Scottish Cinema and Brexit

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Key workshop questions

• In what ways does the EU referendum decision invite us to rethink both the past and present of ‘British’ film and television, and of national film and television histories?
• How has Brexit been narrated in film and television, and what are the implications of this?
• What are the potential implications of Brexit for film and television as UK industries, and for reception abroad?
• How does the decision to leave the EU impact upon Film and Television Studies as an area of study in the UK, and beyond?
Introduction

• “The Scottish Government is committed to developing and nurturing the creative sector for generations to come, however following the result of the EU referendum, it faces a significant challenge. To ensure that the recent upward trend in the industries’ growth continues, and to protect the thousands of jobs which rely on it, we are exploring all options to avoid a hard Brexit and protect the benefits that we know our culture and creative sectors gain from our relationship with the EU... the UK must retain membership of the single market in all its aspects. Access to the ideas, talent, experiences and creative exchanges which the freedom of movement aspect of the single market provides is especially important to the cultural sector.”

• Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop, speaking at a second anniversary celebration event for the Creative Industries Federation in London, January 9th 2017.

Introduction

• “There is no clear way ahead at the moment: Scottish production activity is very reliant on the rest of the UK, London especially, to attract inward investment and so we are pleased the UK tax incentives are safe for the time being. However, TV co-production with European countries, changes in BBC commissioning and programming and the potential dwindling lack of opportunities for producers here in Scotland are all factors that make freelance crew and facilities companies very vulnerable... indigenous Scottish feature film production has always relied on European investment, and this may be difficult in the future.”

Introduction

• “We are devastated. Producers in Scotland have benefited from training, development and production funding through Creative Europe. They have been particularly valuable in establishing alternative, indigenous production in contrast to the dominance of the United States in our industry. We have also had access to producers and their funds in our fellow EU countries for international co-productions. European initiatives have also helped build our industry. If they become closed to us due to Brexit, it will make it harder for Scottish producers across fiction, documentary and animation to be players in the wider global marketplace, with the consequent loss of jobs, growth and opportunity in Scotland.”


Question 1

• In what ways does the EU referendum decision invite us to rethink both the past and present of ‘British’ film and television, and of national film and television histories?
Question 1

• “there has not been a mixing of the chemistry of filmmaking with the other strands of culture... common in Europe.”

• Scotland [my emphasis] has produced no equivalents of Syberberg’s, Bertolucci’s, Angelopoulos’s, Alvarez’s and Mulloy’s treatments of their respective national histories; no equivalents of Godard’s, Oshima’s or Makavejev’s anatomising of the sexual mores of the societies in which they live; no equivalents of the sustained reflection on the processes of cinema evident in the work of Snow and Straub/Hillet...

Question 1

• “In the best of Scottish cinema, the European influence is never far away.”

• “[There exists] a discernible influence of post-WWII European art cinema on contemporary Scottish filmmakers... [at] a moment in history when such a tradition has come to be treated with suspicion by an increasingly populist and youth-orientated British cinema establishment.”
Question 1

Dedicated to the One I Love:
Lynne Ramsay’s *Morvern Callar* (GB/Can, 2002)
as exemplar of the long-anticipated Scottish-European Cinema:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Z0INch5qkQ
[Accessed April 2nd 2017].

**Question 1**

- Sigma Films, a Glasgow-based independent production company established in 1997 by producer Gillian Berrie, actor Alistair Mackenzie and director David Mackenzie. In the years since the company’s feature-length debut, *The Last Great Wilderness* (David Mackenzie, GB/Den, 2002), Sigma acted as lead or co-producer on no fewer than seventeen further feature projects during the decade after.

- Something like one in five fiction features produced with a significant element of Scottish financial and/or creative input during the c21st emerged from what Mette Hjort terms a strategic process of ‘milieu-developing transnationalism’ overseen from opposite sides of the North Sea.

- Key titles included: *Aberdeen* (Hans Petter Moland, GB/Nor/Swe, 2000); *Wilbur (Wants to Kill Himself)* (Lone Scherfig, Den/GB/Swe/Ar, 2002); *Skagerrak* (Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, Den/Swe/GB/Sp/Ger/Fr/Swi, 2003); *One Last Chance* (Stewart Svaasand, GB/Nor, 2004); *Red Road* (Andrea Arnold, GB/Den, 2006); *Donkeys* (Morag McKinnon, GB/Den, 2010); *Perfect Sense* (David Mackenzie, Ger/GB/Swe/Den, 2011).
Question 1

  - Less than half (ten) were international co-productions.
  - More than half (twenty) were locally set.
  - More than half (eighteen) were directed by film-makers Scottish by birth.

  - Lists 43 features incorporating a degree of Scottish financial and/or creative involvement between 2000 and 2011.
  - Three quarters (33) were international co-productions.
  - Less than half (seventeen) were locally set.
  - Only one quarter (eleven) were directed by film-makers Scottish by birth.

Question 2

- How has Brexit been narrated in film and television, and what are the implications of this?
Question 2

• “[There exists] a quintessential cinematic narration of ‘Scotland’, which in its myriad individual variants proceeds roughly as follows. Somewhere in ‘The Wilds of Scotland’™ there unfolds a perverse conflict between Modernity and Tradition. Isolated representatives of the former are trounced or seduced at every turn by an amoral gaggle of adherents to the latter. This is so notwithstanding diametrically opposed, long-term historical and cultural shifts experienced and acceded to elsewhere in the Occident... according to The Wicker Man, Whisky Galore!, The Maggie, Local Hero and more films than it is possible to cite here, Scotland is both a place and a mindset definitively out of kilter with Western rationality.”


Question 2

• “[Scotland’s dominant image in cinema has been that of] a distant periphery far removed from the modern, urban and cosmopolitan social world inhabited by the kind of people involved in the creation of such images [...] central to this is the idea of remoteness – physical, social, moral – from metropolitan rules, conventions and certainties... another central trope [...] is the literal and metaphorical figure of the ‘island’, a space in which remoteness and isolation is enhanced by virtue of its detachment from the mainland.”

• Duncan Petrie, Screening Scotland (London: BFI, 2000), pp. 32; 35.
Question 2

• “I think the people in this country have had enough of experts from organisations with acronyms saying that they know what is best and getting it consistently wrong.”

• Michael Gove (3/6/16), available @ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGgiGtJk7MA [Accessed April 2nd 2017].

Question 2

• “The story of the father and son who practically invented the modern game of golf in the mid-19th century from the then-isolated outpost of Prestwick on the Ayrshire coast; a comic paean to the “water of life” after a ship full of whisky hits the rocks and crafty locals do their best to hang on to the cargo. Few films would seem more archetypally Scots than Tommy’s Honour, a biopic of pioneering golf champion Young Tom Morris, and Whisky Galore, the remake of the classic Ealing comedy... as the films occupying the high-profile opening and closing gala slots at the Edinburgh international film festival, their cultural capital is entirely appropriate.”

Question 2

Tommy’s Honour (GB/USA, 2016); watch clip @ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ft62nZuwFqc [Accessed April 2nd 2017].

Whisky Galore (GB, 2016); watch trailer @ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hygLCDOM6I [Accessed April 2nd 2017].

Sunshine on Leith (GB, 2016); view clip @ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBxZAqQTLlo [Accessed April 2nd 2017].
Question 2

- **Sunshine on Leith** suggests that flag-waving is a physically and emotionally dangerous activity: Ally, Davie and Robbie wear the Union Jack in Afghanistan, and are nearly killed for their troubles; Davie’s anti-English knee-jerk prejudice nearly scuppers his relationship with Yvonne (as does her belatedly expressed worry that she doesn’t ‘belong’ in Scotland).

- The film can also be seen, very obviously, as a ‘love conquers all’ story which, as well as being familiar from the Musical genre per se, goes out of its way to suggest that intimate human bonds of identification are much more important and real than any competing forms of tribal abstraction: Rab left Glasgow to be with Jean; Davie leaves Scotland to be with Yvonne.

- The film suggests that Scotland’s physical and cultural borders are necessarily – and even desirably – porous. Liz goes to America not because she has to (Rab’s view that it’s what Scots do) but because she wants to: experience of other cultures (“languages I don’t understand, music I haven’t heard before”) is key to her pursuit of individual self-fulfilment.

- Non-white faces are also prominent throughout: not just Yvonne, but think also about the prominence of non-white extras in other parts of/locations within the film.

- If the film begins with a Proclaimers song about the joy of returning to one’s roots (‘I’m on my Way’), it concludes with another (‘500 Miles’) that celebrates the necessity of travelling anywhere – and any distance – in order to bond with one other person.

- The film’s happy ending can be seen to involve the creation/confirmation of a family unit that is an extended one in multiple senses – it now has Scots living abroad (Ally, Davie, Liz) and also incorporates non-Scottish members (Yvonne, Eilidh).

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**Castles in the Sky** (2014):

- The story of Robert Watson-West, the father of modern radar.

- Like the much better-known *The Imitation Game*, a narrative in which a conspicuous outsider (defined here by nationality, rather than sexuality) saves a British state that can never fully accept him as one of its own.

- Watson-West explicitly links acceptance and encouragement of difference to the health of a given state: “men without ties” are what saves the UK from Nazism.

- Like *The Imitation Game*, includes a repeated mantra – here, “you make the invisible visible” – meant to crystallise a clear sense of Watson-West’s achievement and specialness.

- But also like *The Imitation Game*, is also conflicted as to the romantic myth of WWII Britain: the state’s extraordinarily caste-bound structures and ideologies are among the “invisible” things that Watson-West’s research makes “visible” during the narrative’s course.

- In this sense, this a film that celebrates the successful defence of certain ideas, institutions and individuals that are quite clearly indefensible.
Question 2

Perhaps takes its odd title from the fact that Terminal 2 of Edinburgh Airport is the disembarkation point at which Renton returns home: local escape to Europe is replaced twenty years on with local retreat from Europe.

Both devolved UK and pan-European political institutions are the subject of local scepticism and mockery: Renton and Sick Boy con a Scottish Parliament panel into giving them £0.1m of EU urban regeneration funding to set up a brothel.

The Bulgarian character of Veronika, both satirises British fears around mass immigration from the ‘new’ Europe (she is far more fair-minded and forward-looking that Renton or Sick Boy) and speaks to them – see the film’s ending.

A ‘Scottish’ film with minimal Scottish financial involvement (c. £0.5m from Creative Scotland; the rest from metropolitan British and US funding sources – nothing from Europe.)
Question 2

• “Our desire to live in the past, with the cultural, social and political alienation it leads to is brilliantly parodied in the film’s funniest sequence. Renton and Sickboy target a social gathering in the West of Scotland, in which the past memorialised is a distant one indeed: 1690... T2, perhaps just occasionally, riffs on this pain. It seems to wonder what has become of the enthusiasm of its characters, and us. It seems to be at once more local (with a greater grounding in Leith) and more global (its focus on migration and human trafficking). As our quartet end the film either where they started, or worse off, Veronika, the Bulgarian sex worker being exploited by Sick Boy... returns home to a notably sunnier future, and a reunion with her family. While we wallow in the past, incapable of accepting a post-national present, somewhere out there people are still choosing life after all.”


Question 3

• What are the potential implications of Brexit for film and television as UK industries, and for reception abroad?
Question 3

• “We made a wee mongrel of a film, as I call it. We had Scottish actors, a Belgian director, we had Portuguese, we had French, we had all these nationalities, the way a film should be. So up you, Brexit!”


Question 3

• A prominent (relatively speaking) strain of contemporary Scottish feature production falls off a cliff:

  • *Pale Star* (Ice/GB, 2016)
  • *A Reykjavik Porno* (Ice/GB, 2016)
  • *The Rezort* (GB/Sp/Bel, 2016)
  • *Couple in a Hole* (GB/Bel/Fr, 2015)
  • *Macbeth* (GB/Fr/USA, 2015)
  • *Pikadero* (Sp/GB, 2015)
  • *Sunset Song* (GB/Lux, 2015)
  • *Let Us Prey* (GB/Ire, 2014)
  • *Filth* (GB/Ger/Swe/Bel/USA, 2013)
  • *The Railway Man* (Switz/GB/Aus, 2013)
Question 3

- **Scottish and British television funding steps in to fill the possible gap:**
  - “The British film industry is based entirely on the British television industry, and at the moment in Scotland television is not supporting film enough. What needs to happen is a strategic partnership between [funding agency] Creative Scotland and the television companies, STV and the BBC. I am optimistic about the future but it’s taking a very long time.”
  - Young says he has a lot of time for Holyrood culture secretary Fiona Hyslop, and “the threat of separation has forced everyone to be a bit less London-centric, but we haven’t yet seen the results”. “The one thing that’s really happening in Scotland is Outlander – it’s employing loads of people – but it’s American. If Sony think it’s worth putting five years of TV production in Scotland, why doesn’t Britain?”

Question 3

- **February 2017:**
  - The BBC announces a new TV channel, called BBC Scotland, for the BBC in Scotland will begin broadcasting in autumn 2018.
  - The channel will have a budget of £30m, broadly equivalent to the amount spent on BBC4.
  - In addition, the BBC also announced an increase of about £20m a year for Scotland to make UK-wide programmes.
  - The new channel will be available in iPlayer in HD in Scotland and across UK.
    - It will broadcast from 7pm to midnight every evening.
    - Its creation represents £19m in new money and £11m from programmes currently made for BBC2 in Scotland.
  - The BBC aspires to increase network production spend from Scotland by around 1/3rd (£60m to £90m) over the next three years.
Question 3

• Freed from EU “State Aid” rules that govern how government subsidies and other incentives are applied to the film and TV industry, one or more of the UK governments could look to set up more attractive local production incentives than the rest of Europe – and/or the rest of the UK:

• “Apart from getting some location shooting for big films, Scotland doesn’t yet have the skills and technical infrastructure to support a big movie in the way that we can down south. But I do think that is an achievable goal if a studio is built and it is designed so that it can work, for instance, with high-end television - *Outlander* is a very good case in point... I think that there is political will problem, in that there seems to be a lot of demurring going on at the Scottish government, at Scottish Enterprise. They don’t seem to be convinced that there is a business that Scotland could be a part of, which I think is very unfortunate. If you look at the map of Britain, Scotland is under-performing quite badly. There is a huge amount of money coming in. We have capacity pressure in the south and we need to see the nations and regions building up. Wales is doing very well, the Leeds/Manchester nexus is very well, Northern Ireland is doing very well, and Scotland is sort of limping along and that is a disgrace, frankly.”

Question 3

- The Scottish Government and its various arms-length public bodies (Creative Scotland, Scottish Enterprise) decide to emphasise and prioritise even more than they currently do a commercial, inward investment-focused remit over a cultural, indigenously focused counterpart:

- “The British industry can be broadly divided into two camps. The cultural one and the industrial one. The cultural one will definitely be impacted by the withdrawal of EU subsidy and support for films that are of European cultural importance but which would not be considered overtly commercial... The industrial camp, which is largely reliant upon ‘inward investment’ production coming in from the US, will probably benefit from lower US dollar/British pound exchange rates... Scotland... will be affected in exactly the same way. The cultural/creative side will be inhibited, and the commercial/industrial side, such as it is, will be theoretically enhanced. The existence of a film studio and a skills programme would enable Scotland's film business to compete in this more favourable environment.”


Question 4

- How does the decision to leave the EU impact upon Film and Television Studies as an area of study in the UK, and beyond?

- Less for me to say right now than for us all to decide throughout today.