercial criteria, most of the channel's films have actually made a loss. Indeed, in their submission to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, the channel openly acknowledged that 'in ten years only a handful of films had actually made a profit for the channel'.²¹ While Channel 4 has not, of course, depended upon direct financial returns in the same way as conventional film production companies, it may, nevertheless, be seen to have 'subsidized' film production insofar as the relatively high percentage of the channel's overall budget (6.2 per cent between 1982 and 1992) devoted to 'Film on Four' has not been matched by the number of programme hours or audience ratings which it has provided. As Jeremy Isaacs explained in the early days of 'Film on Four', he regarded such films as having 'a socio-cultural provenance and purpose' which went beyond their financial returns or contribution to the ratings.²² In this respect, the channel has been content (and able) to carry the 'losses' of film production because of its belief in its cultural value. However, as broadcasting entered a more commercial environment at the start of the 1990s, the willingness of television to provide this support underwent a degree of change.

Under the 1990 Broadcasting Act, Channel 4 was responsible, from the start of 1993, for selling its own advertising. Although there were initial fears about how the channel might fare, it actually did far better than many predicted. Nevertheless, the channel was forced to compete much more strongly for both ratings and advertising revenue and this inevitably had consequences for the channel's ability to fulfil its original programming remit, including its ability to support film. As has been argued, the channel's investment in film production in the 1980s was, to some extent, 'underwritten' by the arrangements between the channel and the independent television companies concerning the sale of advertising. With the channel no longer guaranteed its income, and in competition with the other television companies for advertising, there was increased pressure not only to make programming more 'popular' but also to take less artistic and financial risks. Thus, the 'deficit-financing' of feature films that was a characteristic of Channel 4 in the 1980s, and which was critical in getting some of the more unorthodox films of the period made, came under increasing threat.²³

²¹ Monopolies and Mergers Commission, *Films: A Report on the Supply of Films for Exhibition in Cinemas in the UK*, 151.

²² Quoted in Stephen Lambert, 'Isaacs: Still Smiling', *Stills*, no. 6 (May–June 1983), 26.

²³ For a fuller discussion of these changes, see John Hill, 'British Television and Film: The Making of a Relationship', in John Hill and Martin McLoone (eds.), *Big Picture, Small Screen: The Relations Between Film and Television* (Luton: John Libbey Media/University of Luton Press, 1996).

This was particularly evident in the case of the Department of Independent Film and Video which, during the early 1990s, ended its ongoing support for the workshops and moved away from the production of film features. As with 'Film on Four', the channel's support for the workshops rested upon a belief in the social and cultural value of this sector insofar as the number of programme hours the workshops provided (fifteen to twenty per year) was relatively low in proportion to their budget allocation (£1.7 million for the year ending March 1990). Given these economics (and the decline in support for the workshops from local and metropolitan authorities), the Department of Independent Film and Video sought to move towards a more project-based system of funding for the workshops at the end of the 1980s.²⁴ In 1991 the Department abandoned its separate budget for the workshops altogether, since when the workshops have been forced to compete for resources in the same way as conventional producers. At the same time, the Department moved away from the low-budget feature work which had been one of its distinguishing characteristics: for while such work was cheap in terms of cinema it was still relatively expensive for television.

Similar commercial pressures also affected the willingness of the ITV companies to involve themselves in film production. As has been seen, a number of ITV companies were tempted to invest in feature film towards the end of the 1980s. Altogether, ITV companies were involved in about twenty productions between 1985 and 1989. However, in 1988, the government altered the way of collecting the ITV levy (in effect a tax paid by the ITV companies for the right to broadcast) by imposing it on advertising revenues rather than, as from 1974, on profits. This had the effect of increasing the amount of levy which the broadcasters had to pay (an increase of £17 million in two years) as well as closing off a form of 'tax shelter' whereby ITV companies had written off up to 30 per cent of their production costs against the levy.²⁵ As a result, the making of features became much less attractive than before and ITV involvement in feature production fell by one-third between 1989 and 1990.

This drop in production was also related to the anxiety surrounding the allocation of television franchises due to be announced in 1991 (and which did, indeed, result in two companies involved in film production—Thames and TVS—losing their licences). The now notorious system of competitive bidding used to decide the new franchise-holders also reduced the amount of money available for programme-making, and, given its high cost, feature production was destined to be less appealing. Disputes over the involvement of Granada Television in film production were, for example, one of the factors which led to the resignation of Granada Chairman David Plowright in February 1992 while,

²⁴ See Adam Barker, 'Film Workshops Face Pressure from C4 and BFI', *Screen Finance* (8 Feb. 1989), 9–10, and Alan Lovell, 'That was the Workshop that Was', *Screen*, vol. 31, no. 1 (Spring 1990), 102–8. A similar economic logic was also at work in the Department's changing relationship to the BFI which involved a move away from long-term funding and an increased emphasis on case-by-case funding for its film features (*Screen Finance* (19 May 1993), 5).

²⁵ For the details, see Neil McCartney, 'Change in UK Levy System Threatens ITV Film Deals', *Screen Finance* (20 June 1988), 9–11.

more generally, ITV investment in British films began to dry up. This was also true of new 'commercial' sector of satellite television. Launched belatedly in April 1990, British Satellite Broadcasting (BSB) had taken a leaf out of Channel 4's book and committed itself to a substantial investment in film, including *Chicago Joe and the Showgirl* (1989), *The Big Man* (1990), *Hardware* (1990), *Hidden Agenda* (1990), and *Memphis Belle* (1990). However, following its merger with Sky less than a year later, the company's investment plans for film were brought to a halt and the new British Sky Broadcasting (BSkyB) confined itself to the occasional pre-purchase of satellite rights.²⁶

In this respect, it can be seen that the support of film provided by television during the 1980s was largely unplanned and was not an explicit goal of government film and broadcasting policy. In such circumstances, the delicate ecology between film and television which evolved in the UK during the 1980s was always vulnerable to changes in government policy or increasing financial pressures. Indeed, rather perversely, the first policy document to appear since the White Paper on film in 1984, *The British Film Industry* (1995) argued that the dependence of British film on television actually represented a part of 'the problem' faced by the film industry rather than a part of the solution to the difficulties that had been encountered by the industry in the 1980s.²⁷ In this respect, the document appeared, despite all the lessons of the 1980s, to be hankering after precisely the kind of 'international' big-budget cinema that precipitated the downfall of Goldcrest and others. If such a cinema had proved viable, however, the British film industry would not, of course, have become so dependent on television in the first place.

Television Aesthetics

Inevitably, this coming together of film and television during the 1980s generated considerable debate concerning the kind of films that were then produced. Thus, while many observers acknowledged the economic importance of television to film, they were also sceptical of whether the resulting films were properly 'cinematic'. Thus, in her introduction to a series of discussions of the relations between film and television, Penelope Houston, the then editor of *Sight and Sound*, argues that 'no one wants to look the Channel 4 gift-horse in the mouth . . . but . . . there remains a nagging feeling that what we've got . . . isn't quite enough: that the movie movie, as opposed to the TV movie, enjoys not only a wider vitality, but the power to probe more deeply'. This, in turn, is related to what she describes as both 'crucial aesthetic differences, as well as differences in the quality of the experience' between film and TV.²⁸

²⁶ Partly in an effort to improve the European content of its channels, BSkyB did, however, conclude a three-year deal with British Screen in April 1994 for pay-television rights to its films.

²⁷ Department of National Heritage, *The British Film Industry*, Cm. 2884 (London: HMSO, 1995), 5 and 18.

²⁸ Penelope Houston, 'British Cinema: Life Before Death on Television', *Sight and Sound* (Spring 1984), 115.

However, whether it is possible to distinguish cinema from television in such a clear-cut way as this is open to question. For all cinema, and not just that in Britain, has become dependent upon television (and video) both for funding and revenues. This has meant that all films are now watched more on the small screen than in the cinema and that the 'quality' of experience associated with cinema in the 'classical' period (large screen, darkness, shared public space, relative immobility, concentrated viewing) can no longer be regarded as the cinematic norm. In the same way, the recognition that the ultimate destination of all cinema is the small screen has led to varying strategies (from sticking to 'safe-action' areas when filming to the adoption of more 'segmentalized' narrative forms) that have led inevitably to a blurring of the boundaries between film and TV aesthetics.²⁹ As a result, discussion about film and television in Britain has tended to reflect critical preferences for particular kinds of cinema rather than any 'essential' differences between the two mediums. As Martin McLoone suggests, there has been a tendency, especially in Britain, to champion 'cinema in its big picture, "event" mode' as the only 'real' form of cinema while downplaying, or failing to acknowledge, the qualities of other kinds of 'smaller' non-Hollywood cinemas.³⁰

As such, it may be argued that what was at stake in discussions of British cinema in the 1980s was often not so much its status as cinema *per se* as the particular *type* of cinema that British films had come to represent (and which marked a certain break with British cinema of an earlier era). In the last chapter, it was argued that the conventional strategies of British cinema—competition with Hollywood in the international market or production primarily aimed at the home market—had proved unsustainable. In this respect, British film production in the 1980s was pushed in the direction of a different form of production aimed at more specialized markets—both in the cinema and on TV, and at home and abroad. In doing so, the character of British filmmaking also began to alter and moved much more decisively towards what might be called an 'art cinema'.

'Art' Cinema

Writing in 1969 Alan Lovell argued that, unlike its European counterparts, the British cinema had failed to develop an art cinema (or at any rate that the documentary film had served in its place).³¹ During the 1980s, however, it could

²⁹ For an overview of these debates, see John Hill, 'Film and Television', in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

³⁰ Martin McLoone, 'Boxed In?: The Aesthetics of Film and Television', in Hill and McLoone (eds.), *Big Picture, Small Screen*, 81. Not all critics of television-supported British cinema, however, judged it by the standards of Hollywood. James Park argues, for example, that, in comparison with a tradition of European filmmaking, the 'television film' lacks 'fantasy' and the capacity 'to dream'. In doing so, however, he tends to draw 'essentialist' distinctions between cinema and television rather than relate these to the historical uses to which the two mediums have been put. See James Park, *Learning To Dream: The New British Cinema* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), esp. chap. 5.

³¹ Alan Lovell, *The British Cinema: The Unknown Cinema*, mimeo (London: BFI, 1969), 2.

be argued that it was the 'art cinema' tradition that became pre-eminent within British filmmaking. As Steve Neale suggests, art cinema has traditionally offered, to European countries especially, a way of occupying 'a different space' from Hollywood within the film market. This has involved a process of 'differentiation' whereby a national cinema marks itself as distinct from Hollywood, by drawing upon features of either 'high Art' or nationally specific 'cultural traditions'.³² A certain form of differentiation has, of course, always been a feature of British film production. Andrew Higson, for example, suggests how British cinema has traditionally sought to distinguish itself from Hollywood films through local variations of popular genres or the creation of 'prestige' drama.³³ Such films, however, still depended upon the 'mass' market at home for their viability. As British cinema became more dependent upon television on the one hand and specialist international outlets on the other, so the parameters of its narrative and stylistic practices also began to alter.

David Bordwell attempts to identify the defining features of art cinema in terms of a particular set of formal conventions which distinguish it from both classical narrative cinema and the avant-garde. These include the loosening of narrative structures, a concern with 'realism' (both 'objective' and 'subjective'), authorial expressiveness, and textual ambiguity.³⁴ His categorization, however, mainly covers the specific moment of art cinema characteristic of European cinema in the late 1950s and 1960s (and the work of such directors as Antonioni, Bergman, Fellini, Truffaut, and Resnais) and only goes so far in capturing the full range of ways in which European cinema has subsequently circulated as 'art' rather than 'popular' cinema.³⁵ In the case of British cinema, two main considerations are of relevance.

As has already been noted, 'art cinema' has never simply been a matter of textual characteristics but has also been allied to a particular system of production (typically state or television subsidy) and distribution (festivals and a specialist arthouse circuit). As the outlets for British films in Britain have contracted and films have become more dependent upon international audiences, so even relatively conventional, or artistically conservative, works have tended to circulate as 'art cinema'. This has been the case, for example, with the 'heritage film' which has successfully carved out a niche in the US market by

³² Steve Neale, 'Art Cinema and the Question of Independent Film', in Rod Stoneman and Hilary Thompson (eds.), *The New Social Function of Cinema: Catalogue: British Film Institute Productions '79/80* (London: BFI, 1981), 42.

³³ Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 11. For Higson, the process of 'differentiation' involves distanciation from a relatively unvarying Hollywood norm. However, since the 1960s, Hollywood itself has undergone a certain transition from 'classical' to 'post-classical' forms of narration. British cinema of the 1980s, therefore, may be distinguished not only from the tight-knit patterns and functional style characteristic of 'classical' Hollywood but also from the more spectacular, 'post-classical' 'event' movie. For a helpful overview, see Peter Kramer, 'Post-classical Hollywood', in Hill and Church Gibson (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*.

³⁴ David Bordwell, 'The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice', *Film Criticism*, vol. 4 no. 1 (Fall 1979).

³⁵ Bordwell himself defines the 'apogee' of art cinema as the years 1957–69 in *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London: Methuen, 1985), 220–21.

providing 'highbrow', 'quality' drama which is clearly distinguishable from mainstream Hollywood (see Chapter 4).³⁶ More generally, the involvement of British cinema within an international system of arthouse distribution has encouraged an increasing emphasis upon a 'branding' of British cinema in terms of its directors. As Bordwell argues, the art film has traditionally relied upon viewing procedures which regard it as 'the work of an expressive individual'.³⁷ However, while 'authorship' may be visible as a textual property (in the form of an overt inscription of the authorial voice into the text), it is also, as Bordwell recognizes, the product of an elaborate infrastructure of critical writing and reviewing, education, promotion, and marketing. Thus, as British cinema has increasingly occupied the terrain of art cinema at the level of production and distribution, so it has also become more common for British cinema to be characterized, and promoted, in terms of personal approaches and styles. As a result it is not just the overtly 'authored' films of directors such as Derek Jarman and Peter Greenaway that have circulated internationally as 'art' films but also the less artistically self-conscious work of Stephen Frears, Mike Leigh, Ken Loach, and, even, James Ivory.³⁸

As a result, it is difficult to map the range of British films that circulated as 'art cinema' in the 1980s directly onto the textual strategies of art cinema identified by Bordwell's model. This is not simply because of the way the institutional apparatus of art cinema mobilized discourses surrounding British cinema, however, but because the British cinema itself manifested a new hybridity and blurring of aesthetic boundaries. A significant development, in this respect, is described by Christopher Williams. For Williams, a key trend of the 1980s was the emergence of a British 'social art' cinema in which the traditional 'social' interests of British cinema—debate on 'issues of present social and media concern', the use of 'elements of observational, cultural, and stylistic realism' and an 'interest in group rather than individual entities and identities'—were combined with the more individualistic and stylistically self-conscious concerns of the European art film (which, as Bordwell points out, seldom involved an analysis of 'groups and institutions').³⁹ This was not an entirely new phenomenon. The British 'new wave' of the 1960s had already accomplished a degree of *rapprochement* between social realism and art-cinema narration in films such

³⁶ See Martin A. Hipsky, 'Anglophil(m)ia: Why Does America Watch Merchant-Ivory Movies?', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol. 22 no. 3 (Fall 1994).

³⁷ Bordwell, 'The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice', 59.

³⁸ A good example of this is provided by the British Council's promotional booklet *British Film-makers of the 1980s* (London: British Council) which provides thumbnail sketches of no less than thirty-seven 'British' directors. Books surveying British cinema of this period such as Jonathan Hacker and David Price, *Take 10: Contemporary British Film Directors* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) and Lester Friedman (ed.), *British Cinema and Thatcherism* (London: UCL Press, 1993) also use the director as a key organizing principle.

³⁹ Christopher Williams, 'The Social Art Cinema: A Movement in the History of British Film and Television Culture', in Christopher Williams (ed.), *Cinema: The Beginnings and the Future* (London: University of Westminster Press, 1996), 194. In this respect, Williams is also arguing that the dominant tradition of British filmmaking should be regarded as 'social' rather than 'realist' and that 'realism' itself should be conceptualized in plural terms.

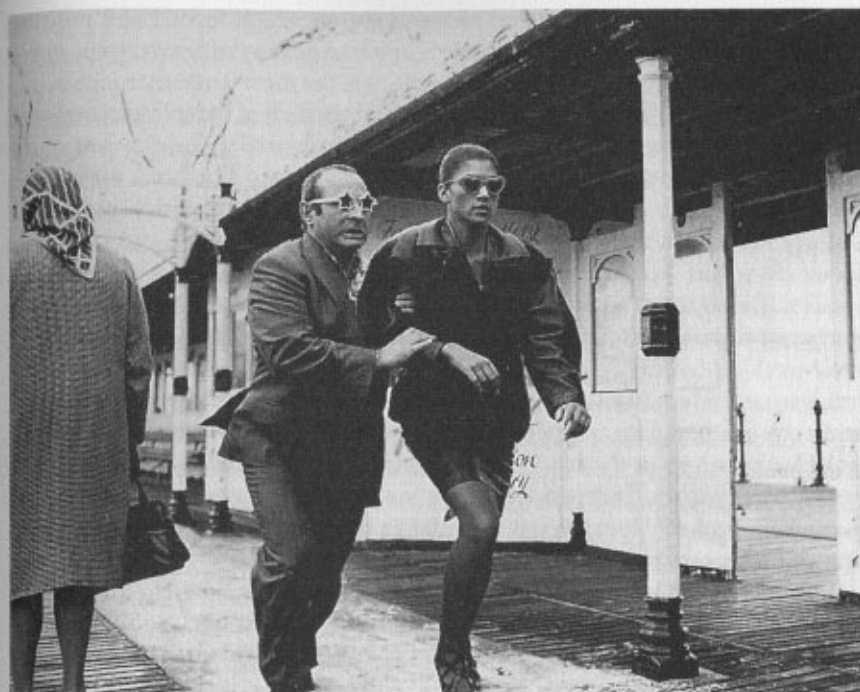


PLATE 2. Generic hybridity: Bob Hoskins and Kathy Tyson in *Mona Lisa*

as *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* and *This Sporting Life*.⁴⁰ However, it is undoubtedly the case that this process gathered momentum in the 1980s and was given a particular impetus by Channel 4 as a result of its joint commitment to the support of a 'national cinema' (which would win prestige internationally by circulating as 'art') and to the fulfilment of a public-service remit (which favoured a degree of engagement by cinema with matters of contemporary social concern).

This fusion of disparate artistic elements also characterized British cinema in the 1980s more generally. On the one hand, popular genre conventions, such as those of crime, horror, and science fiction, were mixed with art cinema concerns in films such as *The Hit*, *Parker*, *Mona Lisa*, *Melancholia*, *The Company of Wolves*, *The Magic Toyshop*, and *Hardware*. On the other hand, strategies typically associated with the avant-garde also began to converge with those of the traditional art film. Bordwell's identification of 'art cinema' as a distinct mode of film practice had, of course, rested upon a differentiation from not only classical Hollywood but also the avant-garde. In this respect, art cinema was to be distinguished from both a 'first avant-garde' devoted to non-narrative

⁴⁰ Erik Hedling pursues a similar argument in relation to the work of Lindsay Anderson in 'Lindsay Anderson and The Development of British Art Cinema', in Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book* (London: BFI, 1997).

formal experiment and a 'second avant-garde' in which formal and political radicalism were combined.⁴¹ However, as Michael O'Pray suggests, it was much harder to draw such distinctions during the 1980s as these diverse strands began to come together.⁴² Thus, in the case of filmmakers such as Peter Greenaway and Derek Jarman, there was a certain fusion of their earlier (first) avant-garde interests with those of the narrative art film. For David Bordwell, art cinema had represented a sort of 'domesticated modernism' in which modernist self-consciousness was combined with an interest in narrative and character. However, in the 'art cinema' of Jarman and Greenaway, there was much less interest in character (and often narrative) and an abandonment of many of the humanist themes that had been a feature of earlier art cinema. In this respect, their work represented less 'domesticated modernism' than an emergent post-modern art cinema in which eclecticism, the erosion of artistic boundaries, and signifiatory play were central features. A similar blending of elements was also apparent in the black film movement which carried on the political radicalism of 1970s 'independent' film (or the second avant-garde) but in a way which typically blurred the boundaries between avant-garde, art cinema, and documentary practices (see Chapter 11).

In both cases, television may also be seen to have contributed to this convergence of 'art cinema' and the 'avant-garde'. For as television, and Channel 4 in particular, emerged as a major patron of experimental work (both directly and, indirectly, via its support for the BFI and others) so it also exerted certain pressures on this work to accommodate to television (and television audience) expectations. The idea of 'independence', associated especially with the Independent Filmmakers Association in the 1970s and partly carried over into the work of the Department of Independent Film and Video, had placed an emphasis not simply on a particular kind of aesthetic practice (anti-illusionist and self-reflexive) but on new forms of engagement with an audience (involving, for example, discussion with filmmakers and accompanying documentation). The exhibition context for such work on television, however, was generally the same as that for more conventional television output and, inevitably, there were pressures to adapt to these new circumstances. As Sue Aspinall suggests, although Channel 4 opened up a space for the politically radical 'independent' sector and, to a lesser extent, the formally experimental avant-garde, the practices associated with them—such as non-standard running times, a formal interest in the medium, an emphasis upon ideas rather than production values—did not always sit easily with the requirements of television formats.⁴³ As a result, there was a growing pressure for films to adapt to television norms and to embrace more recognizable art cinema conventions, such as feature-length narratives and authorial signatures.

⁴¹ For the key statement on the 'two avant-gardes', see Peter Wollen, *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies* (London: Verso, 1982).

⁴² Michael O'Pray, 'The British Avant-Garde and Art Cinema from the 1970s to the 1990s', in Andrew Higson (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1996), 179.

⁴³ Sue Aspinall, 'The Space for Innovation and Experiment', *Screen*, vol. 25 no. 6 (1984), 74.

Conclusion: Television, Art Cinema, and Audience

If the involvement of television in British cinema may be seen to have encouraged a growing convergence around the practices of 'art cinema', then, inevitably, this also had consequences for how the relations between film and television in Britain were perceived. In particular, the growing involvement of television in film was identified with a move away from 'popular' forms of filmmaking and, as a result, the popular audience that British cinema is assumed once to have possessed. Clearly, there is some justification for such a view. British cinema during the 1980s did move away from straightforward genre filmmaking towards often more difficult and demanding forms of cinema that were often not shown widely in British cinemas. However, the question of the 'popularity' of the British films that were then made is not entirely straightforward.

For, as has been seen, while films were no longer watched in the same numbers as they once were in the cinemas, they were watched in increasing numbers on television and video (especially given the high level of TV and video penetration in the UK). Thus, in 1989, the viewing figures for the top seven films on TV alone were greater than total cinema admissions for that year.⁴⁴ Hence, even such apparently 'unpopular' British 'art' films as *Hidden City* (1987) and *Empire State* were seen by over four and three million people respectively. Had these figures been converted into cinema attendances, both films would have been in the box-office top ten for that year. Thus, while television is often blamed for the demise of cinema, it may in fact have encouraged many contemporary British films, which are not regarded as especially 'popular', to be seen by as many, and indeed more, people as 'popular' British films of the past.⁴⁵

There are, of course, some qualifications. Although films can achieve very high audience figures on television, it is, none the less, the case that other forms of drama (especially serial drama) achieve even higher figures. Indeed, John Caughie has reversed conventional arguments concerning television's supposedly detrimental effects on film by expressing an anxiety that the growth of television investment in film production has led to a growth of drama on film aimed at the international market at the expense of more local forms of television drama aimed at the home market. In doing so, he contrasts the work of Ken Loach in the 1960s and 1990s. '*Ladybird Ladybird*', he argues, 'circulates within an aesthetic and a cultural sphere which is given cultural prestige (and an economic viability) by international critics' awards, whereas *Cathy Come Home* circulated as a national event and functioned as documentary evidence within the political sphere'.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ 'Screen Finance Analysis: Top 20 Feature Films on TV in 1989', *Screen Finance*, 24 (January 1990), 11.

⁴⁵ For a fuller discussion of these issues, see Hill, 'British Cinema as National Cinema: Production, Audience and Representation', in Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book* (London: BFI, 1997).

⁴⁶ John Caughie, 'The Logic of Convergence', in *Big Picture, Small Screen*, 219. Charles Barr has also expressed the concern that television films were in danger of creating a 'TV/movie hybrid' that lacked 'the immediacy and urgency that TV drama used to have'. See 'A Conundrum for England', *Monthly Film Bulletin* (Aug. 1984), 235.

However, if television drama circulates less as a 'national event' in the 1980s than it did in the 1960s, television involvement in cinema was not solely responsible. It is also a consequence of the transformations that broadcasting as a whole have undergone, especially the increase in channels (both terrestrial and non-terrestrial), the rise of video (and its opportunities for alternative viewing and time-shifting), and the fragmentation of the national audience which resulted. If the capacity of both television drama and film to function as a national event lessened, this was partly because the 'national' audience for either film or television did not exist in the same way as it did in the 1960s and because neither individual television programmes nor films were able to lay claim to the same cultural dominance within the entertainment sphere that they once could. In this regard, the audience for both film and television is more differentiated than it once was and the changing character of British cinema, and its movement towards 'art cinema', may be related to a certain re-orientation towards a specific (but none the less substantial) section of the audience which is generally older and better educated than that for mainstream Hollywood (which is heavily skewed towards the 15–34 age group). Thus, while British cinema in the 1980s may, to some degree, have lost its earlier connection with a 'mass' audience at the cinemas, it is also worth noting that the 'mass audience' during this period did not represent, if it ever did, the 'mass' of people but only one—primarily youthful—section of it.

part two
**Representations
of the Past**
