

FI112-15 The Business of Film

23/24

Department

SCAPVC - Film & Television Studies

Level

Undergraduate Level 1

Module leader

Jon Burrows

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

The three major industrial sectors of the film business are production, distribution and exhibition. The organisation of this module has been designed to mirror this segmentation. It will concentrate on key issues concerning film production in North America and the UK in its first four weeks, followed by two weeks focusing on film distribution (5 & 7) and two weeks on mainstream and arthouse film exhibition (8 & 9). The final week of the module focuses upon what the industry calls 'ancillary markets', or 'post-theatrical markets' – i.e. additional ways in which films can be commercially exploited and consumed after their cinema release cycle is completed, such as DVD/Blu-Ray, television broadcasts and online streaming. Although the term 'ancillary' suggests that these methods of exploiting films have a supplemental or bonus economic status within the business, we will see that ancillary markets actually play a fundamental keystone role in the film industry ecosystem. In fact, it will become evident that all of these different sectors of the industry have a deeply symbiotic relationship with each other, so it will never be possible to avoid talking about distribution, exhibition and post-theatrical markets when talking about production, and vice versa. Three weeks of the module (4, 7 and 9) will take a radically different form to the others: instead of a lecture and seminar, we will be paying host to, and gently interrogating, three practitioners in the fields of production, distribution and exhibition, respectively. We consider this variation in approach to be necessary for several reasons. Although the contemporary film industry can be studied via a range of extremely useful published sources (e.g. trade papers dedicated to reporting industry news; accurate box office figures for the latest releases made freely available,

and helpfully archived, online), it is also the case that companies involved in this business keep most of their important operational data confidential, and many basic procedural facets of the industry are never publicly discussed. Interviews with industry insiders can offer a level of understanding that is otherwise impossible to establish, so it's important that this approach forms a significant part of the module.

Module aims

The main learning aims of this module are:

- To explore how film should be understood as a socio-economic, as distinct from a cultural, phenomenon
- To explain the primary characteristics of the contemporary film production, distribution and exhibition sectors in the U.K. and U.S.A., and their co-dependency within a complex industrial ecosystem
- To gain more awareness and understanding of the perspectives of current practitioners in the fields of production, distribution and exhibition
- To familiarise students with a range of available research and data sources produced by the contemporary film industry, and productive ways of analysing them
- To understand the infrastructural impact of new methods of digital delivery of films to consumers

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Week 1: How a Film Gets Made – (Production)

Week 2: How a Film Gets Shown (Distribution and Marketing)

Week 3: Where a Film Gets Seen (Exhibition)

Week 4: Studying the Film Business (Authorship)

Week 5: Studying the Film Business (Genre)

Week 6: Reading and Viewing Week

Week 7: Studying the Film Business (Stardom)

Week 8: the British Film Industry – A Case Study (Funding, Policy and Regulation)

Week 9: the British Film Industry – A Case Study (Contemporary Distribution and Exhibition)

Week 10: the British Film Industry – A Case Study (Key Production Trends and Challenges)

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- By the end of the module, students will be able to successfully demonstrate a critical, practical and historically informed appreciation of the main organisational roles and structures of the film industry.
- By the end of the module, students will be able to successfully demonstrate a critical, practical and historically informed appreciation of the different ways in which film industries may be conceptualised in both national and transnational terms.

- By the end of the module, students will be able to successfully demonstrate a critical, practical and historically informed appreciation of the key debates relating to the critical understanding of various national and international film industries within Film Studies.
- By the end of the module, students will be able to successfully demonstrate a critical, practical and historically informed appreciation of the social, cultural, and political contexts that inform many of the key aspects of the film business past and present.
- By the end of the module, students will be able to successfully demonstrate a critical, practical and historically informed appreciation of the role of different forms of labour practice in the film business past and present.
- By the end of the module, students will be able to successfully demonstrate a critical, practical and historically informed appreciation of the changing landscape of contemporary film production, distribution, exhibition, marketing and policy.

Indicative reading list

Eileen R. Meehan, 'A Legacy of Neoliberalism: Patterns in Media Conglomeration', in Jyotsna Kapur and Keith B. Wagner (eds), *Neoliberalism and Global Cinema: Capital, Culture and Marxist Critique* (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 38-58.

Justin Wyatt, *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), Chapter 1 'A Critical Redefinition: The Concept of High Concept', pp. 1-22.

Janet Staiger, 'Independent of What? Sorting Out Differences From Hollywood', in Geoff King, Claire Molloy and Yannis Tzioumakis (eds), *American Independent Cinema: Indie, Indiewood and Beyond* (London & New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 15-27.

Alisa Perren, 'Sex, Lies and Marketing: Miramax and the Development of the Quality Indie Blockbuster', *Film Quarterly*, 55:2 (2001), pp. 30-39.

John Hill, "'This is for the Batmans as well as the Vera Drakes': Economics, Culture and UK Government Film Production Policy in the 2000s', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 9:3 (2012), pp. 333-356.

John Hill, 'Living With Hollywood: British Film Policy and the Definition of "Nationality"', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 22:5 (2016), pp. 706-723.

Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers and Other Media Paratexts* (New York & London: New York University Press, 2010), Chapter 2 'Coming Soon! Hype, Intros and Textual Beginnings' extracts, pp. 47-56, 63-72.

Justin Smith, 'Cinema for Sale: The Impact of the Multiplex on Cinema-going in Britain, 1985-2000', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 2:2 (2005), pp. 242-255.

Paul McDonald, 'What's On? Film Programming, Structured Choice and the Production of Cinema Culture in Contemporary Britain', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 7:2 (2010), pp. 264-298.

Kevin P. McDonald, 'Digital Dreams in a Material World: The Rise of Netflix and

its Impact on Changing Distribution and Exhibition Patterns', *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, 55 (2013) [unpaginated]

Neta Alexander, 'Catered to Your Future Self: Netflix's "Predictive Personalization" and the Mathematization of Taste' in Kevin McDonald and Daniel Smith-Rowsey (eds), *The Netflix Effect: Technology and Entertainment in the 21st Century* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp. 81-97.

[View reading list on Talis Aspire](#)

Subject specific skills

This module develops understandings of historical, theoretical and conceptual frameworks relevant to screen arts and cultures.

Transferable skills

- critical and analytical thinking in relation
 - independent research skills
 - team work
 - clarity and effectiveness of communication, oral and written
 - accurate, concise and persuasive writing
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Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 1 hour (20%)
Seminars	9 sessions of 1 hour (20%)
Private study	27 hours (60%)
Total	45 hours

Private study description

Undertaking set reading and some viewing in preparation for each seminar;
Preparing for assessed presentations in certain weeks;
Researching and writing assessment.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A2

	Weighting	Study time
Dossier	90%	85 hours
Students are required to compile a research dossier that investigates the production, distribution/marketing and exhibition history of a feature film released in the UK within the past 12 months.		
Seminar Presentation	10%	20 hours
Different research tasks will be allocated to different pairs of students in five of the teaching weeks.		

Feedback on assessment

Written feedback on assessed work and oral feedback by appointment.

Availability

Courses

This module is Core for:

- Year 1 of UFIA-W620 Undergraduate Film Studies